

**Searching for Harmony
in All the Wrong Places**
Steve Reich's
Music for String Orchestra (1961)

by

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Abstract

The main objectives of this thesis are to show how minimal music has been described in musicological literature and to provide an analysis of a student piece, *Music for String Orchestra* (1961), by one of minimal music's composers, Steve Reich. Juxtaposing the many different thoughts on the origins of minimal music with this analysis provides several insights on the importance of the American academic climate in which Reich was educated. The objective is, however, not to show that this academic period was the only formative element in Reich's compositional career. Rather, the examination of *Music for String Orchestra*, and the connections this piece shows with earlier developments in twentieth-century music, demonstrates how the influence of avant-gardist or modernist thoughts on music should be considered one of the important influences among many. Although acknowledged by many authors, the significance of Reich's academic period is frequently underestimated in musicological literature on minimal music. This understudied area in the study of minimal music and the history of music in general, therefore, deserves attention.

Introduction

The term “minimal music” can be traced back to 1968, when Michael Nyman introduced the term in a review in *The Spectator*.¹ Not only does it appear in the review itself, Nyman, or one of the editors, also chose to include the term as the title of the review. The term actually only appears once, as part of a description of a performance of *Springen* by Henning Christiansen—a Danish Composer. Nyman notes the following.

I also deduced a recipe for the successful ‘minimal-music’ happening from the entertainment presented by Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik at the ICA. Simple idea, straightforward structure, intellectual control, theatrical presence and intensity in presentation. These all contributed to Paik’s spellbinding performance of *Springen* by Hennig [sic] Christiansen.²

Thus starts the history of minimal music as a critical term; not with an assessment of such emblematic minimal music pieces like Terry Riley’s *In C* (1964) or Steve Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain* (1964–65), but with a recipe deduced from a performance of *Springen*, a piece that appears not to have survived in work lists.

It was not until the mid-1970s that the term minimal music began to be applied in a consistent manner as an umbrella term describing the works of La Monte Young (b. 1935), Terry Riley (b. 1935), Steve Reich

1. Cf., among others, Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, *Music in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3; and K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists, 20th-Century Composers* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), 8.

2. Michael Nyman, “Minimal Music,” review of several concerts including a happening by Moorman and Paik (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; date not specified), *The Spectator* 221, no. 7320 (11 October 1968): 519. The full text of the review is included as appendix, because it seems quite hard to get. Many authors mistakenly claim that the term “minimal music” was used to describe Cardew’s music, whereas this is only one of many pieces discussed in the article. See, for instance, Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5:355.

(b. 1936), and Philip Glass (b. 1937). A significant thrust toward canonization of these four composers as minimalists was again given by Nyman, who—in his book *Experimental Music* (1974)—included all of them under the header “Minimal Music, Determinacy and the New Tonality.” In it, he posited that “the origins of this minimal process music lie in serialism.”³ According to Nyman, the element of stasis in Anton Webern’s music—reached by using the same octave transpositions of pitches in sections of his works—attracted Young, who found the same tendency to be present in non-Western music.

Given the fact that the term “minimal music” was gradually introduced since the end of the 1960s, but mostly since the mid-1970s, the term was applied to the music of these composers in hindsight. For instance, 1960s pieces by Reich—the main protagonist of the second part of this thesis—had variously been described as “musique-concrete” or a “Dada-ish collage” in the case of *Livelihood* (1964),⁴ and—most frequently—as “hypnotic” in the case of *Four Pianos* (1965–66), *Come Out* (1966), *Violin Phase* (1967), and *Pulse Music* (1969).⁵ The first time his music is called “minimal”—at least as far as I could trace—is in a

3. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 119.

4. Dean Wallace, “Newcomer to Tape Music,” review of a concert by Steve Reich at the San Francisco Tape Music Center, 27 January 1965, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1965; Richard D. Freed, “Avant-Garde Gives Electronic Display,” review of a concert including works by Lucier, Reich, Mumma, Behrman, and Maxfield at the Judson Hall, New York, 27 August 1965, *New York Times*, 28 August 1965.

5. Douglas M. Davis, “The Sounds, in Startling Variety, Break with Patterns of the Past,” review of various concerts, among them a “recent performance of *Four Pianos* at the Park Place Gallery in New York” (probably 17–19 March 1967), *National Observer*, 10 July 1967; Theodore Strongin, “When Teen-agers Get to College...,” review of several Odyssey recordings, among them *New Sounds in Electronic Music* featuring *Come Out*, *New York Times*, 10 December 1967; Eric Salzman, “Musicotechnology: The Medium Is the Music,” review of *New Sounds in Electronic Music*, *HiFi/Stereo Review* 20, no. 5 (1968); Donal Henahan, “Repetition, Electronically Aided, Dominates the Music of Steve Reich,” review of a concert of music by Reich including *Pulse Music* at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art, 27 May 1969, *New York Times*, 28 May 1969; Robert Commanday, “When to Boo and When to Just Opt Out,”

1970 review by Donal Henahan, who professed that “Reich is still obsessed with taking his minimal art as far as it can be taken.”⁶

Interestingly, less than a year earlier, the same *New York Times* reviewer proposed the exact opposite. Reviewing a concert of Reich’s music at the Whitney Museum, he proposed a historical metaphor of art as a pendulum. (One of the pieces performed was *Pendulum Music* [1968]). As a reaction against sentimentality, Stravinsky and other neoclassicists are depicted as pulling the pendulum toward sparseness. Then, “Webern came along and drove the idea to its extreme, and music went through a period in which *minimal art and nonrepetition* of materials were idealized.”⁷ In the following phase of Henahan’s concise history of music the pendulum is reversed. “We have now entered well into a time when composers are in revulsion against the previous esthetic, so that an artist such as Steve Reich carries his celebration of *repetition* to lengths that we have known previously only at second hand, from Oriental music.”

“Minimal music,” then, is a rather ambiguous term if applied to the 1960s. Those seeking a cursory explanation of the term in the first edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980), would find themselves redirected to a short article entitled “System,”⁸ underlining the fact that by 1980 the term was still not universally used. As can be deduced from Henahan’s quotes, the term is borrowed from art criticism. The term “minimal art” was applied to the highly reductive visual art works by, among others,

review of a concert including *Violin Phase*, Hertz Hall, Berkeley, 5 August 1969, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 August 1969.

6. Donal Henahan, “Steve Reich Presents a Program of Pulse Music at Guggenheim,” review of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Presents An Evening of Music by Steve Reich, 7 May 1970, *New York Times*, 9 May 1970.

7. This and next quotation, Henahan, “Repetition, Electronically Aided” (italics added).

8. Paul Griffiths, “System (ii),” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1st edn., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), 18:481.

Dan Flavin, Frank Stella, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and Donald Judd. One of the reasons the term was transferred to music was the fact that minimal artists and those composers who came to be defined as minimalists were closely associated.

Many of the 1960s works by to-be-musical-minimalists were premiered in art galleries. A 1967 article bearing the subtitle “Show Mixes Melodica and ‘Minimal’ Art” reviews an art exhibition at the Park Place Gallery, New York. Works by Dean Fleming, Charles Ross, and Jerry Foyster were accompanied by a tape playing Reich’s *Melodica* (1966). The scores of this piece and two versions of *Piano Phase* (1966–67) were exhibit as well.⁹ The reviewer characterized the Park Place Gallery as an “out-post of ‘minimal,’ ‘pure,’ or ‘systemic’ art” and explicitly connected Reich’s music with the art works exhibited. The “sound effects (O.K., music) by Steve Reich,” she wrote—expressing her hesitation of whether it *is* music—“appears to be just as modular as the art. And somehow everything hangs together very well.”¹⁰ In a 1993 article, Jonathan Bernard intends to show several analogies between minimal art and music. He claims that the term “is not at all inappropriate to the music of certain composers when construed according to its meaning in the plastic arts,” and that “the language developed by art critics to treat minimalism can be adapted to furnish an essentially workable basis for analysis and criticism of minimalism in music.”¹¹

9. “The music you are listening to is *Melodica*, the score of which appears to your right in the middle. The two versions of *Piano Phase* represent two versions of the same musical process.” Leaflet presented at the exhibition, Steve Reich Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland.

10. Grace Glueck, “Park Place Puts On a Stunner: Show Mixes Melodica and ‘Minimal’ Art,” review of a Park Place Gallery exhibition featuring Dean Fleming, “Primal Panels,” Charles Ross, “Prisms and Lenses,” Jerry Foyster, “Mirrors,” and Steve Reich, “Continuous Tape Music,” 5–30 March 1967, *New York Times*, 11 March 1967.

11. Jonathan W. Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 1 (1993): 87.

Although Bernard's claims are interesting, the influence of minimalism in the visual arts is only one aspect of what has been described as a "cauldron of activity" and a "Gebräu" out of which minimal music emerged.¹² Only minor attention will, therefore, be paid to such consideration in this thesis—confined to a short paragraph not dealing with minimal art, but with connections between minimal music and concept art as found in textbooks (§2.1). Rather, in the first part of this thesis an attempt is made to capture the cauldron of activity in more musical terms.

The method applied to do so is as simple as it is effective. Proceeding from general textbook accounts on the history of music in chapter 1—all dealing to a certain degree with minimal music—the various topics are outlined. Specific attention is paid to connections with other musics (whether art, popular, or non-Western) and the way they are seen to have influenced minimal music's composers. The next chapter deals with books directed at a broader audience. These tend to take minimal music's popular appeal as a starting point. As such, they illustrate one of the topics of minimal music as hinted to in chapter 1, namely, that minimal music somehow gained a popular audience. The last paragraph of this chapter (§2.2) discusses books on American music, which mostly deal with the way this popular appeal can be interpreted. Having proceeded from general histories and twentieth-century histories to histories of American music, chapter 3 examines the views brought to the fore in books dealing specifically with minimal music.

The most important topic in the first part of this thesis is the relationship between minimal music and other Western "classical" musics. Although influences from other musics—notably non-Western musics/philosophies, jazz, and other popular musics—as well as the already outlined relation with visual art have been formative for minimal music, such considerations do not constitute the main objective of part 1. Rather, the objective is to create an overview of the cauldron of activity—as described by

12. Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 7; Ulli Götte, *Minimal Music: Geschichte—Ästhetik—Umfeld*,

Taschenbücher zur Musikwissenschaft 138 (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 2000), 16.

musicologists and composers—and then single out the aspects that are relevant to the subject of part 2, Reich’s 1961 composition *Music for String Orchestra*.

This piece, lasting between 1’44” and 1’49”,¹³ was composed within the American academic climate and remains rather obscure in literature. The earliest piece by Reich I encountered during my research at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Basel, Switzerland, it immediately drew my attention. The peculiar application of twelve-tone technique in the piece was familiar to me from secondary sources. The actual score showed several other interesting details that appeared to merit a more comprehensive study, eventually leading to this thesis.

Reich possibly rejected it almost immediately after having received his master’s degree or same time thereafter. As a consequence, no list of works mentions its existence. Not only does the piece itself remain relatively unknown, Reich’s academic period as a whole is an understudied area in musicological literature dealing with minimal music. Paul Griffiths’s article on Reich in the second edition of the *New Grove* only mentions the fact that such a period exists, providing information on where he studied, with whom, and when. Griffiths then immediately turns to Reich’s *It’s Gonna Rain*, “his first acknowledged piece [that] provided the seed from which his music would grow.”¹⁴ An objection to such a claim is that it is highly improbable that Reich’s music grew from a seed he singlehandedly sowed.

Many other factors should be taken into consideration to explain Reich’s minimal music. In other words, there is no single seed from which Reich’s music grew. A variety of influences—of which the main, but not all, ingredients are presented in part 1—should be considered formative elements in Reich’s

13. Two recordings are available in the Steve Reich Collection at the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland. The duration as deduced from the actual score (showing no *accelerando* or *rallentando*) is slightly more than 1’37”.

14. Paul Griffiths, “Reich, Steve [Stephen] Michael,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd edn., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), 21:124.

music. One of those—itsself constituting multiple aspects—is Western “classical” music, more specifically (with respect to *Music for String Orchestra*) strands of twentieth-century classical music characterized as “avant-garde” or “modern.” The analysis presented in chapter 6 shows in what ways Reich’s early piece relates to earlier developments in twentieth-century music. Although tempting, I will refrain—with a minor exception, *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano + Tape* (1964)—from relating the piece to later pieces by Reich, because such claims would not exceed the status of speculation. (The only solid claim that can be made is a superficial one. Reich avoids programmatic titles in many of his works, preferring generic ones. Many of those start, like *Music for String Orchestra*, with the word “music.” Anti-subjectivity is frequently seen as an important aspect of minimal music—as will become clear in the first part of this thesis—and fits well with this observation.)¹⁵ Care is taken to limit the interpretation of the piece (through formal analysis) as much as possible to solid claims, avoiding dubious assumptions.

The two chapters preceding the analysis intend to contextualize the piece by taking into account what the composer has said about it and the period in which it was composed (Chapt. 4) and how it is interpreted by those few publications dealing with the subject (Chapt. 5). The importance of Berio in Reich’s development is one of the leading principles in these explorations. Another important strand is the fact that Reich frequently confessed that, while composing serial music, he tried to “sneak in harmony through the back door” (see Chapt. 4). Reich apparently showed some fascination for this combination of serialism and harmony, as he tried to analyze other composer’s pieces (notably by Webern and Schoenberg) in search for harmony. The title of this thesis, then, aims for both this search by Reich and

15. These are *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano + Tape* (1964), *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* (1973), *Music for Pieces of Wood* (1973), *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76), and *Music for a Large Ensemble* (1978). Titles ending with “music,” are *Pendulum Music* (1968), *Pulse Music* (1968), *Clapping Music* (1972), and *The Desert Music* (1982–84). Note that these titles are not generic in any conventional sense. To my knowledge, for instance, no piece entitled “Music for String Orchestra” exists, except for a 1931 piece by the English composer Walter Leigh that I encountered while searching *Oxford Music Online*.

my own search for harmony in Reich's twelve-tone piece. The kind of harmonic foundations, however, are far from conventional, as will become clear in the last chapter.

PART ONE MINIMAL MUSIC

I heard the piece Aphex Twin of Richard James carefully: I think it would be very helpful if he listens to my work *Song of the Youth* [*Gesang der Jünglinge*], which is electronic music, and a young boy's voice singing with himself. Because he would then immediately stop with all these post-African repetitions, and he would look for changing tempi and changing rhythms, and he would not allow to repeat any rhythm if it were not varied to some extent and if it did not have a direction in its sequence of variations.

Karlheinz Stockhausen in "Stockhausen vs. the Technocrats" (1995)

Writing a history of minimal music is a complicated matter. It will evidently suffer the same flaws as any attempt to write a history. Personal preferences and interpretations tend to crop up and shape a history more than actual facts can underpin. It should be quite clear, then, that—to quote a German musicologist's attempt to absolve himself of the subjectivities in his history—"eine chemisch reine Neutralität nie und nirgends zu verwirklichen ist."¹⁶

In the following survey of books that try to grapple with the difficult task of writing a history of music—trying to incorporate minimal music in the process—many points of view will pass. Whether the authors' approaches are even historical in nature is to be seen. Many authors discussed in this chapter take

The opening quotation is from Karlheinz Stockhausen, Aphex Twin, Scanner, and Daniel Pemberton, "Stockhausen vs. the 'Technocrats,'" interviews by Dick Witts and Rob Young, in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2006), 382. Originally published in *The Wire*, no. 141 (Nov. 1995). The piece Stockhausen refers to is either "Alberto Balsalm" or "Ventolin" by Richard James (a.k.a. Aphex Twin).

16. Hans Vogt, *Neue Musik seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1972), 12. The same goes for minimal music itself. Abstractness and objectivity are only partially applicable to the style, as will become clear from Robert Fink's views in chapter 3.

on a more formal, psychoanalytical, social, or political stance and some are less concerned with an “objective” representation of history—or minimal music for that matter—than with their own aesthetic judgments. So, for example, where Eric Salzman detects a “quintessential purity,” Wilfrid Mellers is alarmed by an “oriental abnegation” (see Chapt. 2).

The range of books I chose to include in this part of my thesis is by no means comprehensive. The selection is meant to serve as a broad overview of stances toward minimal music as precipitated in general histories. It also intends to facilitate the introduction of specialized literature on the subject discussed in the last chapter of this first part. The pragmatic criteria for this selection are the following. First, the publication should deal to some extent with minimal music. Secondly, it should be in book form. Finally, it is written in either German, English, or French.

1 *Textbook Examples of Minimal Music*

The 1988 edition of Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca's textbook *A History of Western Music* ends with a compact survey of the style called "minimal music." The one-and-a-half page description of minimalism starts off with an explanation of minimalism's origins.

The musics of Asia, particularly Indian and Indonesian, frequently heard in America since 1960, have stimulated composers to cultivate a simpler style in which subtleties of melody and rhythm could be exploited. The controlled improvisation upon ragas ... was one inspiration. The cool, entrancing, repetitive, contemplative, music of the Javanese and Balinese gamelans gave composers a model of complex structures that depended on reiteration of simple patterns. ... Synthesizers provided an easy means to improvise over "canned" rhythms and melodic patterns. Rock music, which itself absorbed elements of jazz, blues, folk, electronic music, and Oriental idioms, was a common experience of many composers who were born in the 1930s and 1940s; they were enticed by its directness, hypnotic rhythms, consonant harmonies, repeated phrases, and ostinatos.

The pursuit of simplicity, or reaction to the complexity of serial music, led a number of composers in a direction that has been called *minimalism*, because the vocabulary ... was intentionally limited. The term as well as the direction may owe something to the New York group of visual artists who designed cyclic and repetitive structures consisting of simple elements like lines and dots. On the other hand, the time limits ... as well as the durations of particular gestures—in contrast to the compression and constant change of much serial music—[were] anything but minimal.¹⁷

The remaining page then briefly surveys the four composers that are usually present in discussions of the style: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. Glass provides the link to the book's conclusion. Because he "has won the support of a large and diversified audience that includes

17. Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 4th edn. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 877. Grout died a year before the publication of this fourth edition and was "unable to participate in this revision" (xi).

concertgoers, frequenters of art galleries, ... rock enthusiasts, and the record-buying public” (878), Glass is emblematic for yet another reason why minimalism came into being: “the concern with the gap between composer and listener has led to simplification and even minimalization of content, cultivation of hybrid styles born of marriages between art and popular, ethnic, non-Western, or folk music, lifting the organization of music to the surface rather than concealing it” (880).

Leaving aside the question whether Glass gained a large audience as a consequence of his concern with the gap between composer and listener, or won support because his music “emphasized melodiousness, consonance, and the harmonic progressions and heavy amplification common in rock music” (878), this textbook serves as a stepping stone for a lengthy discussion of minimalism and its origins that will cover the first part of my thesis. I chose this general survey of Western music as a starting point, because it neatly summarizes the difficulties of disentangling the origins of minimal music. The sheer variety of influences (ragas, gamelan, synthesizers, rock music [featuring jazz, blues, folk, and electronic music]) is only an indication of the complexity of such a task.¹⁸ The discussion of why this style came into being at this moment in time complicates matters further. The availability of Asian musics, “frequently heard in America since 1960,” and the emergence of rock music are two reasons mentioned in the concise discussion offered by (Grout and) Palisca. The role of synthesizers, treated as an independent agent in the account cited above, indicates that there was a technological aspect (apart from reproducing-sound-through-recording) that facilitated the emergence of minimalism. But these aspects do not fully explain the emergence of minimalism. There is another, deeper strand that Palisca wants us to recognize: the emergence of minimalism as reaction against serialism.

18. Note that Western or classical music is fully absent in this discussion raising the question whether this should be the conclusion of a book on Western music for any other reason than the fact that the composers discussed are westerners.

As Palisca puts it, minimalism is equally a pursuit of simplicity as a reaction against the complexity of serial music. Postwar-serial music, the relatively complex style cultivated in Europe and exported as the solution to the perennial problem of the development of composition, had gained ground in the United States in the 1950s. The reaction against this approach led composers in the direction of minimalism, a direction that owed “something” to minimalism in the visual arts. Or so the story goes.

By considering the brief survey offered in *A History of Western Music*, we now have a template of minimal music’s origins that can serve as a general backbone for discussing the extensive literature on minimal music that deals with its origins. This backbone proves relatively stern if we consider other general histories of (twentieth-century) Western music.

Examining the 2006 edition of the same *History of Western Music*, an easy candidate for such a comparison, some of the above-mentioned elements recur, some do not. J. Peter Burkholder, who continued the project, is clear on the variety of influences, even adding some not present in the 1988 edition: “composers of minimalist works absorbed influences from rock, African music, Asian music, tonality, and finally Romanticism.”¹⁹ (This last influence is added to accommodate the introduction of a fifth minimalist composer, John Adams, whose music will, for the most part, be disregarded in this thesis.) Like Palisca, he notes that minimalism as a musical style parallels minimalism in the visual arts, with its “reduc[tion of] materials and form to fundamentals [and reluctance] to express feelings or convey the artist’s state of mind. Minimalist artworks often feature a repetitive pattern of simple elements” (952). And the reaction-against-serialism is discussed in slightly different terms: “the desire of classical composers to connect with listeners who were unsympathetic to modernist or avant-garde music has prompted a search for more accessible languages, including minimalism” (950). Serialism is left out in favor of the broader terms “modernist or avant-garde,” but, like Palisca, Burkholder adds the cause-and-effect description of

19. J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 7th edn. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006), 952.

composers pursuing simplicity because of the search for connection with listeners. The “pursuit of simplicity—or reaction to the complexity of serial music” is thus explained by taking the listeners’ unsympathetic stance toward modernist or avant-garde music and combining it with the composers’ desire to connect with those listeners. The desire to connect with listeners is part of the problem that Kyle Gann, in his *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (1997), capitalizes as “The Gap” between listeners and composers. I will return to Gann’s take on minimalism and The Gap in §2.2. For a discussion of the terms “modernist” and “avant-garde” in relation to minimal music, see the histories of Richard Taruskin and Hermann Danuser discussed below (§1.1 and §1.2). First I would like to compare the two textbook accounts above with other histories of music, in order to complete the present survey of more general textbook/historical accounts on minimalism.

Robert P. Morgan, for example, in his textbook *Twentieth-Century Music* (1991), states that minimalist composers were “interested in bringing music back to a more elemental foundation, freeing it from the accumulated weight of Western conventions.”²⁰ This reactionary (and altruistic) move was inspired by “Oriental influences,” in that minimal music relies on “understatement rather than exaggeration” and encourages “a response of passive contemplation rather than active involvement.”²¹ Thus, Morgan shares Palisca’s view that the “cool and entrancing” aspects of oriental music are most important for the evolution of minimal music. Apart from the oriental sources, Morgan mentions jazz and rock (Riley, Reich, Glass), and performance art (Reich, Glass).²² Introducing Young as the “leading figure” in the earliest stages of minimal music, Morgan comments on his relation to Webern, whose sparse and static

20. Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America*. The Norton Introduction to Music History (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 424.

21. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 423. (Morgan mentions Reich studying in Bali [421 and 432], which is not the case.)

22. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, 418–19 and 433.

textures appealed to Young. Although the reaction against serialism is not present in Morgan's story—he, in effect, proposes a smooth transition from Webern to Young—he calls the music written since the 1960s “post-serial.” With this term he means the “seemingly countless new compositional approaches [that] appeared, at least on the surface, to have very little to do with one another” (408), and that came about after serialism—“the last compositional development shared by enough composers of different stylistic persuasions and nationalities to have represented a sort of common, if not ‘universal,’ musical language” (407). Whereas serial music once was a common musical language, minimal music, according to Morgan, was just one of many coexisting approaches; an approach that tried to bring music back to its elemental foundations.

In *Music of the Twentieth Century* (2005; first published in Dutch in 1964), composer Ton de Leeuw grapples with the same subject as Morgan—albeit from an analytical rather than historical point of view. In his own compositions, De Leeuw tries to combine non-Western philosophy and Western compositional techniques. Thus, De Leeuw is clear on the (popular and) non-Western influences in minimal music: Young, Riley, and other Americans “shared a broad interest in widely different idioms including jazz, pop, and non-Western music.”²³ The reaction against the abstractions of serial concepts and a “tendency towards greater directness in music making,” is also present in De Leeuw's narrative.²⁴ Generally, minimalism is seen by De Leeuw as the “antithesis” of extreme complexity.²⁵ He introduces a concept not present in (Grout and) Palisca's account (though touched upon by the statement that Asian musics were frequently heard in America), namely the American aspect tied to minimal music's origins. He

23. Ton de Leeuw, *Music of the Twentieth Century: A Study of Its Elements and Structure*, trans. Stephen Taylor (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 187. Originally published in Dutch as *Muziek van de twintigste eeuw: Een onderzoek naar haar elementen en structuur*, 3rd edn. (Utrecht: Bohn, Scheltema, and Holkema, 1977).

24. De Leeuw, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 188.

25. De Leeuw, *Music of the Twentieth Century*, 197.

thus introduces the geographical place of origin (and the identity issues involved) as an important factor. The Americans John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Earle Brown are discussed as having “a much freer relation to musical tradition than most progressive Europeans” (35). (We will return to a discussion of place and American identity in §2.2.) Young and Riley find themselves following Cage’s concepts, of which the most characteristic trait is “the abandonment of music as an autonomous entity: it was used increasingly as a sound environment, free of traditional ideas of form and concert performance” (35–36). In their works—and that of Robert Ashley and the Fluxus movement—“almost all existing values and concepts related to music were turned well and truly upside down” (187). According to De Leeuw, it was Cage who—lacking a concern with tradition—opened up the possibilities for minimal music’s existence through the abandonment of the notion of music as an autonomous entity.

The textbook *Histoire de la Musique occidentale* (1995) is relatively wide in scope, considering that one of its twelve sections is devoted to jazz. Not surprisingly, for a French book, the editors chose to include many French composers. With respect to American music, the French composer and “grande pedagogue” Nadia Boulanger is discussed.²⁶ She taught many American composers (among them Glass) at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau (near Paris). A considerable treatment of minimal music as such is missing, however. Of the four composers usually grouped under the heading “minimal music,” only three are mentioned, Young being left out. The other three (Riley, Reich, and Glass) are discussed as composers of *repetitive* music, and not as minimal music. Like in De Leeuw’s story, repetitive music is connected to identity issues in the earlier twentieth-century United States, as the absence of a national tradition led Charles Ives and his contemporaries to forge a new language that, “ne dépende plus de l’hégémonie européenne” (1087). In the same vein, Brigitte Massin—principal author of the last section called “Le deuxième 20^e siècle”—posits that with the advent of repetitive music the United States again

26. Jean Massin and Brigitte Massin, eds., *L’Histoire de la Musique occidentale*, nouv. éd. rev. et augm., Collection Les Indispensables de la musique (Paris: Fayard, 1985), 1182.

played their role as “détonateur dans la musique” (1274). Not directly concerned with European discussions on the problems of composition and musical language, and following the tracks set out by Feldman and Brown, the three composers of repetitive music extremely simplified fundamental compositional principles.

Repetitive music, as Massin defines it, does not dismiss tonality, is based on a rhythmic principle, unfolds with imperceptible variations, and often incorporates electronic instruments. Of the three composers, Massin thinks Reich’s development the most interesting and most complete.²⁷ Studying with Berio at Mills College, Reich sensed that dodecaphonic music had lost the important sense of pulse. Quoting Bérénice Reynaud—editor of the 1981 French edition of Reich’s collection of articles *Writings about Music* (1974)—Massin states that Reich disavowed experimental music and refers to tradition instead—not only the European tradition, but also those of Balinese gamelan, African music, and Hebrew cantillation.²⁸ (For all Reich’s prominence, however, it was Riley’s *In C* that constituted “le première ouverture sur le grand public” [1275].) In her closing remarks, Massin contemplates the problematic term “avant-garde” in relation to the return to tradition exemplified by, among others, Reich’s music. She observes, for example, that in avant-garde music “le phénomène de réintégration de la tonalité ... est quasi général” (1279–80). American repetitive music, she contends, is just one of the many strands that together constitute a new notion of avant-garde of which the return to tradition has become an important factor: “une bonne partie des ‘répétitifs’ américains, comme Phil Glass ou Steve Reich, peut naturellement revendiquer [le] retour aux sources tonales que les Américains ont été d’ailleurs les premiers à oser” (1280).

Contrary to De Leeuw’s notion that the American-ness played a role in abandoning Western conventions such as the autonomy of the art work, Massin contends that it was the lack of interest in

27. Massin and Massin, *Histoire de la Musique*, 1274.

28. Massin and Massin, *Histoire de la Musique*, 1275.

European debates over compositional technique that brought minimal composers back to traditional notions such as tonality. In short, they disagree on the effects of America's isolated position with respect to tradition; whereas De Leeuw sees an abandonment of conventional Western notions because of this isolation, for Massin, the isolated position caused a return to traditional concerns (such as tonality) not inhibited by European compositional developments. Both do, however, agree that the isolation Americans enjoyed was an important factor in the emergence of minimal music.

Paul Griffiths, in *A Concise History of Modern Music* (1978), briefly discusses Reich's statements on his use of structural models of non-Western music in the chapter "To the East." He touches on Riley's *In C* as a borderline between pop and avant-garde. Idiosyncratically, he includes a brief comment on Reich in a discussion of chance music, because his "patterned surfaces stimulate 'false' perceptions. ... The mind is mesmerized by repetition, put into such a state that small motifs can leap out of the music with a distinctness quite unrelated to their acoustic dominance."²⁹ The term "minimal music" does not at all appear in this book, again stressing the fact that it only gradually became common parlance. In *Modern Music and After* (1995), however, Griffiths divides his discussion of minimalism in two parts; one in the section 1960s and 1970s—a paragraph called "New York Minimalism"—and a separate discussion for minimalism in the 1980s and 1990s. After offering two early examples of minimalism (Erik Satie's *Vexations* [1893], Cage's *Music for Marcel Duchamp* [1947]), Griffiths states that those were not widely followed and that "the starting points ... are more likely to be found in the music of La Monte Young, [which is] highly repetitive [and] drone-based. ... His insistence on just intonation and on his own performing forces had the effect of displacing his music wholesale from the western tradition."³⁰ Young's

29. Paul Griffiths, *A Concise History of Western Music: From Debussy to Boulez* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 179.

30. Paul Griffiths, *Modern Music and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 209–10. Rev. edn. of *Modern Music: The Avant Garde since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

drones, to Griffiths, seem to be the origin of minimalism, and, not unlike De Leeuw's statement on the abandonment of musical works as autonomic entities, he states that "by the sheer length of his pieces, [Young] removes them from the status of art objects ... to that of environments" (274). Griffiths also mentions non-Western influences with respect to the music of Reich and Glass—the contribution of Riley's *In C* being marginalized by Griffiths as a "momentarily successful simplification of Young's practice and purpose" (211). Reich's use of musical processes that can be heard in the actual sounding music, prompts Griffiths to state that, "for Reich, minimalism was an escape from the embarrassment and unjustifiabilities of choice, just as chance processes had been for Cage" (212). Griffiths's separation of New York Minimalism and more general minimalism has to do with international success. Several works—notably Reich's *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* (1973), and *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76); Glass's *Einstein on the Beach* (1975–76)—caused minimalism to "move from a fringe existence in the SoHo area of New York to international acclaim and imitation" (214).

Discussing the international minimalism of the 1980s and 1990s, Griffiths mentions the personal styles of several American and European composers: Meredith Monk, David Lang, Michael Torke, Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman, and Louis Andriessen. He reveals two great paradoxes of minimalism. The first is that "an extreme reduction of means ... by no means eliminates personal style" (274), and the other that "[minimalism's] twin origins—in rock and in the sacred musics of Asia and Africa—have resulted in a bizarre alliance of spirituality and commerce" (276). Griffiths explains the first paradox by informing the reader that minimalism, by definition, puts style before content. It is thus style, not content, that for the most part defines the music of individual minimalist composers, and, therefore, their personal styles are most readily recognizable. The second paradox is probably Griffiths's debunking of the New Age movement. He brings this paradox to the fore in order to raise the question whether music can be spiritual without attributing that quality to the music's text or how the music is heard (interpreted) by the listener. Griffiths's provisional answer is that minimalism's spirituality is "just style" (the role of content already

being marginalized by his explanation of the first paradox), invested on the music by text or listener's interpretation, and does not reside in the style of the music itself.

Griffiths's book already offers quite a different story from that of Palisca with which this chapter opened. Although non-Western influences are discussed by Griffiths, he skips the influence of plastic arts and is unclear about what the relation between serialism and minimal music could be. These points will be discussed in the last section of this paragraph. First, I will discuss one last example of a textbook on music that does contain clear references to a reaction against serialism and a parallel in the plastic arts.

With composer Reginald Smith Brindle's *The New Music: The Avant-Garde since 1945* (1987) we return to the template offered by Palisca: reaction against serialism, technology, influence of non-Western music, and a parallel in the plastic arts. (Actually, popular music's influence is missing in his account.) Smith Brindle sees minimal music as "the most radical reaction to the labyrinthine complexities of avant-garde music ... just as in painting the ultimate reaction to expressionism in the Sixties was the blank canvas of completely uniform colour."³¹ The "school of 'minimalism,'" which began around 1970, was not only concerned with simplicity and non-cerebralism. One of the important aims was to "reduc[e] the demand on the listener's perception and intellect to a minimum" (193). Smith Brindle's view of minimal music is thus a negative one, at least in terms of intellect.

He attributes the appeal of minimal music to a kind of escapist listening behavior, a "subconscious need to experience the 'neutralization of time' as a psychotherapy. ... If it mesmerizes, induces states of trance, thoughtlessness, timelessness, if it hardly needs to be listened to at all, this is just what some listeners crave for" (194). Minimal music thus provides an escape from the pressures of life. It is "directed towards a public which prefers withdrawal from this world rather than involvement in its trials" (196). The influence of technology, for Smith Brindle, is clear, in that "tape loops and the use of synthesizer

31. Reginald Smith Brindle, *The New Music: The Avant-Garde since 1945*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 193.

sequencers must have pointed composers towards the advantages and conveniences of repeating musical designs” (194). As for non-Western music, Smith Brindle does not really make a point of that apart from mentioning “Eastern origins”—of harmonic simplicity, perpetual ostinatos, tonal immobility, and rāga-type melodies—in Riley’s *In C* and *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1967).³²

The textbooks discussed in this paragraph are all intended to give their readers a general introduction to the history of (modern/new) music. It is thus striking that they diverge on so many topics. The only aspects of minimal music that is consistent, is that there were influences from non-Western sources. Palisca, Burkholder, and Morgan mention a connection with visual art. De Leeuw and Massin agree that America’s isolated position had its effects, but they disagree on what this constitutes. Whereas De Leeuw thinks that freedom from tradition caused the abandonment of an autonomous entity in musical works, Massin posits that the isolation opened up the way to a return to traditional concerns like tonality. Griffiths discusses the phenomenon “process music” and concludes that it is clearly a reaction against the unjustifiabilities of choice. He also mentions that spirituality is not something present *in* minimal music, but rather something invested *on* the music. Smith Brindle, finally, is rather negative about minimal music. His own compositions are, not surprisingly, based on a more atonal idiom. He even wrote a textbook on serial composition which will figure in a later chapter. In the next paragraph, the authors of the Cambridge and Oxford histories of (twentieth-century) music will have their say on minimal music and its origins.

1.1 The Cambridge and Oxford Approach to the History of Minimal Music

As in Griffiths’s account, *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (2004), a collection of articles edited by Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, presents two separate discussions of minimalism. The first “stage” is discussed in Richard Toop’s contribution “Expanding Horizons: The International Avant-Garde, 1962–75,” the second in Robert Fink’s chapter “(Post-)Minimalisms 1970–2000: The Search for a New Mainstream.” As might be deduced from the titles of these essays, the two periods these essays are

32. Smith Brindle, *The New Music*, 136.

(to be) concerned with roughly coincide with Griffiths's division 1960s–1970s and 1980s–1990s. Toop's essay contains a paragraph "Minimalism and Psychedelia." Minimalism, in his account, "broke more radically with modernist orthodoxies than even the New York School around Cage had done."³³ Like Griffiths, Toop sees the origins of minimal music in Young's drones: "The origins of minimalism are

Fig. 1 La Monte Young, *Trio for Strings* (1958), first page, as printed in Edward Strickland's *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 116

33. Richard Toop, "Expanding Horizons: The International Avant-Garde, 1962–75," in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, 453–77 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 466.

normally traced back to La Monte Young: to the startlingly long durations of his String Trio [1958; Fig. 1], and above all to one of his Fluxus-oriented pieces, a *Composition #7 1960* [Fig. 2]” (466). Young’s works, with their stasis and long durations, miss an aspect present in the music of Riley, Reich, and Glass, namely “the element of obsessive repetition” (467).

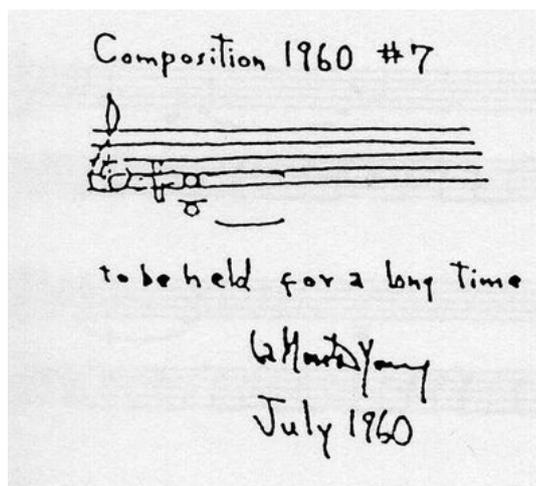


Fig. 2 La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #7* as printed in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), p. 70

Toop points out a difference between on the one hand Young and Riley, who “aimed to induce a trance-like state” and on the other Reich and Glass, who were “concerned that the listener followed every detail of what was happening” (467). He then discusses the role of psychedelia. He sees a “point of intersection between the ‘rock’ and ‘art’ avant-gardes and their audiences” with the release of Riley’s *In C* by Columbia Masterworks in 1968. Its album cover and the reference to a “trip” in the liner notes suggest that there were connections with the “flower power” movement and LSD consumption. As for the reaction against serialism, Toop makes an interesting comment. Although Reich and Glass have pointed to such a reaction, Toop states that this reaction would not have been a significant part of audience reception, because minimalism’s target audience did not consist of ex-serialists, but rather of popular music fans, unaware of even the existence of serial music.

Robert Fink offers a “fractured story [with] multiple and mutually antagonistic post-minimalisms.”³⁴ Citing Kyle Gann—whose *American Music in the Twentieth Century* will be discussed in §2.2 below—Fink identifies and incorporates two “grand historical hypotheses” (540). The first is that minimalism was the “last identifiable new style in music history” (539). The second hypothesis claims that minimalism was “an evolutionary or dialectical starting point, the beginning of a new mainstream” (540–41). Both these takes on minimalism accommodate the term post-minimalism, simply denoting everything that came after minimalism with its analogy to post-modernism. The difference between minimalism and post-minimalism is that the first was highly reductive whereas the second is described by Fink as “elaborate pulse process music that broke into mainstream consciousness in the late 1970s as ‘minimalism’ [but] was ... actually the first stirrings of post-minimalism, already an evolutionary shift away from the early reductionism of its founders” (541). Griffiths’s term “New York Minimalism” corresponds with the first of these two (although this term is rather a misnomer as this early minimal music originates on the West Coast) and the international minimalism that was spawned by its international success is on a par with Fink’s post-minimalism. As Fink puts it, post-minimalists have been more concerned with lushness of sound than with the radical audible processes of the earlier style. In his concluding remarks, Fink argues that post-minimalism can be seen as a new mainstream if one takes into consideration the many popular music styles (ambient, electronic dance music) which it comprises. As such, post-minimalism as mainstream falls mostly outside the scope of “classical” music.

In Richard Taruskin’s magnum opus *The Oxford History of Western Music* (2005), a discussion of minimalism directly follows his exploration of popular music (including [third-stream] jazz) in the 1960s. This discussion paves the way for the subsequent chapter on minima music composers—subtitled “Minimalism: Young, Riley, Reich, Glass; Their European Emulators.” Taruskin categorizes the

34. Robert Fink, “(Post-)Minimalisms 1970–2000: The Search for a New Mainstream,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople, 539–56 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 555.

minimalist composers as “the first identifiable group of composers in the literate tradition whose music not only exemplified but thrived on the blurring of sociostylistic categories.”³⁵ This blurring is one of the consequences of what Taruskin describes as “the change in the patterns of consumption that so transformed popular music, and then all music, in the sixties” (5:333). Thus, Taruskin claims that although minimal music “definitely comes out of ... the ‘avant-garde tradition,’ ... much of it has been commercially successful beyond the dreams of most classical composers, and beyond the dreams of ‘traditional’ avant-gardists by virtual definition” (5:351).

The avant-garde quality that Taruskin connects with minimal music is clearly confined to its origins and is compromised “by definition” by the commercial success the composers enjoyed. Young’s *Trio for Strings*, according to Taruskin, is clearly an example of this attitude.

The willingness ... to take things to unaccountable extremes immediately marked Young’s work as “avant-garde” in the classical meaning of the word. There is no doubt, then, about the esthetic from which minimalism emerged. It was, at first, an art of alienation and social disaffection in the late, late romantic tradition (5:357–58).

Young’s lack of interest in commercial success actually kept him inside the avant-garde tradition; his “brand of minimalism” becoming “a form of esoteric religious practice, a discipline to be carried out by and in the presence of initiates rather than performed before the general public” (5: 360). Young influenced minimalism rather indirectly through his association with, among others, Riley. Riley was the one who did reach the general public. Like Young, he “chafed against the forced regimen of serial composition” at Berkeley.³⁶ The title of Riley’s tape piece *Mescaline Mix* (1961) demonstrates, for Taruskin, the link between “the new avant-garde and the same counterculture out of which progressive rock was about to emerge” (5:362–63). By transferring the looping of tapes to live performance in *In C*, he

35. Taruskin, *History of Western Music*, 5:351.

36. Taruskin, *History of Western Music*, 5:362.

inaugurated the “last, true ‘revolution’” in the history of Western music, one that involved contradiction in terms of an avant-garde with popular success.³⁷ Tightening the link with the 1960s counterculture “with its hippie communes and ashrams” is the “cooperative behavior” that *In C* promulgates, as well as its democratic, ritualistic quality through its “ease of performance” (5:365).

Taruskin is concerned with the notion “avant-garde” in relation to minimal music, as is also clear from the title of the chapter, “A Harmonious Avant-Garde?” The embrace of consonance in *In C*, demonstrates that “Riley’s music located the site of innovation elsewhere than in the domain of ‘pitch organization.’” (5:367) Eschewing the postwar serialist focus on pitch organization, he deliberately placed himself outside the modernist tradition that seeks to build “toward a goal that ... earlier achievements implied” (5:367). Thus, Riley’s seeking innovation in other realms than those established by tradition is what makes him an avant-gardist.

Taruskin continues his discussion of minimalism by introducing Reich—in a paragraph entitled “‘Classical’ Minimalism,” without Taruskin explaining this term—whose contribution of pulsing Cs to Riley’s *In C* makes for a smooth transition in his narrative. Here too, Taruskin’s concern with the notion “avant-garde” is apparent. Reich’s use of his patented phase-shifting process “was a genuinely avant-garde, shock-the-bourgeois gesture,” and he represented a “true avant-garde movement, neither conservative nor nostalgic, even though it renounced complexity and social alienation” (5:370–71); this despite his academic training “that usually led to a career as an elite modernist rather than an avant-gardist” (5:368). Decisive, according to Taruskin, was Reich’s discovery, through records, of non-Western music (African drumming, Balinese gamelan), “that effectively liberated his creative thinking from the assumptions of his traditional training” (5:369). Taruskin devotes some space to the manifesto “Music as a Gradual Process” (1968; first published in 1969), in which Reich stressed his concern with the audibility of compositional processes. Unlike serialism and chance operations, in which the manner of production is not discernable in the

37. Taruskin, *History of Western Music*, 5:363.

sounding result, Reich wanted his compositional decisions to be directly reflected in the outcome. “More explicitly than most musicians at the time, Reich made a political point of this. ... The composer’s implicit ascendancy over the listener was overthrown. Reich deliberately cast himself ... as a Great Emancipator. [He] was out to liberate people” (5:372). One of the differences between Reich and Riley, however, is that Reich’s phase pieces are hard to perform and require professional musicians, “thereby satisfying a traditional elite modernist criterion” making Reich “the most academically acceptable” composer of the minimalists.³⁸ Reich claimed a performance situation in which he could subjugate himself to the music. Taruskin sees this as a “critical perspective, hostile to existing institutions and established relations and even threatening, makes it not only possible but essential to regard *Drumming* [1970–71] as being, within its own context (and despite its mounting popularity), an avant-garde composition. It produced historical change” (5:383).

Taruskin then turns to Glass, who, like Reich, has been “mellowed by success” (5:389). The success story of minimalism, to Taruskin, has much to do with its qualities of “seemingly indiscriminate ... eclecticism, its live adaptation of musical techniques originating in the ... tape studio, and its tendency toward a kind of factory standardization” that made it an “honest product of ... the commodification, objectification, and exteriorization of the affluent postwar American consumer society” (5:396). Spreading alongside the values of American society, minimal music “has unquestionably been the most influential ... of any musical movement ... since the Second World War” (5:396).

The three authors discussed in this paragraph represent the authorities in recent Anglo-Saxon histories of music. Toop discusses the difference between the four canonized composers and, like Taruskin, he stresses the importance of psychedelia, especially in Riley’s music. Toop also claims that minimal music should be seen as a radical break with modernist concerns, even more so than Cage’s. This coincides with Taruskin’s discussion of the notion “avant-garde.” According to Taruskin, minimal music’s avant-garde

38. Taruskin, *History of Western Music*, 5:373.

quality—though compromised by commercial success—represented a radical break with traditional modernist concerns. Both Taruskin and Fink agree that minimal music should be seen as the last identifiable new style in music history. As such they challenge Morgan’s hypothesis that serialism was the last musical movement representing a common language.

1.2 The German Approach to the History of Minimal Music

My survey of general historiographic literature with respect to minimal music will continue with three German books focusing on twentieth-century music. In this relatively long paragraph, several of the most widely used German histories are discussed. Hermann Danuser—in *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1984)—is, like Taruskin above, concerned with the notions “modern” and “avant-garde.” Danuser sees a distinction between modern and avant-garde not so much in the respective musics as in their assessments of art qualities: where modern denotes the aim to create a new *Kunstmusik*, the avant-garde pursues the abolition of any art tradition whatsoever. This is, for example, apparent in the *Institutionengeschichte*: whereas Boulez—an example of the “(nicht-avantgardistische) Moderne”—occupies the traditional institutions of music culture, Young—one of the “(nicht-moderne) Avantgarde”—is unwilling to enter “die ‘Institution Kunst.’”³⁹ Riley’s *In C* is another example of the non-modern avant-garde on the American West Coast. The passive and meditative listening situation it sets up shows a sharp contrast with the active listening professed by the modernists. Riley’s piece is an example of an avant-garde instead of a modernist approach, because, “verwandt allenfalls mit indischen Praktiken der Formel improvisation, existiert ... *In C* gänzlich unabhängig von allen Traditionen der abendländischen Kunstmusik” (297).

For Danuser, there was an “epochale Umbruch” of music history at mid-century, which is exemplified by the fact that the approach to musical works as self-contained entities became a highly contested

39. Hermann Danuser, *Die Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft 7 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1984), 286.

premise—a view we encountered earlier in De Leeuw’s history.⁴⁰ Even though Danuser warns the reader that it is not his intention to sketch the history of twentieth-century music as one of *Traditionsauflösung*, his story leads him to the (casually posited) claim that for “postmoderne Minimal Music ... die gänzliche Absenz abendländischer Tradition charakteristisch ist” (392). At this point the term postmodern is introduced, denoting a

Gegenströmung gegen die Moderne und die Neue Musik seit etwa 1970, einerseits in den Richtungen der Minimal- und Meditationsmusik unter Anlehnung an außereuropäische Musik, andererseits in den Richtungen der ‘Neuen Einfachheit’ (Neomodern) unter Rückgriff auf die Tradition der europäischen Kunstmusik vor dem Aufkommen der Neuen Musik (424).

Minimal music is thus part of a general countercurrent called postmodernism. More specifically, it belongs to one of two postmodern strands, namely the one following non-European music. Cage’s philosophy of non-intentionality shows one attitude of postmodernism in American *Avantgardekunst*. The minimal and meditation music of the four composers Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass shows another direction. Instead of having complex structures, the intricacies of which can hardly be experienced by listeners, an important aspect for this group of composers is to make sure the structural basis of their music can be perceived—a point also emphasized by Taruskin. Danuser names several premises that formed this music: a grounding in West Coast culture as well as the New York avant-garde scene; “Erfahrungen mit der Neuen Musik serieller und Cagescher Prägung” and with jazz and rock practice; utilization of the advantages of electronic and tape music; extensive studies of non-European music; the development of personal traditions by way of an immediate link between composition and performance; and an affinity with the plastic arts, especially (impersonal) minimal art.⁴¹

40. Danuser, *Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 328.

41. Danuser, *Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 393.

What follows are separate introductions to the music of the four composer. Danuser notes the presence of Webernian influences in Young's *Trio for Strings*, his involvement in the Fluxus movement exemplified by his *Composition 1960 #7* (Fig. 2 above), and the meditative aspects of his Dream House project which aims at "eine Ineinssetzung der menschlichen Existenz mit einem ... endlos erklingenden Klangkontinuum" (394). Riley was the first to realize the possibilities of a "Minimal Music repetitiver Art" (394). Reich transferred the mechanical precision of machines to live ensembles, "gelangte so am unmittelbarsten in die Nähe der unpersönlichen Gitterwerke Sol LeWitts" (394), and, during the 1970s, expanded his "Klangmittel und Strukturprinzipien" (396). Glass created "der additive Typus von Minimal Music," and, like Reich, expanded the possibilities of his approach, especially with respect to the addition of repetitive cadence-like structures. Danuser's general impression of minimal and meditation music is that "Subjektivität entweder aufgelöscht oder durch ein Streben nach Bewußtseinsformen nicht-westlicher Provenienz ersetzt [erscheint]" (397).

A similar comment can be found in *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1945–1975* (2005). (This is the third volume of the series *Handbuch der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert*. My discussion of this book will be followed by a discussion of the fourth volume which deals with the period 1975–2000.) In Hanns-Werner Heister's chapter called "Abschied von der Avantgarde?" he states that "Cageismus und Minimalismus ... beide einer objektivistischen Richtung zugehören, anti-subjektiv mit Absicht oder de facto."⁴² Heister intersperses his account with several negative terms, such as "Abschwung," "Regression," and "Rückfall." "Die drastische Vereinfachung der internen Strukturen von Musik," as Heister characterizes minimal music in a earlier chapter, is "eine massive musikalischen Reaktion auf Krisenerscheinungen im

42. Hanns-Werner Heister, "Abschied von der Avantgarde?" in *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1945–1975*, ed. Hanns-Werner Heister, 359–67 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2005), 361. Note the similarity between Heister's title and the one chosen by Taruskin for his chapter on minimalism, "A Harmonious Avant-Garde?"

Zusammenhang mit dem Einbruch von Cage und seinen Anhängern in die Avantgarde.”⁴³ The reduction of pitch material to penta- or diatonic scales exemplifies “eine Gegenposition zu entwickelter Chromatik, gar zum ‘Zwölfton’” (279). Riley’s *In C* is the “Initialwerk” of minimal music with its polymetric and micro-canonical textures. Unwittingly following the Western hegemony of the “Tonhöhendimension,” Young renounced the rhythmical differentiation of Riley’s music and based his music on stationary sounds. The repetitive patterns of which the music consists, are at odds with the “Komplexität- und Innovationsideal der (europäischen) Avantgarde” (279). It was Cage who inaugurated, or at least fostered, the liberalization necessary for such a development, enhanced by “folkloristische bzw. Exotistische Vorbilder” (279).

The economical use of materials in minimal music does not demonstrate such traditional concerns as developing multiplicity out of a single element or creating sensual richness and affect with little resources. “Vielmehr wird mit Zeit und Geduld der Spielenden wie Hörenden nicht gespart” (279), and, Heister adds, compositional subjectivity is eliminated. “Die Strömung ist weniger Rückgriff auf die Tradition als Rückfall hinter die Moderne” (279). It is “anti-avantgardistischer Gegenschlag und retrospektive Postmoderne ante letteram ... ein Gegenzug gegen fortschreitend radikalisierte materiale Expansion sowie Komplexität der Tonsatzverfahren” (280). Additionally, Heister sees a connection with ritualism, which he sees as a nostalgic fallback after a break with tradition combined with the “Angst vor substanziell Neuem” (281). Heister contends that, implied in the ritualistic performance situation of minimal music that seeks for “Archaik zwischen Trance und Ekstase,” there is also a reference to “rationalisierte industrielle Prozesse” (281). Heister considers non-Western cultural influences to be essential to minimal music. Reich, for example, “strebte eine mehr als exotistische Synthese an, eine Art Synkretismus” (282). Reich’s decision to transfer the phasing process, previously confined to tape machines, to live musicians prompts

43. Hanns-Werner Heister, “Vereinfachungen: Ritualismus und Minimalismus,” in *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1945–1975*, ed. Hanns-Werner Heister, 278–84 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2005), 278.

Heister to call the musicians “eine Art automatische Subjekte” (282). “Der Abschwung des innovativen Elans,” according to Heister’s general and negative conclusion, “ist sinnenfällig” (284). The subsequent phase of minimalism is treated in the next volume of the series, which deals with the period 1975–2000.

Edited by Helga de la Motte-Haber, *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1975–2000* (2000) deals with minimal music in a more fragmented way. The first chapter starts with a discussion of the term avant-garde by Reinhard Oehlschlägel. For Oehlschlägel, avant-garde is not a solid term. This vague term is the less serious half-brother of the terms “Fortschritt” and “Moderne,” and comes close to “Neue Musik.” Except for this last term, the relatives “Fortschritt,” “Moderne,” and “Avantgarde” are mostly avoided or used pejoratively since the mid-1970s. It was the Fluxus movement that, as early as the 1960s, rendered the “serielle und experimentelle Avantgardismus” inoperative.⁴⁴ The term avant-garde was radically challenged by more-or-less politically oriented groups of composers, performers, musicologists, and journalists. On the other hand, the term was restored by some as a political term. The application of the term thus shows considerable disagreement over its meaning, with some persisting on its use and others denouncing the term altogether. Discussing the American avant-garde, Oehlschlägel first touches upon Cage, Feldman, Christian Wolff, and Alvin Lucier, but soon turns to Young’s involvement in the Fluxus movement; a movement positioned as an “Ästhetik, die sich ihrerseits als etwas absolut Neues gegenüber der experimentellen und seriellen Komposition verstanden hat” (30). With his use of long tones and repetition, Young founded “eine radikale Spielart des Minimalismus und der meditativen Musik” (30). Oehlschlägel sees in this at least an “Ablösung älterer Konzepte durch ein neues,” if not a “heroisch-kämpferische Vorstellung von Modernität und Avantgardismus” (30). For Riley, Reich, and Glass, this meant an “Abkehr vom experimentellen und seriellen und—was oft vergessen wird—vom akademischen Komponieren, wie sie es an den Musikkonservatorien und Universitäten der USA im Studium erlebt

44. Reinhard Oehlschlägel, “Wandlungen der Avantgarde,” in *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1975–2000*, ed. Helga de la Motte-Haber, 23–47 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2000), 25.

hatten” (31). What follows is a discussion of the careers of these three composers and the manner in which their work has changed over the years, from which Oehlschlägel concludes: “La Monte Youngs und Terry Rileys Hinwendung zur altindischen Musik und Philip Glass’ jahrzehntelange Abwendung von nahezu jeder Art von Musik für den traditionellen Konzertgebrauch ... sind Antihaltungen, in denen die Abkehr von Avantgarde, Moderne und Neuer Musik nur ein Bestandteil unter mehreren ist” (32).

Unfortunately, Oehlschlägel does not mention any of the other ingredients.

In a later chapter, specifically in the paragraph subtitled “Minimal Music als frühe Form meditativer Musik,” Marion Saxer discusses minimal music as “eine frühe Form meditativer Musik ... die in der ersten Hälfte der 60er Jahre [enstand], deren Hauptvertreter La Monte Young, Terry Riley und Steve Reich ausdrücklich den spirituellen Charakter ihrer Werke betonen.”⁴⁵ Minimal music is not seen as identical to meditative music, however, because there are also minimal compositions without meditative intention and, vice-versa, not every meditative composition uses minimalist techniques. With Young, Saxer claims, the meditative tendencies of his artistic thinking are very clear. Young’s own comments on silent meditation and his reading haikus prove, to Saxer, the connection between his radically reduced art and an Oriental way of thinking. Saxer contends that the fact that Young ascribes spiritual qualities to just one parameter—that of pitch—is typical for a conception of meditative music. Young’s comments on the influence of slow sustained sounds of a train yard in his work show that there is a “Verschmelzung dieser orientalisches gefärbten Denkhaltung mit Motiven des Industriell-Technischen” (255). Young’s aesthetic was influenced by his experience with the works of Cage. Saxer points to the analogy between Young’s *Composition 1960 #3* (Fig. 3) and Cage’s *4’33”* (1952). For Young, repetition means control, and this sets

45. Marion Saxer, “Individuelle Mythologien und die Wahrheit des Materials: Meditative Musikformen,” in *Geschichte der Musik im 20. Jahrhundert: 1975–2000*, ed. Helga de la Motte-Haber, 247–80 (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2000), 254. The title of the paragraph, “Musicians of the Sacred,” is taken from a 1968 anthology subtitled *A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania* compiled by Jerome Rothenberg, mistakenly referred to by Saxer as a publication on minimal music.

him apart from Cage, according to Saxer. In general, Young's Dream House project, to which Saxer devotes a full paragraph, answers to the criteria for meditative music she sets out in her introduction.

Composition 1960 #3

Announce to the audience when the piece will begin and end if there is a limit on duration. It may be of any duration.

Then announce that everyone may do whatever he wishes for the duration of the composition.

Fig. 3 La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #3*, as printed in Wim Mertens, *Amerikaanse repetitieve muziek* (Bierbeek: Vergaelen, 1980), Ex. 6, p. 30

One of the general characteristics of meditative music is that it posits a critique of the aesthetics of autonomy (*Autonomieästhetik*), a critique that is exemplary for the radical aesthetic shifts in the 1950s and 1960s and meant that “dem musikalischen Material selbst ... eine sinnhafte Qualität zugesprochen [wurde]” (251). Saxer names several other features common to her concept of meditative music: reduction of complexity, repetitive techniques to incite trance-like, timeless states, distaste for expressivity, and distance from traditional institutions.⁴⁶ All these converge in the Dream House project, a project in which multimedia installations provide a theoretically everlasting sound and light environment. It was Young's intention, with these and other projects, to invoke a spiritual experience. Because of his evocation of the “universal principals” on which his music relies, there is “für subjective Ausdrucksmomente, ja, selbst für kompositorische Entscheidung kein Raum” (259). Riley and Reich, according to Saxer, show the same tendency for a meditative character in their music, though they did not participate in Young's “ausschließlichkeit, ... sondern gaben musikalisch-immanenten Erwägungen mehr Gewicht” (259). Reich's musical development, for example, shows many changes over the years, whereas Young did not considerably modify his approach. Reich, like Young, intends meditative effects and excludes subjective

46. Saxer, “Individuelle Mythologien,” 251–53.

compositional decisions in his phasing process works of the late 1960s and early 1970s, according to Saxer.

We find the same concern with meditation in Ulrich Dibelius's *Moderne Musik II, 1965–1985* (1988). Riley is discussed in a chapter called “Exotismus und Meditation” in which Stockhausen is the other protagonist; Reich and Glass, however, can be found in the chapter “Repetitives und Minimales.” The obvious Oriental connection between exoticism and meditation is in Riley's work conspicuous because of his involvement with Indian rāga practice. Dibelius names three points of view connected to the engagement with non-Western music: the social element of escapist diversion from societal structures and aversion to political engagement leading to isolation and subjectivity; on the opposite side, a psychological factor professing (anti-subjective) universal harmony; and, finally, a material component of reduction, “ein Hang, alle Komplexität wegzuschieben und sie in einer Art anti-intellektuellem Entschlackungsprozeß auf ihre elementaren Urphänomene zurückzuführen.”⁴⁷ The reduction of materials (long tones, repetitive rhythms) provides attractiveness without eschewing the “Rückfall ins Primitive und Banale” (83). These three tendencies have to be considered against the background of “Hippiekultur und Drogeneuphorie, Pop, psychedelische Experimente und aufkommender Sektenfanatismus” (83). Riley's *In C* is described as “ein wichtiges Initial” for the repetitive use of minimal material.

From this initial piece, supplemented by influences from pop and jazz musicians, American minimal music has developed. Dibelius explains the way Riley used the jazz practice of improvisation. In his discussion of Reich and Glass, Dibelius posits that the origin of minimal music has not so much to do with psychology (“verschwiegene Sehnsüchten nach ungefilterter Schönheit”) as it has with “die positivistische Orientierung an modellen von Reihenformeln, Zahlenketten oder Mengentheorien, wie sie durch das Aufkommen des Computer-Zeitalters zentrale Bedeutung und weitreichende Verbreitung

47. Ulrich Dibelius, *Moderne Musik II, 1965–1985*, Serie Piper 629 (München: Piper, 1988), 83. (Both *Moderne Musik I* and *II* were reprinted in a new revised and expanded edition entitled *Moderne Musik nach 1945* [Piper, 1998].)

erlangten” (175). Although “automatische Prozesse” are set up by the composer—Dibelius, it appears, addresses mostly Reich’s early music—the actual sounding results do elicit surprising moments that constitute the pleasure of listening to them. But these surprises constitute a lift off into irrationality. “Die Dämpfung des Gehörssins,” according to Dibelius, “erhöht noch jenen Irritationseffekt, den die Minimal Music mit ihren trancehaften Dauerviederholungen ohnehin verursacht” (176).

For Dibelius, one of the characteristics of minimal music is that,

immer wieder ... ein erheblicher Aufwand getrieben [wird], um neue Webmuster, sich verjüngende oder sanft drehende Schraffuren, sich zunehmend entstellende Spiegelbildreflexe oder kunstvoll verschachtelte Ornamente mit wanderndem Rapport zu erfinden, nur zu dem einen Zweck, die Monotonie des dauernd sich selbst umkreisenden Gleichen zu überlisten und zu verschleiern, also unkenntlich zu machen (179–80).

Thus, Dibelius sees a paradox in the fact that minimal music’s dogma of reduction is counterbalanced by the composers’ attempts to outwit the rigor of the underlying process: the minimalist dogma generates the problem that composers have to conceal. The desire for repetitive, stable processes is too strong for the minimalist composers to resist. “Da spielen außereuropäische Haltungen als Vorbild und eine antiwestliche Orientierung als amerikanischer Trend hinein” (180).

Dibelius then criticizes the intentionality behind the minimalist—actually only Reich’s in the late-1960s—dogma: that of perceiving the compositional process in the sounding result. Reich’s aphorism is not only countered by his own admission that there are still psycho-acoustical side-effects not accounted for in the composers’ decisions; Dibelius also sees an objection in the fact that the irrational aspects of the sounding result promote a passive rather than active stance: “Jede aktive Teilnahme verwandelt sich allmählich in eine passive, ... ein Erschlaffen der Konzentration, bis man sich ... vagen Stimmungen überläßt und Veränderungen erst begreift, wenn es schon zu spät ist, den Weg, auf dem sie zustande kamen, noch zu rekonstruieren” (184). This meditative quality is what connects the four minimalist composers—again these are Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass.

The five authors presented in this paragraph all have their own point of view. With the exception of Oehlschlägel, however, all of them agree that there is an anti-subjective strand in minimal music. All of the authors agree that there is a non-Western (meditative) aspect at work and, like in Taruskin's statement on factory standardization, this is combined with industrial factors. Saxer and Dibelius posit that the non-Western attitude of "universal harmony" was the instigator of the anti-subjective, meditative quality of minimal music. Dibelius adds that drugs and hippie culture have played an important role.

Oehlschlägel and Danuser discuss the terms "modern" and "avant-garde" with respect to minimal music. Although Oehlschlägel is reluctant to use the term avant-garde and prefers to speak of anti-attitudes, this term coincides more-or-less with what Danuser calls avant-garde. For Danuser the distinction is clear: modernism tries to extend the line of history; avant-garde denotes a break with tradition. That the term avant-garde is not that easily pinned down as in Danuser's use of it, is clear from Heister's discussion. Heister contends that minimal music represents an anti-avant-gardist attitude, because it developed against the current of the European avant-garde. The notions "avant-garde" and "tradition" appear to be highly contested terms with respect to discussions of minimal music.

2 *Minimal Music's Origins: Journalists, Visual Art, and American-ness*

In this chapter several less-scholarly attempts to describe minimal music are presented. Whereas in the preceding chapter the emphasis was on minimal music as “classical” music—avant-garde, modernist, anti-avant-garde, meditative, reactive, traditional, or anti-traditional—Mark Prendergast and Alex Ross pay attention to popular music.

Prendergast's *The Ambient Century* (2000) takes “the evolution of sound in the electronic age” as its object. He introduces minimalism by way of two 1973 concept albums: Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* with “an uncanny resemblance to the music of ... Glass,” and Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*, of which the “interlocking series of notes ... was originally blueprinted by ... Reich.”⁴⁸ Reich's essay “Music as a Gradual Process” serves as an explanation of minimalism, especially the way Reich “aligned Minimalist music with meditation, its ritualistic sense shifting music away from the subjective attention to an objective appreciation of its very existence” (92). The new direction minimalism offered has, according to Prendergast, to be seen in light of the importance of Schoenberg and his followers in the 1950s:

The academic world had adopted Serialism as the new ethos and many young musicians and composers simply did not agree. The times were changing and social and political forces were pushing music in another direction. ... It was one of the ironies of the twentieth century that without something so rigid and formalized as the music of the Second Viennese School, a new form like Minimalism would have had nothing to bounce off (92).

Prendergast names several influences that formed minimalism: Cage, Stockhausen, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane. He then quotes Jon Hassell, who posited that “The history of drugs in America is inextricably interlaced with early Minimalism. There was a need for a music that one could actually enjoy listening to

48. Mark J. Prendergast, *The Ambient Century: From Mahler to Trance—The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 91.

and that you could float away to.”⁴⁹ Another point Prendergast considers important, is the “very social nature of the music. No movement has had so much interaction and cross-pollination from all the main parties” (93). The most intriguing issue, however, is “the way the very music is a product of individual experience and invention,” which for Prendergast opens the way for the many separate discussions he offers of what he considers the important players in the field.⁵⁰ As for minimalism and popularity, he credits Eno’s ambient music with bringing minimalism in the mainstream, and he points to New Age music as a “general fallout from Minimalism and Ambient” (94).

The subtitle of the chapter discussing minimalism in *The Rest Is Noise* (2007) by Alex Ross, reads “Bob, Rock, and the Minimalists.” It is clear that Ross sees a link between these styles, especially clear when he states that “the history of minimalism can’t be written without a cursory look at postwar jazz.”⁵¹ In fact, Ross embeds his story in the notion that, in the (late) 1960s, “the wall separating classical music from neighboring genres appeared ready to crumble” (474). Although Riley, Reich, and Glass are called minimalists, Ross contends that “they are better understood as the continuation of a . . . development that dated back to the early years of the century” (474), with the activities of Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Feldman, and Young. Instead of being self-contained musical works, their music was “open-ended, potentially limitless; . . . a purely American art, free of modernist angst and inflected with pop optimism” (475). After an extensive discussion of the latter composer category’s works, Ross introduces the

49. Prendergast, *The Ambient Century*, 92–93. The quote comes from an interview with Hassell by Prendergast in *Sound on Sound* (July 1991), see <http://www.jonhassell.com/soundon.html> (accessed 14 July 2010).

50. Prendergast, *The Ambient Century*, 93. Those receiving separate treatment are Young, Riley, Reich, Eno, Glass, Harold Budd, Hassell, Michael Nyman, John Adams, Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, John Tavener, Pauline Oliveros and David Toop.

51. Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 476.

distinction between the “musical constructs” uptown and downtown composers.⁵² Named after the Upper West Side of New York City, uptown composers comprise those at “richly endowed institution” (490). Downtown composers are those that “descend from the free spirits ... on the West Coast [and] have tended to congregate in loft spaces, art galleries, and rock clubs below [New York City’s] Fourteenth Street” (490), complemented by those with the “downtown” aesthetic in the San Francisco Bay Area.

A discussion of the San Francisco Tape Music Center, where Riley’s *In C* was premiered in 1964, leads Ross to discuss minimalism in the short paragraph “West Coast Minimalism”: “Minimalism proper begins with La Monte Young, the master of the drone” (492). Discussing Young, Riley, and their music, Ross soon turns to Reich, who provides him the link to “New York Minimalism,” as Reich moved from California to New York in 1965. It was Reich who “cast off psychedelic trappings and made minimalism a rapid-fire urban discourse” (497). In Ross’s reading, Reich and Glass represent this New York school of minimalism. This “school” started off with Reich’s composition *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965; composed in San Francisco) and his establishing his own ensemble (later called Steve Reich and Musicians) since 1966. The ensemble “acted more like a jazz combo than a purebred classical ensemble,” and “the downtown New York arts scene embraced this new sound from the start” (503).

The link with visual art, however, is not a straightforward one. “Minimalist painting and sculpture remained arts of abstraction. Minimalist music, with its restoration of tonality, rejected abstraction and often came closer to the spirit of Pop Art” (503). And Glass is in this respect the most outspoken example in Ross’s view, to the point that “the Philip Glass Ensemble had the extrovert energy of a rock band [and] Glass ... vaulted to a level of popular recognition that no modern composer since Stravinsky had enjoyed” (504). With the expanded timeframes of pieces like Glass’s *Einstein on the Beach*, Reich’s

52. Ross, *The Rest Is Noise*, 491. Ross builds on Kyle Gann’s division in his collection of *Village Voice*-articles *Music Downtown* (2006). For a cursory introduction to Gann’s term, see the original of his *Wikipedia* entry “Downtown Music,” <http://www.kylegann.com/downtowndefined.html> (accessed 14 July 2010).

Drumming, and *Music for 18 Musicians*, “downtown music had entered a phase that might be called grand minimalism. Large-scale structures and modulatory schemes ascended toward moments of transcendence” (506). To end his story of bob, rock, and the minimalists, Ross invents the term “Rock ’n’ Roll Minimalism.” By this he means those popular artists who “carried the minimalist idea toward the mainstream” (508), of which Ross names only the Velvet Underground and Brian Eno, and mentions hip-hop. Citing Robert Fink’s *Repeating Ourselves* (2005), Ross ends his survey of minimalism with an ambiguous explanation of repetition. “Repetition is inherent in the science of sound: tones move through space in periodic waves. It is also inherent in the way the mind processes the outside world. So, in a sense, minimalism is a return to nature. At the same time, repetition underpins all technological existence” (511).

The focus on popular art forms in the books by these two authors serves as a counterpart to the textbooks discussed in the preceding chapter. Both authors contend that there is a mainstream side to minimal music. This status is reached by Eno’s ambient music, among others. Both are generally positive about the phenomenon “minimal music.” Prendergast stresses its social nature and Ross characterizes the composers as free spirits. Whereas the negative comments by, among others, Heister and Dibelius approach minimal music from a classical vantage point, Prendergast and Ross reach an opposing point of view by considering minimal music from a popular-music point of view.

2.1 Textbooks on Minimal Music and Concept Art

Similar positive approaches are reached by the two authors discussed in this paragraph. Both take visual “high” art as their vantage point and because of several parallels, minimal music is seen as equally “high” in pursuit. Both authors, therefore, attribute a pure, essential, or foundational quality to minimal music.

The two textbooks to be discussed contain a paragraph that discusses minimalism and its relation to concept art. These are Eric Salzman’s *Twentieth-Century Music* (1974) and David H. Cope’s *New Directions in Music* (1984). To the American composer Salzman concept art and minimalism are connected by way of their shared “need to return to the simplest, most basic elements ... already felt by Webern and the

serialists”⁵³—concept art’s reduction to concepts matching the reduction to structures in minimalism. Salzman continues by stating that “clearly, minimalism is a reaction to twentieth-century information overload, to the buzzing, blooming confusion” (186). He then discusses minimalism’s relation with “‘drug culture’” and its consciousness-expanding quality, and notes the analogy with non-Western music in that respect. A further connection between minimalism and concept art is “non-dualism.” He discusses precedents of such non-dualism: Cage and Zen Buddhism, the influence of non-Western music, and the music of Morton Feldman who “created the first minimal art, [insisting] on the essential ‘it-ness’ of the sound. There are no levels here, no meanings within meanings, no symbology; only the thing itself in its quintessential purity” (187–88). Non-dualism, Salzman claims, is present in the focus on minimal processes that minimal music demands, but also in the collectiveness of minimalism’s performance situations (Riley’s *In C*, Reich’s *Drumming*). He concludes, however, that minimalism, for all its appeal to collective performances, “remains an art of strong personalities, the last and most extreme form of the old modern-art notions of heroic individuality, alienation, and personal style” (189), locating minimalism in the modernist tradition.

In *New Directions in Music*, Cope states that “*minimal* and *concept music* are so closely related that separation becomes impossible.”⁵⁴ He first discusses Cage’s *4’33”* as analogous to minimalism in the plastic arts such as the canvases of Robert Rauschenberg. They are connected not only because of the sparseness of the concept, but also because the creative act is minimal. In these works “the act of the creator is minimal *and* conceptual.”⁵⁵ He further notes the maximal nature of many minimal music works,

53. Eric Salzman, *Twentieth-Century Music: An Introduction*, 2nd edn., Prentice-Hall History of Music Series (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 186.

54. David H. Cope, *New Directions in Music*, 4th edn. (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publishers, 1984), 309 (italics in original).

55. Cope, *New Directions*, 310 (italics in original).

noting the extremely expanded duration in such works as Young's *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* (1964) and its precedents, Satie's *Vexations* and *musique d'ameublement*. Cope states that "most minimal works ... contain drones and slowly overlapping ... projections: a minimum of material" (311). After describing several pieces with such features, he turns to a (retrospective) explanation of why minimal music came into being: "Many composers feel that the *avant-garde* as such is dead, and that the works of the 1960s point to a return to simplicity, a return to the foundations of sound itself," their works no longer achieving the "'shock' immediacy, ... nor the pretentious complexities of systems and scientific paraphernalia [employed by] more mainstream academic-based composers."⁵⁶ Steve Reich's early phase-shifting works are the most notable in this respect, according to Cope.

2.2 Minimal Music as American Music

Like in the narratives of composers Salzman and Cope, the link between minimalism and conceptualism is apparent in composer Kyle Gann's *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (1997). Gann states that "minimalism grew quietly from the premises of conceptualism: it wasn't very far from verbal instructions like 'make a sound until you no longer want to change it' to 'play a tape loop of a sound over and over.'"⁵⁷ As for the style's placement in history, Gann uses the framework proposed in Leonard B. Meyer's *Style and Music* (1989), through which styles can be seen to move from a simple "preclassic" stage, via a "classic" stage toward a decadent "mannerist" stage. The simplicity of minimalism can thus be seen as a preclassic phase that followed "an era of complex polyphony so saturated with musical meaning that further developments or elaboration seemed impossible."⁵⁸

56. Cope, *New Directions*, 312 (italics in original).

57. Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 185.

58. Gann, *American Music*, 185. Gann admits that "this is an *a posteriori* explanation" (185).

Thus, to Gann, the new aesthetic called minimalism originates in “an impulse to start over with the simplest of materials after a period of complexity” (186), and develops toward a classic phase that is represented by postminimalism and totalism. Gann is sympathetic towards the new simpler style, or at least not unsympathetic. He criticizes the historical ignorance of those rallying against minimalism (the inevitable new preclassic style, for Gann) for its overt simplicity. This uninformed stance is caused by The Gap between composers and audience. According to Gann, The Gap is the most central aspect of twentieth-century music. It ensures that a barrier is put up between a composer’s music and the audience. If the music is too readily comprehensible, it is not “authentically twentieth-century” (184). With respect to minimalism, The Gap thus runs neurotically counter to the historical inevitability of the style, explaining, according to Gann, “the controversy surrounding minimalism, the first musical movement in a hundred years that has threatened to close The Gap” (184).

The Gap is also prominent in Richard Crawford’s discussion of minimalism in *America’s Musical Life* (2001). Building on Gann’s take on minimalism and The Gap, Crawford discusses how The Gap has allowed composers to cut themselves off of concerns about listeners’ response. The Gap functions as a trench isolating and absolving composers from the necessity for their music to be heard by large audiences. Crawford links the closing of The Gap by, among others, minimalist composers to issues of American mass consumption. Those concerned with rapprochement to non-specialist audiences “were raised in America’s consumer culture and are unashamed to claim its interest in sound, popular expression, and technology for their own. [They] accepted the United States as a consumption-driven marketing mecca.”⁵⁹ Moving away from listening-as-perceiving toward listening-as-experience-of-sound, the Gap-closing minimalists employed “change on an expanded time scale” (836). This scale, according to Crawford, invites listeners to “spirituality, ritual, and . . . an expanding consciousness linked to drug use” (836). These three aspects are identifiable as 1960s countercultural traits with which minimal music shares

59. Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 836.

“common ground” (836). According to Crawford, the new possibility of closing The Gap—of popular and classical music to approach each other—was accommodated by three basic shifts. First, there was a “growing belief in present-day American aesthetic approaches” (824), so that American composers no longer felt the need to look at European developments for inspiration. Secondly, the emphasis shifted toward appreciation of actual musical sound. The third shift—already present in Crawford’s account above—was that the “resistance to popular music and marketplace values” (824) diminished.

The first edition (1965) of Wilfrid Mellers’s *Music in a New Found Land* does not refer to minimal music—the early date of its publication predating minimal music’s ascendancy. In his “Foreword to the 1987 Edition,” Mellers tried to remedy the absence of several developments in the earlier edition. Mellers assesses “‘minimal’ or ‘process’ musics” as having become “the most influential, if not necessarily significant, forces during the last twenty years.”⁶⁰ Oriental influences in Young’s and Riley’s work are noted and commented on as “an oriental abnegation of works.” “The objection to such negation is that,” Mellers contends,

although to reject European humanism may be understandable and even excusable, we do not, even if we’re West Coast Americans, belong to an ancient oriental culture but irremediably to Western traditions which, as European composers like Debussy and Messiaen have demonstrated, may be modified but not denied. Young’s and Riley’s wilfulness amounts to a prodigious exercise of will (xix–xx).

Reich’s “Africanism” is “less damaging” because his phase shifting processes for live musicians are “enlivening, calling for a high degree of skill” (xx). *Drumming*, for example, tends to “enhance rather than engulf ‘consciousness,’ ... mind, nerves and sense are activated as one becomes momentarily part of a ritual performance” (xx). Still there is a danger, according to Mellers, in that we do not know “what the ritual signifies in relation to our lives, act may degenerate into habit” (xx). Mellers proposes to see Reich’s

60. Wilfrid Mellers, *Music in a New Found Land: Themes and Developments in the History of American Music*, rev. edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), xix.

later works that incorporate melody instruments and text as deliberately moving away from such practices because of this “danger.”

This moving away of the earlier “abstraction” has upset some, but it has also won him a “vast new public [that] has discovered in a piece like *Tebillim* [1981] a substitute tribal pop music” (xx). Glass is credited as the most successful in effecting the “transition between Process and Pop” (xx). Mellers then introduces psychoanalysis. He posits that the distinction between ego, id, and libido (actually ego, id, and superego; libido being part of id) is important here, because submission to the libidinal impulses “is to deny part of our birthright. . . . We cannot be savages because we cannot extrapolate ourselves from history. The attempt to abolish history becomes ultimately slavery to it, for Freud was on the mark when he equated submission to the libido with the death instinct” (xxi). The death instinct is part of the id and opposes the life instinct. Whereas the life instinct communicates to the ego the essential needs for survival, the death instinct wants those needs to be fulfilled that do not have a survival function, in fact, as the opposite of the life instinct, it seeks regression into a womblike or even inorganic state. Glass’s success, in this light, should be seen as related to “this most fundamental negation” (xxi). Describing several of Glass’s operas, Mellers concludes that “although one is not against commercial success and popular appeal, one prefers it to be on behalf of life—as it is with Reich—rather than on behalf of death” (xxi). Mellers rounds off his story with a paradox between our consumer-driven world and the value of art works. “Pecuniarily, we value [aural] art in terms of . . . duration,” but when it comes to thought put into art works, it is not rewarded evenly, whereas “humanity needs more, not less thought . . . if it is to survive” (xxi–xxii). The implications of Glass’s music, therefore, are “alarming” (xxii).

Another book on American music that features a (brief) discussion of minimalism—or at least music “labeled ‘trance music’ and ‘minimal music’ by critics grappling to understand it”⁶¹—is Charles Hamm’s *Music in the New World* (1983). Although one would expect so from the title of his book, the comments on

61. Charles Hamm, *Music in the New World* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), 613.

minimal music do not include any reference to an American nature of the music. In Hamm's account, *In C* is called "probably the most widely performed avant-garde composition," and has the "effect of a slowly shifting mass of sound, repetitive and hypnotic" (612–13). He notes the significance of non-Western music in the works of the four minimalists, which is apparent, according to Hamm, in that their "patterns and gestures are repetitive, hypnotic, and meditative, rather than dynamic and linear" (613). He discusses Young's extended time pieces, Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* as "lengthy pieces out of a small amount of material," Reich's use of insistent repetition, and Glass who "brought this music to the attention of the largest public to date" (613), with the *Einstein on the Beach* performances at the Metropolitan Opera. To conclude my survey of this book, Hamm also brings the connection between minimalism and popular appeal to the fore, stating that "avant-garde composers Terry Riley and La Monte Young, and even ... Cage, found their audiences swelled with long-haired, drug-taking 'hippies,' the same people who would flock to rock concerts and festivals" (649–50).

The title of this paragraph is a little deceptive. Although the titles of the books discussed suggest that something would be said about minimal music's American-ness, only Crawford's pays attention to what he contends are specifically American aspects. Elaborating on Gann's Gap, he adds that American mass consumption combined with a growing belief in an American aesthetic contributed to the rise of minimal music. Both these authors, like the ones opening this chapter, are positive about the closing of The Gap: Gann from Meyer's meta-historical point of view that he embraces to justify the return to simplicity; Crawford from an identity point of view that justifies the emergence of minimal music because of geographical considerations. Hamm is less explicit about his preferences. Discussing the minimal music composers in a chapter called "The American Avant-Garde," it is at least clear that he approaches it as an art music form (which eventually attracted popular music fans). Mellers does the opposite. In search for a justification of his distaste for minimal music, he employs psychoanalysis.

3 *Specialists on Minimal Music*

The different perspectives by the various authors discussed in the preceding chapters inevitably also play a role in those books dealing (almost) exclusively with minimal music. Wim Mertens, though he later became a minimal music composer himself, concludes that “in repetitive music, repetition in the service of the death instinct prevails”—probably inspiring Mellers’s comments encountered in the previous chapter.⁶² Mertens’s book *American Minimal Music* (first published in Dutch in 1980) is divided in three parts. The first deals with the composers and their works and, as such, is quite informative. Introducing the composers and their works, Mertens briefly discusses the characteristics of minimal music. Although repetition is found in the Renaissance period, these early forms of repetition presume “a *linear memory* in the listener that forces him or her to follow the linear musical evolution [and] demands a learned, serious and concentrated, memory-dominated approach to listening.”⁶³ Repetition in minimal music, however, is non-narrative and a-teleological, and its static nature, for Mertens, dissolves the idea of time to the point that “a higher level of macro-time, beyond history, is reached” (92).

The two main characteristics of minimal music, to Mertens, are the replacement of the “work” concept by the notion of “process,” and the unity of form and content. The latter is brought about by the lack of logical causality (of tension between form and content and its final resolution) in minimal music, which causes sound to become autonomous. In traditional music, form is the superficial appearance, and is as such different from content, which is what a piece of music represents. Music consisting of processes, to

62. Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, with a preface by Michael Nyman, trans. J. Hautekiet (London: Kahn and Averill, 1983), 123 (italics in original). First published in Dutch as *Amerikaanse repetitieve muziek: In het perspectief van de Westeuropese muziek-evolutie*, with an introduction by Michael Nyman (Bierbeek: Vergaelen, 1980).

63. Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 17 (italics in original).

Mertens, unites the two because its content (that which is represented) is a process which is at the same time its form (that which is heard physically). The former (notion of process instead of work concept) is caused by the fact that the form of repetitive works no longer relates to an expressive content and their form is no longer a means of creating tension. “A work becomes a process when it relates only to itself” (89). (These two main characteristics are intertwined.)

Although he acknowledges several possible approaches (a focus on restorative features such as tonality and pulse, and a focus on the influence of non-Western music), Mertens deems these inappropriate. These aspects are merely symptoms of the influence exercised by the avant-garde since Schoenberg. Both the work-as-process and the unity of form and content are results of historical developments. “The real importance of repetitive music lies in the way in which it represents the most recent stage in the continuing evolution of music since Schoenberg” (87).

In the second part of his book, Mertens describes this evolution. Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique is the first development that eventually led to a break-down of dialectical principles. “The 12-tone technique brought about an equalisation of the musical content. ... In the 12-tone system form is completely determined but this determinacy is imposed externally and remains strictly outside the musical material, or as Adorno put it: ‘Music becomes the result of a process that determines the music without revealing itself’” (96–97). The next stage in this development was Webern’s music and that of post-serialism. (Mertens does not explain this term.) “With [the] total identification of form and material, post-serialism reached its highest degree of determinacy. ... A goal-directed approach is no longer feasible because all perspectives are legitimate. Thus it is no longer possible to reach the ultimate goal, i.e. the *work*.”⁶⁴ Stockhausen’s *Moment-form* finally destroyed the concept of self-contained works. With Cage’s aleatoric works, “the non-dialectical movement in 20th-century music reached its peak” (109).

64. Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 100 (italics in original).

Minimal music is, according to Mertens, an outgrowth of this non-dialectical development. Mertens reserves the third part of his book to describe the ideological implications of minimal music. This exploration leads him to Freud's theory of the unconscious. Freud posited an unconscious pleasure principle which denotes the hypothesis that pleasure is pursued and unpleasure is avoided (*Eros*). This principle, however, appeared inadequate to Freud when applied to post-traumatic dreams in which traumatic events are repeated. In such cases the repetition has nothing to do with wishfulfillment because unpleasure was unconsciously sought after (*Thanatos* or death instinct). Mertens concludes that,

in repetitive music, repetition in the service of the death instinct prevails. Repetition is not repetition of identical elements, so it is not reproduction, but the repetition of the identical in another guise. ... In repetitive music, repetition does not refer to eros and to the ego, but to the libido and to the death principle (123).

In *Repeating Ourselves* (2005), Robert Fink directly challenges Mertens's assumptions, noting the suddenness of his turn to Freudian psychoanalysis. Fink notes two reductive assumptions: that repetition "negate[s] teleological desire" and therefore is "antithetical to Eros" (Mertens: non-narrative and a-teleological) and that it is a sign of regression. Still, Fink employs the terms Eros and Thanatos as metaphors and divides his book into two parts: "The Culture of Eros" and "The Culture of Thanatos." The first pertains to "repetition [as] a technique of *desire creation*, as more-or-less elaborately structured repetitive entrainment of human subjects toward culturally adaptive goals and behaviors."⁶⁵ Instead of viewing minimal music as a-teleological, Fink proposes that a "recombinant teleology" is at work. These recombinant teleologies exhibit two features that set them apart from traditional teleology. The larger scale of many minimal music works invites critics to view it as a-teleological. But, Fink argues, in reality the recombinant teleologies "abandon the 'human scale' of classical musical teleology": the music changes too

65. Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 8 (italics in original).

slowly to notice because the recombinant teleologies “create musical universes in which tension and release are pursued on a scale that far outstrips the ability of the individual human subject to imagine a congruent bodily response” (44). This is what repetitive minimal music shares with disco and other popular electronic dance music. But, according to Fink, it is also part of a larger culture of repetition. Fink likens minimal music’s repetition to that of mid-century advertising strategies and their massive scale of desire creation through repetition. Both are part of a “culture of repetition.”

Listening to pulsed minimal music, hearing every repetition, is like having the experience not of any consumer, but of all consumers at once. *You* are the mass market, and you feel the entire pressure of the mass media’s power to construct desire ... directly on your consciousness. The impossible attempt to represent that pressure directly gives this music its teleology, its content.⁶⁶

The second part of Fink’s book “is devoted to a recuperation of Thanatos, to a sympathetic look at the use within industrial culture of ambient repetition as a form of homeostatic *mood regulation*.”⁶⁷ In this part, Fink discusses the seemingly endless stream of Baroque recordings. Put on record changers they provided a seemingly endless stream of baroque music. The “steady beat of the basso continuo” functioned as a kind of repetitive wallpaper music, suited to a “new kind of listening” (183). Fink concludes that “repetitive listening to eighteenth-century instrumental music in the 1950s and ’60s may well be the first documented instance of the widespread appropriation of ‘classical’ music for ambient self-regulation of mood—but it was certainly not the last. Soon a composed music would arise that incorporated repetitive listening, mood regulation, and ubiquitous subjectivity into its very structure” (206). Both minimal music and the Baroque revival belong to what Fink calls cultures of repetition. In his last chapter Fink explains Shinichi Suzuki’s teaching method. Fink argues that, instead of objectivity, this method provided “a discourse on group solidarity, on selflessness” (234).

66. Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 166 (italics in original).

67. Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 11 (italics in original).

Fink's argument is that minimal music should not be seen as an abstract music. The content is not the same as its form; minimal music is not just what it is; minimal music is not an empty art form standing outside the realm of larger culture. Rather, minimal music has its parallels in other parts of our culture. Fink discusses minimal music "not against the neutral background of the museum wall, but against the riotous backdrop of the supermarket cereal aisle and the color television set. ... [The] excess of repetition is inseparable from the colorful repetitive excess of postindustrial, mass-mediated consumer society" (x).

By doing so, Fink explicitly challenges more formalistic readings of minimal music that stress the abstractness of it. Edward Strickland's *Minimalism: Origins* (1993), for example, attempts to rescue minimal music from the widespread appropriation by mass-culture, lamenting that the "once-subversive style has been tamed by age and acceptance."⁶⁸ In Strickland's reading minimal art is highly reductive, non-representational, and aspires to "the status of autonomous objects" (14). Although minimal music is frequently thought to have come into existence in 1976 (*Einstein on the Beach*) or 1968 (release of a recording of Riley's *In C*), Strickland traces the origins to "Young's long-tone compositions, which directly inspired Riley and in which Young began to establish a climate in post-Cageian experimentalism within which later Minimalist developments could be taken at all seriously" (10). The second part of his book—that dealing with "Sound"—not surprisingly starts with a description of a performance of Young's String Trio (Fig. 1, p. 22 above); the austerity and reduction of the piece is rivaled only by Cage's *4'33"*. Strickland argues that without the American academic institutionalization of Serialism and its inaccessibility and opacity, minimal music would not have come into existence. "The spare figures of Minimal music would very likely not have emerged but from the intricate ground of academic Serialism" (120). The fact that Young's Trio is a twelve-tone piece, however, suggests that the break was far from sudden. "Serialism is generally much more ... complex, ... yet the principal of repetition is not only

68. Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1.

inherent in but fundamental to the concept of constructing the work from a single component, the tone-row” (126).

According to Ulli Götte, author of *Minimal Music: Geschichte—Ästhetik—Umfeld* (2000), Cage’s aleatoric music is much more important than serialism. “Der Umschlag serieller Strenge in postserielle Freiheit schuf ein Klima, in dem innovative, revolutionäre und traditionsentbundene Ideen wie die amerikanische Minimal Music erst gedeihen konnten.”⁶⁹ He argues that the emancipation of American music from European hegemony at the end of the 1950s should be seen as “die eigentliche Ursache für die Entfaltung gänzlich neuer musikalischer Ansätze” (9). The importance of Cage in this development is his insistence on “Entsubjektivierung” (18).

A similar concern with Cage’s importance is demonstrated by Keith Potter in his *Four Musical Minimalists* (2000). (His discussion of “American minimalist music” is confined to the music of Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass in the period before 1976—“the earlier, more truly minimalist” period.)⁷⁰ Potter even argues that “Cage’s early, pre-chance compositions seem proto-minimalist: in their composer’s search for a music based on rhythm and, more generally, lengths of time rather than pitch, for instance, and in their evident borrowing from non-Western musics equally concerned with timbre as well as the vitality of pulse-based methods” (4). Non-intention and avoidance of individual taste and memory, however, are the key “philosophical force” linking his music and minimal music.⁷¹ Three consequences can be noted: avoidance of conventional time-objects, avoidance of previous notions of personal expression, and a reconsideration of narrativity. Minimal art shares with minimal music the attempt to “eliminate not only conventional notions of expression but also referentiality,” leading to the “absence not

69. Götte, *Minimal Music*, 7.

70. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 16.

71. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 4.

only of conventional social symbology, but also of psychological symbology” (9). These traits, according to Potter, are what makes minimal music a modernist enterprise, offering “an American reaction to the serial models of modernism offered by European composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and by American serialists such as Milton Babbitt” (10). Still, connections between European modernism and minimal music can be made. All four of the composers discussed by Potter “owe clear debts to the Second Viennese School,” notably in the “rigorous application of processes independent, to a significant degree, of the composer’s note-to-note control” (11).

3.1 Minimal Music: An Anti-Avant-Gardist and Modernist Avant-Garde

Although Potter calls attention to several other important strands that we have encountered in the previous discussions—counterculture, downtown Manhattan, non-Western styles, jazz—it is the relation between minimal music and that of the Second Viennese School that is singled out in the second part of this thesis. Before turning to a case-study of Reich’s involvement in twelve-tone technique, it is interesting to note the different perspectives that came to the fore in the preceding pages. The authors discussed all exhibit different interests and their takes on minimal music differ accordingly. Robert Fink shows an interest in hermeneutics, providing parallels instead of cause-and-effect relationships. Similarly, Mertens champions a psychoanalytical approach, though he foregrounds the historical developments leading up to minimal music. Strickland’s heavily researched book provides a wealth of information, and like Potter, Götte, and most of the German authors discussed above, proposes a anti-subjective reading of minimal music, directly challenged by the “universal subjectivity” of Fink’s approach—an approach Taruskin is heavily indebted to. The terms “avant-garde,” “modern,” and “tradition” have passed multiple times, but there is no agreement at all about what these terms have to do with minimal music. For Danuser, Toop, and Taruskin, minimal music represents an avant-garde because it radically breaks with modernist concerns with tradition. Potter and Mertens extend the line of development started by the Second Viennese School to include minimal music, thereby stressing a modernist reading. Heister’s contention

that minimal music should be seen as an anti-avant-gardist movement suggests that the very application of these terms is highly debatable.

PART TWO MUSIC FOR STRING ORCHESTRA

What basis is there for an examination of Reich's earliest years? We know little more than the composer has so far chosen to tell us about either his life or work before he took a tape recorder down to Union Square in San Francisco near the end of 1964, when he was already just 28, and made the tape of Brother Walter preaching about the Flood that became the basis of *It's Gonna Rain*.

Keith Potter, "Steve Reich: Thoughts for His 50th-Birthday Year" (1986)

Music for String Orchestra was composed in 1961 while Reich studied at The Juilliard School of Music in New York. Reich was enrolled there in the Extension Division (nowadays called Evening Division) during the 1958–59 academic year, and he continued his studies at Juilliard in the Diploma Composition program of the following two academic years.⁷² Although he "studied composition with William Bergsma,"⁷³ Vincent Persichetti, who also taught at Juilliard, seems to have made a more lasting impression on Reich. In fact, Bergsma does not appear a single time in Reich's collection *Writings on Music* (2002) nor is he mentioned in interviews, whereas Reich refers to Persichetti as one of his "greatest composition teachers" and a "musician who can do everything."⁷⁴ (We will encounter another comment by Reich on Persichetti

The opening quotation is from Keith Potter, "Steve Reich: Thoughts for His 50th-Birthday Year," *Musical Times* 127, no. 1715 (1986): 15.

72. Jeni Dahmus, archivist at The Juilliard School, e-mail message to the author, 26 March 2010. There is some confusion about the date of enrollment: in his introduction to *Writings on Music, 1965–2000*, by Steve Reich, ed. with an introduction by Paul Hillier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8–9, Paul Hillier mentions Reich studying at Juilliard from the spring of 1959 to 1961. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 155, claims the period was 1958 to 1961.

73. Dahmus, e-mail message to the author.

74. First quote, Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 39. (The other teacher Reich mentions with respect to this quotation is Hall Overton, with

in the following.) Reich finished his *Music for String Orchestra* in May 1961 as his final composition at Juilliard. In September of the same year, he left for San Francisco where he took various jobs. He intended to study with Leon Kirchner (whom he considered a major exponent of “the great Bartók tradition”)⁷⁵ at Mills College in Oakland, California. When he heard that Kirchner had left Mills, he considered studying with Seymour Shifrin at Berkeley. At the beginning of 1962, he enrolled at Mills after all, because he had heard that Luciano Berio would succeed Kirchner.⁷⁶ Studying with Berio and Darius Milhaud at Mills, he eventually obtained his Master’s degree in Composition in 1963.

Reich developed a particularly negative stance toward his academic upbringing. The forced regime of twelve-tone and serial composition did not appeal to him. In various interviews Reich repeats a remark by Berio: “If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you write tonal music?” The visionary quality of this remark appears very important to Reich, given the mantra-like repetition in interviews over the years. At the same time, it should be noted that a degree of myth creation might be involved. Bérénice Reynaud, translator and editor of the 1981 French edition of Reich’s *Writings about Music* (1974), rightly observes that Berio’s comment is a “petite phrase trop belle pour être vraie.”⁷⁷ The following chapter will, therefore,

whom Reich studied privately between 1957 and 58. “They shared an ability to see what musical world *you*, the student, were inhabiting without superimposing *their* musical world” [39; italics in original].) Second quote, Andrew Ford, *Composer to Composer: Conversations about Contemporary Music* (London: Quartet, 1993), 65.

75. Reich as quoted in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 156.

76. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 157.

77. Bérénice Reynaud, “Préface: Steve Reich et la nouvelle musique américaine,” in *Écrits et Entretiens sur la musique (Writings about Music)*, by Steve Reich, trans. with a preface by Bérénice Reynaud, Collection Musique/Passé/Présent, 9–46 (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1981), 22. This being the second book in the series Musique/Passé/Présent, the first was a book by Boulez. In the introduction, Reich expresses his gratitude to him.

deal with interviews in which Reich has something to say about his early period. Although the amount of interviews dealing with his academic period is limited, those in which Reich does elaborate on it contain valuable information that serves as an introduction to the analysis of *Music for String Orchestra* in chapter 6.

“Je voudrais remercier tous ceux qui ont contribué à la parution de mes écrits en français: Bérénice Reynaud, ... Jean-Jacques Nattiez, ... Christian Bourgois, ... et Pierre Boulez qui l'a accueilli dans cette collection” (7).

4 *Steve Reich on the Use of Twelve Tone Technique*

Berio's question turns up in almost the same wordings in many interviews. The first I found is in an interview by Françoise Essellier, published in the winter of 1970–71.

[REICH:] La musique sérielle, pour moi et sans doute pour d'autres musiciens de ma génération, c'est quelque chose qu'il fallait apprendre pendant nos études. On apprenait à composer une fugue, et puis le contrepoint et puis ... un peu de musique à douze tons et un peu de musique sérielle. Mais je ne me suis jamais senti à mon aise là-dedans. Il me semblait que ça faisait partie des exercices académiques. ...

J'ai étudié avec Berio et il m'a enseigné quelques-unes des techniques sérielles. Mais j'avais une façon particulière d'écrire la musique à douze tons; je ne transposais jamais des lignes. Je n'étais pas très fort en modulation, je me trompais toujours, et ça me plaisait davantage de cette façon. On me prenait pour un parfait imbécile et je crois que dès qu'il s'agissait de modulations, je le devenais vraiment. Je me souviens qu'un jour Berio m'a dit: "Si vous voulez faire de la musique tonale, pourquoi n'en faites-vous pas?" Et je lui ai répondu: "Mais c'est bien que je fais..."⁷⁸

In a 1971 *New York Times* article anticipating the second major concert-hall programming of his music (in Boulez's New York Philharmonic Prospective Encounters series), Reich again commented on Berio's remark.

"Berio noticed that I was repeating this 12-tone row over and over and letting it evolve into a static thing, and he said to me one day, 'if you want to write tonal music, why don't you write tonal music?'

That was a helpful remark for me, because I saw I was doing what I intuitively wanted to do. As a child I'd listened to a lot of pop music, and in my teens to a lot of jazz—Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, George Shearing—music that I found extremely attractive but which was obviously and unabashedly tonal. That's what it was about. I remember, when I first went to Juilliard, feeling a distinct pull between the kind of

78. Steve Reich, "Steve Reich," interview by Françoise Essellier, trans. Nicole Tisserand, *VH 101*, no. 4 (1970–71): 92 (last ellipsis in original).

music offered me as a model—atonal, whether 12-tone or freely atonal—and on the other hand, music of let's say John Coltrane, music essentially built up of one or two chords. What moved me emotionally was always music built around one tonal center.” Reich adds that he has never been able to sense key differences or key movements over long stretches. “What turns me on, what I find a mental joy is rhythmic structure.”

Reich is not embarrassed at being fascinated with sound as sound, or at his obsession with repeating a few germinal, modular ideas again and again. Those are taboos of an earlier generation of composers, reared in the post-Webern tradition of succinctness, nonrepetition, and structures based on pitch relationships. He comes out of a counterrevolution that is questioning all those ideas severely. But he does believe in one point of the older revealed dogma: the artist's right and duty to control the materials and the performers.

All his music is fully written out, and in certain ways is as rigid and self-determining as any rulebook fugue.⁷⁹

It is not clear whether the interviewer, Donal Henahan, added the last paragraph based on his own observations or paraphrases Reich.

K. Robert Schwarz, author of *Minimalists*, includes this quote from Henahan's interview, introducing it with the following comment. “After examining Reich's string orchestra piece from Juilliard, with its unaltered repetitions of a twelve-tone row, Berio made a remark that may have been intended sarcastically, but that goaded Reich into action.”⁸⁰ Although Reich did not mention *Music for String Orchestra* explicitly in this interview nor in the other interviews surveyed in this chapter, Reich and Berio seem to have talked (extensively) about this piece, even though it was composed before his time at Mills. Their examination of *Music for String Orchestra* was probably part of the usual entry requirements of composition programs. The similarities between Reich's comments on his use of the twelve-tone row and his actual use of it in *Music*

79. Donal Henahan, “Reich? Philharmonic? Paradiddling?” *New York Times*, 24 October 1971.

80. Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 57.

for String Orchestra (as will become clear from my analysis of the piece below) seem to support this course of events.

Almost eight years after the *New York Times* interview, Reich gave another interview in which he explains his approach to twelve-tone music. Asked whether what he learned from Berio and Milhaud was still present in his current compositional practice, Reich replies the following.

When I was a music student with [Berio], and somewhat earlier at Juilliard, I wrote some 12-tone music, because I felt almost obliged to do that. It was the reigning mentality of the late 1950s and early 1960s. And I had to deal with the problem of making it sound something like what I would call music. Music to me always had a tonal center. I did not understand in my heart, or even in my mind, what atonal music was. I still to this day have very little taste for the music of Arnold Schoenberg or Alban Berg. I can appreciate some of Webern's pieces, but that's a very special corner of my musical taste. ... Nevertheless I had to write these pieces. So what I did with the 12-tone row was *not* transpose it, *not* invert it, *not* stick it in retrograde, but simply repeat it over and over again while dealing with the rhythmic sub-groupings. So Berio took a look at one of these pieces, and said to me, "If you want to write tonal music, why don't you write tonal music?" I paused for a moment, and said, "You're quite right, that's what I'm doing." It was nice to have outside feedback on it. Basically, from my teens until now, I have not diverged from that. At various times when I was a student I had to sneak it in the back door, because the idea of steady pulse and a tonal center, which seems like a given in music, actually was not a given in music when I was studying it. But I always felt it was central to me.⁸¹

Again we find Berio's statement as an important event in Reich's development. This time, Reich stresses tonality as a drive forward in his development as composer. The "back door" aspect is new here, and we will encounter several repetitions of this statement. First, however, I would like to introduce another interview, conducted by Dean Paul Suzuki in 1982 and published in his PhD dissertation of 1991. This

81. Steve Reich, "Steve Reich: New Directions in Composition," interview by Jim Aikin, *Contemporary Keyboard* 5 (June 1979): 19 (italics in original).

interview (again) features the Berio anecdote—“If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you write tonal music?” ... “That’s what I’m going to do.”—and, like in Schwarz’s comment above, Suzuki states that it was “after reading through *Music for String Orchestra*,” that Berio’s comment was made.⁸² The discussion of whether or not the Berio anecdote has to do with *Music for String Orchestra* will continue in a later section, as other authors make a similar claim.

In the same interview by Suzuki, Reich makes the interesting remark that his repetition of the same row ensured that he “could make music of it. Otherwise, it was just systematic noise” (432). And, in a longer quotation from the interview, he explains his attitude toward the twelve-tone row.

Basically what I did was regroup it. ... The first four notes are a chord. The next time around, the first three notes are a melodic fragment. The fourth [note] joins [the] next three. This was actually a kind of thinking that could happen right now [in 1982], so writing in the twelve-tone style actually was the beginning, in a sense, of the kind of thinking that I continued in my own music. There were no particular techniques that I could point to. The repetition of the row is not significant enough to say that’s the beginning of repetition. But, in fact, that’s how I dealt with it and the rhythmic regrouping is, in fact, something that I could see doing now with a limited gamut of tones (433).

Reich is quite ambiguous about the relation between his repeating the row and his later compositional development: “in a sense, it was actually the beginning,” but at the same time it was “not significant enough.” One wonders how something that is the actual beginning is not significant. Although it is not the primary focus of my thesis to prove or disprove the importance of *Music for String Orchestra* with respect to later developments—as my focus is on the piece itself with respect to minimal music’s relation to tradition—it is nevertheless striking to see Reich’s own ambiguity within such a short quotation.

82. Steve Reich, interview by Dean Paul Suzuki, 4 May 1982, in Dean Paul Suzuki, *Minimal Music: Its Evolution as Seen in the Works of Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and La Monte Young, and Its Relation to the Visual Arts* (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1991), 432–33.

In an interview conducted by Henning Lohner several years later, Reich repeats the “back door” aspect of his use of tonality in his twelve-tone compositions.

Berio was at Mills College. At that period of time everybody was writing twelve-tone and/or serial music, and I felt that for myself I couldn't invert the row, I couldn't retrograde the row, I couldn't even transpose the row. I wanted to merely *repeat* the row, in the hopes of sneaking in harmony by the back door, the way you might find in Anton Webern's *Orchestral Variations* [op. 30; 1940], his late piece, where the *constancy* of the intervals is such that you might feel that you were hearing a kind of “weird harmony.” And when Berio saw this repeated row, he said to me: “if you want to write tonal music, why don't you write tonal music?” and I said: “*yes*, that's what I'm trying to do”; I was trying to sneak it in, not for any intellectual reason, but because I couldn't make any sense out of twelve-tone or serial music, if I didn't repeat it over and over again so I could get some sense of harmonic constancy.⁸³

In a 1987 interview, Reich adds a twist to the story. He regards writing twelve-tone music, ironically, as the main reason for the direction his composing took after the experience.

When I was writing twelve-tone music, interestingly, the only way I could deal with it was not to transpose the row or invert the row or retrograde the row but to *repeat* the row over and over again, so I could *sneak* some harmony in there. At Mills, Berio would say to me, “If you want to write tonal music, go write tonal music.” The experience of writing twelve-tone music was an important and valuable one for me in that it showed me what I had to do—which was to stop writing it.⁸⁴

83. Steve Reich, “Steve Reich in Conversation with Henning Lohner, Stuttgart, 26.2.1986,” *Interface* 17, no. 2 (1988): 118 (italics in original). First published in German as “‘Musik ist immer ethnische Musik’: Ein Gespräch mit Steve Reich,” *NZ: Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 147, no. 10 (1986): 22–27.

84. Strickland, *American Composers*, 39 (italics in original). William Duckworth also cites the last remark and comments that it is ironic: “Ironically, it was because of Berio's class that Reich first learned how to turn his attention away from 12-tone music and toward tonality.” William Duckworth, *20/20: 20 New Sounds of the 20th Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1999), 110.

In this same interview, Reich also comments on serialism as a particularly European technique.

Schoenberg gives a very honest musical portrayal of his times. ... Stockhausen, Berio, and Boulez were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces of a bombed-out continent after World War II. But for some American in 1948 or 1958 or 1968—in the *real* context of tail fins, Chuck Berry, and millions of Burgers sold—to *pretend* that instead we're *really* going to have the dark-brown *Angst* of Vienna is a *lie*, a musical *lie*, and I think these people are musical liars.⁸⁵

In an interview conducted in 1991, Andrew Ford partly paraphrases Reich on twelve-tone music.

At Mills College, where [Reich] felt obliged to compose twelve-tone music, he refused to invert his rows in the accepted way, or to use their retrogrades or, for that matter, to transpose them.

“I would just repeat the row over and over. By doing this you can create a kind of static harmony not entirely dissimilar to the Webern orchestral Variations, which are very static and intervallically constant and which suggest this kind of world.”

Reich's back-door tonality quickly became a far more consciously rebellious act. Serialism, the composer reasoned, may have been a natural compositional method for people in the 1950s in Europe—it was a post-

85. Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 46 (italics and brackets in original). Now, more than twenty years later, Reich still insists on the context-shapes-identity assumption in almost exactly the same wordings. “Every music comes from a time and place. In the '60s, against a background of ‘Millions of Burgers Sold’ and tail fins, Elvis, Motown, and Coltrane, for [Americans] to pretend they're in the dark-brown angst of Vienna at the turn of the century—it just wasn't true.” Steve Reich, “Play It Again, Steve Reich,” interview by Jeff Kaliss, Artist Spotlight, *San Francisco Classical Voice*, 11 January 2010, <http://www.sfcv.org/events-calendar/artist-spotlight/play-it-again-steve-reich> (accessed 14 July 2010).

war response to 19th-century German romanticism—but it was a bizarre direction to take for Reich’s compatriots “who were raised on Chuck Berry.”⁸⁶

Again, Reich stresses the importance of Webern in his conception of static harmonies. The “Berio anecdote” is not mentioned here.

It resurfaces in a 1993 interview by Geoff Smith. Asked about his “skirmishes” with serialism, Reich replies:

From 1961 to 1963 I wrote that way. But I had to figure out a way to deal with it for myself, so I didn’t transpose, reverse or invert the row. I just repeated it, because by repeating it one could sneak a little weird harmony in the back door. You could divide up the first notes into four groups of three or three groups of four, and that kind of thinking paid off rhythmically later—the idea of twelve as a rhythmic number rather than a pitch number. When I did this, Berio said, “You want to write tonal music, write tonal music.” And I said, “That’s what I’m trying to do.” ...

... A lot of people at Mills College in the early 1960s were either interested in Boulez, Stockhausen and Berio, or very interested in John Cage. To tell you the truth, I was interested in neither, I respect Cage and I got to know him a little bit, but his most useful role for me was as a music that I could push against, no more or less than I pushed against twelve-tone technique.⁸⁷

86. Ford, *Composer to Composer*, 63. (It is not explained which kind of world Reich means.) Chuck Berry is mentioned here again. It is one of the musicians Reich refers to with respect to his American upbringing in several interviews conducted between 1987 and 1993. In a 1993 interview he commented the following on serialism. “It’s peculiarly un-American. ... The dark brown angst of Vienna rings so false here! You want to say to these [Americans], ‘Haven’t you heard of Chuck Berry? Who are you pretending to be?’” Richard B. Woodward, “Songs of a Wired ‘Cave,’” *New York Times*, 12 September 1993.

87. Geoff Smith and Nicola Walker Smith, *American Originals: Interviews with 25 Contemporary Composers* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), 213–14.

Here, Reich insists on his position as an isolated individual within the climate of the early 1960s and again voices his belief that his forays into twelve-tone composition taught him not to compose that way.

Repeating the Berio anecdote in 1995, Reich adds an explanation of why he did not like to compose twelve-tone music.

Als ich das Mills College besuchte und davor Juilliard, gab es *eine* Art Musik zu schreiben, und zwar die von Boulez, Stockhausen, Berio oder vielleicht von John Cage. All dies hatte eine Gemeinsamkeit, einmal gab es keinen regelmäßigen ... Rhythmus und zweitens gab es keine Harmonien in konventionellem Sinne. Und ich wurde Komponist, weil ich Strawinsky, Bach und den Jazz liebte. Doch das mußte ich als Student eher verbergen. Wenn ich damals Zwölftonmusik schrieb, transponierte ich die Reihe nicht, kehrte sie nicht um, ... ich wiederholte die Reihe, immer und immer wieder, weil das der einzige Weg war, der für mich musikalisch Sinn machte. Und als Berio dies sah, sagte er: Warum schreibst du nicht tonale Musik, wenn du tonale Musik schreiben willst. ... Doch wenn man damals Musik mit konventionellen Harmonien schrieb— das war ein Witz und wurde nicht einmal diskutiert.⁸⁸

The same attitude can be found in a 1996 interview by K. Robert Schwarz.

Je trouvais la technique de douze tons très intéressante mais peu motivante. ... Un jour, mon professeur, Luciano Berio, m'a dit: "Si vous voulez composer de la musique tonale, pourquoi n'en écrivez-vous pas?" A ce moment-là les encouragements venaient surtout de l'extérieur: j'avais quelques vieux 78 tours de musique africaine que j'écoutais et qui m'intriguaient. Autre source, la musique de John Coltrane qui était incroyablement riche, tout en ne reposant que sur très peu d'harmonies. Cette sorte de stabilité ... était dans l'air du temps. ... D'un côté il y avait cela et de l'autre Berio, en plus de mon attirance pour la musique populaire et pour les musiques ethniques. Il n'y avait personne à l'école à qui j'aurais pu poser des questions sur tout cela et qui puisse me conseiller. Je me sentais comme un poisson échoué sur la plage car, soit vous

88. Steve Reich, interview by Fabian R. Lovisa, Frankfurt am Main, 9 March 1995, in Fabian R. Lovisa, *Minimal-Music: Entwicklung, Komponisten, Werke* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 63 (italics in original).

suiviez Cage, soit vous suiviez Stockhausen, il n’y avait pas d’autre alternative. Ou alors vous étiez un martien, complètement hors du coup.⁸⁹

The reason Reich gives for his disavowal of the music of Cage and Stockhausen is that both do not rely on a pulse, a clear tonal center, or harmony. This is clearly part of his thinking since 1970 when Reich, in a short essay serving as program notes to concerts, predicted that the “pulse and the drone will re-emerge as basic sources of new music.”⁹⁰ (Reprinted in Reich’s *Writings about Music* (1974), the “drone” was replaced by the “concept of clear tonal center.”) In several interviews, Reich comments on the lack of pulse in serial and other music during his academic years, always amounting to essentially the same point of view. In another 1996 interview, for example, he states,

In the academic world that I studied in from 1957 to 1963, the prevailing works of that time, written by Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, and Cage, were nonpulsatile—there was no regular beat. There was a

89. Steve Reich and John Corigliano, “Dialogue à Manhattan: Les Enjeux de la nouvelle musique américaine par deux grands compositeurs d’aujourd’hui; John Corigliano et Steve Reich,” interview by K. Robert Schwarz, *Diapason*, no. 436 (1997): 28. Originally published in English (unfortunately unavailable to me) as “Outside It’s America: Composers John Corigliano and Steve Reich Trace the Nation’s Musical Landscape,” *Classical Pulse!* no. 18 (1996). Part of the above quotation is cited from the original in David J. Hoek’s *Steve Reich: A Bio-Bibliography*, *Bio-Bibliographies in Music* 89 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002): “I felt that 12-tone technique was very interesting. ... One day my teacher Luciano Berio looked at my work and said: ‘If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you write tonal music?’ ... You either went like Cage or you went like Stockhausen and there was nothing else” (3).

90. Steve Reich, “Some Optimistic Predictions (1970) about the Future of Music,” written in April 1970, used as program notes to concerts since 1970. The first I found is The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Presents An Evening of Music by Steve Reich, 7 and 8 May 1970. Repr. in Reich, *Writings about Music*, 28.

simultaneous move to have no sense of key, cadence, or resting point in the music. I had come from Bach, Stravinsky, and jazz, ... all of which shared a very clear, demarcated pulse.⁹¹

Although we have thus far seen comments on and by his Mills College teacher Berio, *Music for String Orchestra* was actually written earlier when Reich studied composition at Juilliard with Bergsma and Persichetti. One rarely finds comments by Reich on this period. He does, however, comment on it in a lengthy interview by Mark Alburger (in which the Berio-anecdote is also present).

Basically when I was at Juilliard what I was doing was small imitations of Bartók Quartets 3, 4, and 5 (I learned the arch form from Bartók) and early Webern (like the string quartet pieces). I remember going into Vincent Persichetti, who was a great teacher, and saying, “Mr. Persichetti, I’m writing music I know is harmonic, but I can’t put in the numbers. Could you help me?” And he could. He was wonderful. He said, “Well, you can’t put in the numbers, but you can put in several possible numbers!” ...

[When I studied at Mills College] serial music was dominating the concert world. You had to have an opinion, you had to have knowledge, you had to take a stand. And I’m glad that I studied it, but it wasn’t me. Nevertheless, it was good to be right there at ground zero with Luciano Berio. ...

... I had my way of dealing with the twelve-tone row, which is: don’t invert it, don’t retrograde it, don’t transpose it—repeat it! And you’ll sneak some harmony in the back door. And he saw that, and he said: “If you want to be tonal, be tonal.” And I said, “That’s what I’m trying to do.” ... He’s a great composer and I have enormous respect for him.⁹²

91. Steve Reich, “Interview with Steve Reich,” by Jonathan Cott, liner notes for *Steve Reich: Works, 1965–1995* (various artists), Nonesuch 10 CDs 7599-79451-2 (1997), 26. For an additional example, see Steve Reich, “‘Sergeant Pepper klopfte an die Tür’: Der Komponist Steve Reich über Pop und Klassik, Kunst-Skandale und seine neue Video-Oper ‘Hindenburg,’” interview by Thomas Mießgang, *Die Zeit*, 31 October 1997.

92. Steve Reich, “A Conversation with Steve Reich,” by Mark Alburger, *20th-Century Music* 4, no. 12 (1997): 12. Reich repeated the importance of Persichetti in a 1999 interview. “Persichetti ... had the gift of being able to see

In 2002, Reich again voiced his isolated position in the academic world of the early 1960s and the lack of pulses and tonal centers he had to endure.

I was studying with Berio and writing 12-tone music. The way I wrote 12-tone music was like, “Don’t transpose the row. Don’t retrograde the row. Don’t invert the row. Just repeat the row over and over, and you can try to sneak in some harmony.” And Berio said, “If you want to write tonal music, why don’t you write tonal music?” And I said, “That’s what I’m trying to do.” ...

It was a very, very difficult period because, basically, the people that I was going to graduate school with were either very interested in European Serial Music or in John Cage—or in both. And, honestly, I was involved in neither. ... There was no fixed pulse, there was nothing you could tap your foot to, there was nothing you could whistle to, there was no key to hang on to; it was the very antithesis of that. So people who didn’t write that way at that time were simply a joke.⁹³

what people needed at a particular time. I was interested in free atonal music ... but I couldn’t analyse the harmonies, and Persichetti was very helpful in pointing out what they were. Steve Reich, “Steve Reich: The Father of ‘DJ Culture,’” interview by Adrián Pertout, *Mixdown*, no. 62 (1999), <http://www.pertout.com>, articles section, Steve Reich (accessed 14 July 2010).

93. Steve Reich, “An Interview with Steve Reich,” by Gabrielle Zuckerman, *American Mavericks*, American Public Media, 10 July 2002, http://musicmavericks.publicradio.org/features/interview_reich.html (accessed 14 July 2010). In an interview conducted in 2005, Reich repeats his isolation in even stronger terms. “When I was a student in the late 50s and early 60s the Western musical world, the academic world in particular, was *consumed* with Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio in Europe and John Cage, etc. in America. Everything else was considered an *absolute and total irrelevance!* ... So I was in this kind of extreme minority of people who really could admire musicians like that, but had no use for that music.” Steve Reich, “Appendix B: Interview with Steve Reich; Excerpts,” by Daniel Mark Tones, in Daniel Mark Tones, *Elements of Ewe Music in the Music of Steve Reich* (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2007), 120 (*italics in original*).

A last interview that deserves to be mentioned is one conducted in 2009. For the first time Reich speaks about Webern's influence in more formal terms.

Als ich während der fünfziger Jahre an der Juilliard School of Music in New York studierte, war ich ... sehr an Anton Webern interessiert, besonders an seinen "Orchestervariationen" und seinem ständigen Gebrauch von großen Septimen und kleinen Terzen, die immer wieder wiederholt werden, so dass eine konstante Harmonik entsteht. Diese Musik ist von meiner natürlich völlig verschieden. Aber das Denken ist doch irgendwie ähnlich, auch die öffnende Wirkung, die von Weberns Schaffen ausging, der gezeigt hat: "anything is possible."⁹⁴

In the interviews that have passed in this chapter, Reich makes several interesting comments on his period as a student. His discomfort with the music of Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio on the one hand, and Cage and his circle on the other are clearly part of his hindsight assessment of this period of his life. Of the Second Viennese School, Webern seems to have attracted him the most. The constancy of intervals, especially in his *Variationen für Orchester* seems to have been the driving force behind Reich's interest in this composer. Although, at surface level, *Music for String Orchestra* and *Variationen* have little in common apart from twelve-tone technique, some interesting parallels can be found. These will figure in my analysis of the piece in chapter 6. In general, however, Reich mostly voices his discomfort with serial and twelve-tone music. The next chapter will focus mainly on the oft-repeated Berio-anecdote and how it has been interpreted by different authors in light of this discomfort with the academic world surrounding him at that time.

94. Steve Reich, "Empfangsbereite Antennen: Der Pionier der Minimal Music Steve Reich im Gespräch," by Rainer Nonnenmann, trans. not specified, *Musiktexte*, no. 121 (2009): 85.

5 *The Berio-Anecdote and Other Stories*

Of the few books dealing with minimalism, even fewer mention or discuss *Music for String Orchestra*. Wim Mertens's *Amerikaanse repetitieve muziek* (1980), for example, does not feature any piece before *The Plastic Haircut* (1963). And even that is an early piece to be included compared to other discussions of Reich's music, which mostly start off discussing *It's Gonna Rain*. Michael Nyman's *Experimental Music* (1974) omits, for instance, *The Plastic Haircut* and starts with the phasing processes of *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*.⁹⁵ Another author even boldly states that "the story of the composer Steve Reich began one day in 1964," when Reich recorded the tape he used for *It's Gonna Rain*.⁹⁶ The reason why the earlier piece *The Plastic Haircut* does feature in discussions of Reich's music is quite obvious, as it is (generally seen as) the first tape composition by Reich. *The Plastic Haircut* is the soundtrack of the film of the same name by William T. Wiley (with whom Reich would later cooperate on the event *Over Evident Falls* [1968]) and R. G. Davis (of the San Francisco Mime Troupe for which Reich composed several other pieces). (The piece remains rather obscure in literature, but a version of the film is available on the Internet since 2009.)⁹⁷ Because *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* (1966) are both also tape pieces and count as the first major works by Reich, the inclusion of *The Plastic Haircut* in surveys of his compositional career generally serves as a chronological precursor of his use of tape. An actual analysis of this piece, however, has not been published.⁹⁸

95. Nyman, *Experimental Music*, 131.

96. Enzo Restagno, "Steve Reich: A Mediator of Our Time," trans. David Babcock, liner notes for *Steve Reich: City Life / Sextet / Vermont Counterpoint / Clapping Music* (Contempoartensemble / Mauro Ceccanti), Arts Music CD 47624.2 (2002), unpaginated.

97. <http://www.artbabble.org/video/plastic-haircut> (accessed 14 July 2010).

98. Half a page on the piece is included in Suzuki, *Minimal Music*, 444, and some thoughts on it can be found in Sumanth Gopinath, *Contraband Children: The Politics of Race and Liberation in the Music of Steve Reich, 1965–1966* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2005), 29.

Those books that do deal with *Music for String Orchestra*, or at least Reich's academic period, are Edward Strickland's *Minimalism: Origins* (1993), K. Robert Schwarz's *Minimalists* (1996), and Keith Potter's *Four Musical Minimalists* (2000)—of which only the last mentions the title of the piece. I will discuss them below, interspersed with those few articles dealing with the piece and/or with the Berio anecdote (the first of which is Michael Nyman's "S R—Mysteries of the Phase" [1972]). First, however, I would like to introduce a comment by Georg Sachse. In his 2004 book about Reich's vocal works, he briefly comments on the Berio anecdote, stating that it appears to have been "eine Art Initialzündung" for Reich.⁹⁹ He continues—in a footnote stating that Berio's remark concerns *Music for String Orchestra*—by offering three quotations of interviews (by Henahan, Strickland, and Smith; all of which are included in the previous chapter), and four examples from secondary literature (Gottwald, Strickland and two contributions by Schwarz; discussed in the following). Sachse ends this list with the comment that it is "durchaus amüsant ... wie diese Anekdote von den jeweiligen Autoren je nach Intention interpretiert wird: von 'resigniertem Ausruf' bis hin zu 'befreiendem Rat'" (42n19). Of course, I will not refrain from considering these "entertaining" comments in the following discussion.

A 1972 article on Steve Reich's music by Michael Nyman offers the earliest comment I found on the Berio anecdote. Nyman states that this remark "helped [Reich] to realize that a perfectly valid music could be formed out of the language of what had appealed to him in his youth—pop and jazz, the two-chord riffs of John Coltrane."¹⁰⁰ Thus, Nyman clearly sees the remark as a confirmative and positive influence—the "befreiender Rat" we encountered in Sachse's comment. Berio removed the shackles of twelve-tone and serial techniques and allowed Reich to be free.

99. Georg Sachse, *Sprechmelodien, Mischklänge, Atemzüge: Phonetische Aspekte im Vokalwerk Steve Reichs*, Kölner Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft 2 (Kassel: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 2004), 42.

100. Michael Nyman, "S R—Mysteries of the Phase," *Music and Musicians* 20, no. 6 (1972): 20.

The contrasting interpretation mentioned by Sachse—the “resignierte Ausruf”—can be found, literally, in Clytus Gottwald’s discussion of Reich’s music (“Signale zwischen Exotik und Industrie” [1975]). As the title of his article suggests, Gottwald is quite alarmed by Reich’s music. He contends that Reich participates in the neurosis of the mechanical age by composing industrial or assembly-line music (*Industriemusik* or *Fließbandmusik*). The aspects that lead Gottwald to such negative comments are quite obvious: the use of patterns and processes, the submission to these by the performers, as well as the multiple mallet instruments being played by multiple performers with multiple sticks at the same time and the amplification by microphones.¹⁰¹ Almost a decade prior to Gottwald’s description, Reich’s music had already been characterized as mechanical, albeit in a more positive sense. In a 1966 article, Carman Moore reviews The Park Place Gallery Presents Three Concerts of Tape Music by Steve Reich, featuring *Music for Piano and Tape* (a version of *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano + Tape*), *It’s Gonna Rain*, *Come Out*, and *Melodica*. Focusing especially on *Come Out*, Moore states that “elements such as rock and roll and the fan belts of large machines are of our time and in a sense validate and clarify Mr. Reich’s strident, reiterative work.”¹⁰² Comparing Gottwald’s and Moore’s statements, it becomes clear that both approach the same issue from opposite angles. Where Gottwald employs industrial metaphors to devalue Reich’s music, Moore’s approach instead uses mechanical connotations as validation and clarification. This illustrates that, as noted by Sachse, Gottwald’s intention is to devalue Reich’s music.

Apart from the assembly-line metaphor, Gottwald also signals a lack of traditional (European) concerns, which he explains by stating that the geographical distance between San Francisco and Europe is as large as that between San Francisco and Asia (mistakenly taking San Francisco as the place where

101. For a longer discussion of Gottwald’s “quasi-Adornian” dismissal and Reich’s response to that in a later issue of the same journal, see Lovisa, *Minimal-Music*, 83–87.

102. Carman Moore, “Park Place Electronics,” review of Three Concerts of Tape Music by Steve Reich, Park Place Gallery, New York, 27–29 May 1966, *The Village Voice*, 9 June 1966.

Reich grew up).¹⁰³ Not surprisingly, Gottwald twists the story of Berio and Reich a bit with the following claim. “Es wird berichtet, daß Steve Reich während seines Studiums bei Luciano Berio gelegentlich mit seinem Lehrer in Konflikt geriet.”¹⁰⁴ And this is followed by the “resignierte Ausruf” under scrutiny. As we have seen, however, Reich has never talked about a hostile confrontation with his teacher. He considers Berio a “wunderbarer Komponist und netter Kerl” from whom he “learned a great deal.”¹⁰⁵

Still, we can find similar comments on the anecdote in an article by K. Robert Schwarz. Schwarz was one of the first scholars to focus on Reich’s music. After having written his Master’s thesis on Reich’s music,¹⁰⁶ he published two articles (in 1980 and 1981), both called “Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process.” Eighty pages in all, these articles form the first attempt at a biography and a systematic description of Reich’s career. Only the first of these articles is relevant here. In it, Schwarz states that Reich’s “early Juilliard works were in the conventional free atonal idiom of the time.”¹⁰⁷ While studying at

103. Gottwald adds the following witty comment. “Natürlich kennt man Herrn Mozart—allerdings trägt er nicht die Vornamen Dabljuh-E und ist kein Komponist, sondern der größte Volkswagen-Händler von San Francisco.” Clytus Gottwald, “Signale zwischen Exotik und Industrie: Steve Reich auf der Suche nach einer neuen Identität von Klang und Struktur,” *Melos/NZ*, no. 1 (1975): 3. Reich lived in San Francisco from 1961 to 1965.

104. Gottwald, “Signale,” 4. Gottwald does not provide any indication whatsoever of who reported this.

105. First quote from Steve Reich, “Mittelalter—Afrika—Bali,” interview by Ralf Dorschel, *Opernwelt*, no. 5 (May 1995): 33. Second quote from Steve Reich, “Avoiding Boxes: An Interview with Steve Reich,” by Allan Vorda, *Cum Notis Variorum*, no. 131 (1989): 16. I deliberately added these quotations to refute Gottwald’s claim, although, to be fair, Reich’s relation to Berio is not that clear. Edward Strickland claims the opposite: “Reich seems not to have found [Berio] particularly inspiring as a teacher.” Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 183.

106. Referred to by Reynaud, “Préface,” 45n6.

107. K. Robert Schwarz, “Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, Part 1,” *Perspectives of New Music* 19, nos. 1–2 (1980–81): 383.

Mills, “conflicts arose between Reich’s love for tonality and steady rhythmic pulse on the one hand, and the need to write in the accepted serial idiom on the other” (383). Schwarz then mentions the Berio anecdote (quoting Henahan’s article) and adds that twelve-tone technique was important to Reich, because it taught him to respect a “systematic, rigorous approach to composition.”¹⁰⁸

Keith Potter, from whom I drew the opening quotation of this part of my thesis, briefly summarizes Reich’s early academic period, but does not present new facts. The only notes to his description refer to Schwarz’s article and Reich’s comments in Henahan’s interview. Potter has, however, some reservation as to Schwarz’s and Reich’s comments. He observes that,

implied, though far from clearly stated, in what Reich has so far said about his work of these years and how it is interpreted, is a sort of progression ... from ‘the conventional atonal idiom of the time’ to music that slowly became more tonal, even though at least some, perhaps all, of the scores from the Mills period were still serially based. While far from entirely sympathetic, it would appear, Berio at least realized where Reich’s strength lay.¹⁰⁹

As the reader might by now expect, what follows is the Berio anecdote. The value of Potter’s comments lies in the fact that he questions the historical narrative that traces Reich’s use of tonal centers back all the way to his atonal music, or, conversely, that Reich progressed from atonality to tonality in a steady climb. Potter rightly has his doubts as to the validity of this view. It is an unfortunate fact that a description of a composer’s early career is bound to be based, for the most part, on what “the composer has so far chosen to tell us.”¹¹⁰ Reich’s biography is a point in case. Those biographies and surveys written after Reich’s

108. Reich in Schwarz, “Music as a Gradual Process,” 383. Schwarz took this quote from an interview with Reich in *EAM Accents* (Spring–Summer 1980).

109. Keith Potter, “Thoughts for His 50th-Birthday,” 15–16. As the reader might have noticed, Potter quotes from Schwarz’s 1980–81 article.

110. Potter, “Thoughts for His 50th-Birthday,” 15.

Different Trains (1988) almost invariably start with a description of his coast-to-coast train trips between 1939 and 1942—the occasion which lead to this composition (as Reich is willing to tell in interviews and liner notes).¹¹¹

It is hard—if not impossible—to fashion a comprehensive story from what the composer has chosen to tell us. Considering those sources based on the composer’s chosen revelations further complicates the matter. Taking those at face value would be a mistake. After all, they are secondary sources and their reliability should be questioned. The section on Steve Reich’s early years in Dean Paul Suzuki’s 1991 dissertation, for example, is mostly based on a 1982 interview, from which I have quoted the most important parts in the previous chapter. At that point I also introduced Suzuki’s claim that Berio’s remark concerned *Music for String Orchestra* (to which I should add that Suzuki refrains from interpreting Berio’s intention). As a matter of fact, this is the first of only a few publications I found that mention this piece explicitly. Still, it is not clear whether Reich has “chosen to tell” Suzuki that the Berio anecdote has to do with this piece. Possibly, Suzuki connected the bits and pieces and furnished this link. At present—almost twenty years after he wrote his dissertation—Suzuki seems not to back up his own claim: “As I recall, Reich never told me precisely when Berio made the statement.”¹¹² Thus, we are not on solid ground when taking secondary claims as being true. Yet, I will continue the present survey—first by presenting several other comments by Suzuki. Like Schwarz—in “Music as a Gradual Process”—Suzuki informs us that Reich composed in a “freely atonal style” at Juilliard.¹¹³ Subsequently, Suzuki tells the story of Persichetti and the quest for tonality. I found only one other version of this story, namely, in the 1997 interview by Alburger (presented in the previous chapter), in which Reich tells the interviewer that Persichetti helped

111. For examples, see Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 153; Hoek, *A Bio-Bibliography*, 1; Hillier, introduction to *Writings on Music*, 7; and Griffiths, “Reich, Steve,” 21:124.

112. Dean Paul Suzuki, e-mail message to the author, 22 May 2010.

113. Suzuki, *Minimal Music*, 431.

him clarify which harmonies (“numbers”) Reich used in the pieces he composed at Juilliard. Suzuki’s version is somewhat different. Although not acknowledged as such, this version is probably based on Suzuki’s interview with Reich. Suzuki states that Reich became frustrated with atonality. Always having been attracted to tonal music, he “went to Persichetti and began to analyze the music of Webern and Schoenberg. They found tonal references in some of their music” (432). Thus, whereas in the Alburger interview Reich claimed that Persichetti helped him analyze his own pieces, Suzuki claims they analyzed Schoenberg and Webern. This is yet another example of the difficulties involved in creating a comprehensive account out of fractured and sometimes contradictory fragments.

One of the most obvious obstacles in interpreting secondary sources is the lack of references. This is the case in Suzuki’s claims that are seemingly—though not at all certainly—based on what Reich had chosen to tell him. The same is the case in Strickland’s book *Minimalism: Origins* (1993). Heavily researched, it presents the origins of minimalism in three sections: “Paint,” “Sound,” and “Space.” We have already encountered Strickland’s book in the first part of this thesis and, in the previous chapter, his interview with Reich (published in his *American Composers*) was discussed. In this interview nothing points toward Berio viewing *Music for String Orchestra* and then posing his question. In *Minimalism: Origins*, however, Strickland suddenly claims that “on viewing Reich’s ostensibly twelve-tone string orchestra piece,” Berio responded with his *petite phrase*.¹¹⁴ In Strickland’s reading, Berio’s comment was simply a suggestion—no hostilities here—and served as a valuable influence to Reich. Strickland also presents an interesting account of Reich’s Juilliard period (but does not mention his sources). He reports the following.

[Reich] wrote some simple pieces for string quartet and a small orchestral piece and at the end of his studies began his first twelve-tone piece. This was inspired by Stockhausen’s lecture at Columbia University espousing Serialism as the music of the future. It was a brief (three or four minutes) piece for string

114. Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 183.

orchestra, in which Reich used the tone-row but, more significantly, generated his piece not by inversion, retrograde, or transposition but repetition of the row (182).

We cannot but assume that Strickland based this description on an interview he conducted with Reich, although it is certainly not the one published in his *American Composers*. As far as I know, for example, Stockhausen's lecture is nowhere mentioned but in a 1994 interview by Enzo Restagno, where it reads: "Around that time [the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s], Stockhausen gave a lecture at Columbia University and they thought the devil had come to town. In those days, Elliott Carter was still regarded by some Juilliard faculty as part of the lunatic fringe, but I was interested in Carter's use of metric modulation."¹¹⁵ (Reich did, however, state in an earlier interview that he has "met Stockhausen, but his music is probably influenced more by me than mine by him,"¹¹⁶ but no lecture is present there.) Assuming he did attend a lecture by Stockhausen, it must have been one of Stockhausen's American lectures in 1958, although this is an early date if it inspired Reich's use of twelve-tone technique in a 1961 piece. "New Developments in Instrumental and Electronic Music" was delivered at Columbia University on 3

115. Original English typescript of Enzo Restagno's 1994 interview as quoted in Hillier, introduction to *Writings on Music*, 9. The interview was published as part of the Italian edition of Reich's *Writings about Music*, where it appears somewhat differently. "Fino alla fine degli anni Cinquanta e nei primissimi anni Sessanta io ero soltanto uno studente. ... Conoscevo la musica di Cage, di Berio, di Boulez, e di Stockhausen, che proprio in quegli anni venne a tenere una conferenza alla Columbia University. Di Elliott Carter posso dirle che in quegli anni era ancora considerato un francese lunatico, e di lui mi interessava quella tecnica della 'modulazione metrica' che credo sia il suo contributo principale alla musica del nostro tempo." Steve Reich, "Un'autobiografia dell'autore raccontata da Enzo Restagno," interview by Enzo Restagno, in Steve Reich, *Reich*, ed. with an essay on "La svolta americana" by Enzo Restagno, 55–114 (Turin: EDT, 1994), 66.

116. Steve Reich, "Avoiding Boxes," 16.

November 1958.¹¹⁷ In this lecture—I am referring to a recent English translation entitled “Electronic and Instrumental Music”—Stockhausen mostly talks about the importance of electronically generated sounds as a new way of composing. In doing so, he states that “the harmony between structure of material and form was definitively destroyed by 12-tone music. . . . Precisely for this reason the radical 12-tone music of the first half of this century seemed ‘out of tune,’ because one operated nonfunctionally with traditional sound material.”¹¹⁸ The traditional instrumental sounds, according to Stockhausen, were not adequate enough to twelve-tone technique as this new means of structuring music required new (electronic) sounds. So, although Stockhausen mainly reasoned that electronically generated sounds constitute the music of the future, he espoused twelve-tone technique as the origin of this same future. Reich could have been inspired by this modernist point of view. Still, apart from Reich’s reluctance to use the twelve-tone technique in the usual manner, none of the claims made in the short fragment from Strickland’s book are drawn from his *American Composers* interview, which raises the question what these observation are based on.

Even more difficult to grapple with, considering the book’s lack of references, is K. Robert Schwarz’s “popular-press introduction” *Minimalists* (1996).¹¹⁹ Although Schwarz wrote the aforementioned articles entitled “Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process” in a much more scholarly manner, Phaidon Press’s

117. “Stockhausen in the NY Times—1958,” *Anablog*, 31 July 2008, <http://www.analogartsensemble.net/2008/08/stockhausen-in-ny-times-1958.html> (accessed 14 July 2010).

118. Karlheinz Stockhausen, “Electronic and Instrumental Music,” trans. Jerome Kohl, Suzanne Stephens, and John McGuire, in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, 370–80 (New York: Continuum, 2006), 371.

119. Sumanth Gopinath, “Composer Looks East: Steve Reich and Discourse on Non-Western Music,” *Glendora Review* 3, nos. 3–4 (2004): 134, <http://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/African%20Journals/pdfs/glendora%20review/vol3no3&4/graa003003&4022.pdf> (accessed 14 July 2010).

20th-Century Composers series did not require any references except for a “further reading” section, which is far from helpful in establishing the sources of the many direct quotations presented by Schwarz. (This is the reason why none of these can be found in the previous chapter, except for the Henahan quotation, which is quoted so often as to be hard to miss the source.) Several of Schwarz’s observations in this book deserve attention. For example, Schwarz describes Juilliard as “a backward-looking bastion of tonal Americana,” where Reich discovered the “hot new serial works” of Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio “outside of his composition classes.”¹²⁰ Schwarz remark is possibly taken from a 1995 interview by William Duckworth in which Reich repeats his isolated position at Juilliard as follows. “I wasn’t at ease with the academic environment. I didn’t enjoy the music of either the very conservative types, who were still trying to preserve Americana, or of the radical type, who were trying to write like Boulez, Stockhausen, and Berio.”¹²¹ Still, concerning Berio’s remark, Schwarz can be grouped with those interpreting it as the result of a confrontation and suggests that Berio’s remark “may have been intended sarcastically.”¹²² (In the 1997 liner notes he wrote for *Steve Reich: Music for 18 Musicians*, however, Schwarz calls Berio’s advice “simple yet liberating.”)¹²³ Possibly paraphrasing Strickland’s *Minimalism: Origins*, Schwarz states that the last piece Reich composed at Juilliard was “his first serial composition,”¹²⁴ and continues with an untraceable quotation in which Reich describes his repeating the same untransposed twelve-tone row. It is surprising that Reich had to satisfy his need for serial music outside his classes at

120. Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 54.

121. William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995), 313.

122. Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 57.

123. K. Robert Schwarz, “Music for 18 Musicians, Revisited,” liner notes for *Steve Reich: Music for 18 Musicians* (Steve Reich and Musicians), Nonesuch CD 7599-79448-2 (1998), 7.

124. Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 54.

Juilliard, but still wrote a twelve-tone piece at Juilliard. Moreover, Schwarz contends that, at Mills, Berio must have felt Reich's "acute discomfort with atonality,"¹²⁵ leading him to his advice. In various interviews, Reich explains his choice for Mills instead of Berkeley by Berio's presence there: "Mills seemed the more interesting place because of Berio," and "working with Berio was exciting, because at that time ... he was a big hit."¹²⁶ The story gets complicated here. Somehow there seems to have been a distinctive pull toward tonality and a discomfort with atonality, but at the same time Reich was attracted to serialism as can be deduced from his choice to study with Berio.

William Duckworth (who also contends that the string orchestra piece from Juilliard was Reich's "first 12-tone piece")¹²⁷ stresses the former when he states that "as early as his student days at Juilliard, Reich said he had begun to feel a strong pull between the atonal music his teachers were using as models and the 'music built around one tonal center' that moved him emotionally."¹²⁸ The attraction serialism had on Reich and the reason he chose to study with Berio had apparently to do with the excitement this new type of music created in the United States at the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, so Mills was *the* place to study despite Reich's predilection for tonal centers that appear to have been present at Juilliard.

Keith Potter's 2000 book *Four Musical Minimalist* contains the most detailed description of *Music for String Orchestra* and, therefore, serves as the introduction to the analysis of the next chapter. Potter's book is, in fact, one of only four published sources I found mentioning the piece explicitly—the other three being Suzuki's 1991 dissertation, Sachse's 2004 *Sprechmelodien, Mischklänge, Atemzüge*, and Paul Hillier's

125. Schwarz, "Music for 18 Musicians," 7.

126. First quotation from an interview with Paul Hillier in the introduction to *Writings on Music*, 9. Second quotation from Smith and Smith, *American Originals*, 213.

127. Duckworth, *20/20*, 108.

128. Duckworth, *20/20*, 110. Duckworth quotes Reich from Henahan's 1971 interview.

introduction to *Writings on Music* (2002).¹²⁹ At this point I would like to discuss this last source, but not before briefly mentioning the only biography dealing with Reich that is entitled as such: David Hoek's *Steve Reich: A Bio-Bibliography* (2002). Concerning the Berio anecdote, Hoek quotes Reich from K. Robert Schwarz's interview with Reich and Corigliano (see p. 66 above) and interprets it as positive. Berio's comment "encourage[d] Reich to follow his own instincts," and, Hoek adds, Berio "challenged assumptions about contemporary music and, in doing so, guided Reich toward a more personal style."¹³⁰ Surprisingly, considering its status as biography, *Music for String Orchestra* is not mentioned at all.

Even more unexpected is the fact that it *is* mentioned in Paul Hillier's introduction to Reich's *Writings on Music*. Reich is quite reluctant to mention the (title of the) piece, as is clear from the total lack of any reference to it in interviews. He considers it "a student work and it should not be studied because it is not representative."¹³¹ Still, Hillier does mention its title and informs us that it was "a short serial piece with strong tonal tendencies" and that, at Mills, it was "among the works Reich showed Berio," evoking the latter's comment.¹³² Hillier also comments on Reich's Juilliard period and his study with Persichetti (not with Bergsma), with whom he "made analyses of works by Bartok (especially the fourth and fifth Quartets and their arch form), Schönberg (*Five Pieces for Orchestra* Op. 16 and *Six Little Piano Pieces* Op. 19), and Webern (*Five Pieces for String Quartet* Op. 5)—works that go to the brink of tonality but do not pass beyond

129. I actually encountered a fifth source, but it is not of much interest to this discussion. Martin Scherzinger states that "Reich had written a host of twelve-tone pieces before 1965, including his final piece written at Juilliard, *Music for String Orchestra*." Martin Scherzinger, "Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*," *Current Musicology*, nos. 79–80 (2005): 208.

130. Hoek, *A Bio-Bibliography*, 3–4.

131. Andrew Rosner, Reich's European agent, Allied Artists Agency, e-mail message to the author, 9 March 2010.

132. Hillier, introduction to *Writings on Music*, first quote p. 9; second, p. 10.

it” (8). We have already encountered Reich and Persichetti analyzing the music by these composers, but Hillier’s remark is helpful because he mentions specific pieces (probably paraphrasing Reich), two of which will be referred to in my analysis of *Music for String Orchestra*. Before moving on to this analysis, I would first like to single out Reich’s teachers at Juilliard, starting with a brief account of Bergsma.

5.1 William Bergsma (1921–1994)

Bergsma is a relatively unknown American composer. Schwarz’s description of Juilliard as “a backward-looking bastion of tonal Americana” fits well with the following characterization of Bergsma as found in the *New Grove*. “When other 20th-century composers were abandoning tonality in favour of serialism, Bergsma remained unwaveringly conservative in his compositional style.”¹³³ This conservatism explains why Reich was more interested in Persichetti’s less exclusionist, more eclectic, teaching and compositional style. In Potter’s otherwise detailed description of Reich’s career in *Four Musical Minimalists*, Bergsma is not even mentioned with respect to Reich.¹³⁴ (Despite his conservatism and rejection of serialism, Bergsma did play first violin in [one of the] performances of *Music for String Orchestra*, as his name appears on the, otherwise blank, recto side of one of four first-violin parts.)¹³⁵ Although Schwarz claims that Reich discovered the “hot new serial works” outside his classes at Juilliard, Persichetti may have been instrumental in this discovery, as will become clear in the following paragraph.

133. Kurt Stone and James P. Cassaro, “Bergsma, William,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/02805> (accessed 14 July 2010).

134. The only time Bergsma is mentioned in Potter’s book is with respect to Glass’s career, who studied composition at Juilliard at around the same time as Reich. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 253.

135. Handwriting on one of the first-violin parts among the *Music for String Orchestra* papers, Steve Reich Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland.

5.2 Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987)

As already noted, Reich recalls Vincent Persichetti as a very helpful teacher that helped him put the “numbers” in his or other composers’ compositions. Persichetti and Hall Overton—with whom Reich studied composition before he went to Juilliard—appear to have been Reich’s most appreciated composition teachers. In his 1987 lecture “Texture—Space—Survival,” Reich mentions that, although they were not the best composers, both were his best teachers, because they could “give you the musical information you need given your own particular situation at a given time.”¹³⁶ (In contrast, Reich considered Berio an “outstanding composer” who was, for this reason, not necessarily the best teacher. Berio’s teaching “was not about who I was as a composer but about who he was” [278].) Persichetti’s compositional techniques are rather diverse. He has composed pieces for many different instruments and in many genres and styles. For this reason, Reich called him a “musician who can do anything.”¹³⁷ Most well-known are his piano-solo works and his compositions for orchestra and wind band.¹³⁸ As for the “numbers” he helped Reich with, his book *Twentieth-Century Harmony* (1961), which “aims to define [the] harmonic activity [of twentieth-century composers] and make it available to the student and young composer,” is telling.¹³⁹ In it, Persichetti devotes a chapter to “Key Centers,” which he begins by stating that “the tonal meaning of an isolated chord is indefinite. . . . Tonality does not exist as an absolute, [but] is implied through harmonic articulation and through the tension and relaxation of chords around a tone or

136. Steve Reich, “Texture—Space—Survival,” *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 2 (1988): 278. Repr. in *Writings on Music*, 139–44.

137. Reich in Ford, *Composer to Composer*, 65. (Already quoted above.)

138. Walter G. Simmons, “Persichetti, Vincent,” in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21384> (accessed 14 July 2010).

139. Vincent Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), 10.

($J=126$)

melodic set

Piano *f*

non-serial

Original

Inversion

Original (transposition no. 1)

Original (transposition no. 2)

(Original)

non-serial

Original melodic set

serial row extraction

(identical notes)

Inversion (transposed)

Original (transposition no. 2)

Fig. 4 Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, Ex. 12.23, pp. 236–64

chord base” (248). This same chapter includes a section called “Serial Harmony,” which one reviewer dismissed stating that “it would be better if Persichetti were to accept that his premises do not admit orthodox serial technique.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, one gets the impression that Persichetti’s crash course in “serial harmony” is intended for those cases that mix serial technique with non-serial, or with “free serial” techniques, as, for instance, in his example 12.23 (see Fig. 4). Here, an eleven-tone melodic set containing “not necessarily all different” notes (in this set two As, two Dbs, and three Ebs) is accompanied by “non-serial” chords. The first nine notes of this set are subsequently juxtaposed with the first five notes of its inversion and a two-semitones transposition, “forming harmony from horizontal movement.”¹⁴¹ Most striking in this quotation is Persichetti’s use of the word “harmony” to describe, in his own words, “chordal formations that arise from linear writing [and] have little or no function in a scalar tonal sense” (262). Reich’s use of the term “a little weird harmony” (see p. 65 above) would fit better with such a description. As the reader might expect, I will return to Persichetti’s book in my analysis of *Music for String Orchestra*. It is interesting to note that several years after Persichetti’s attempt, Reginald Smith Brindle published a monograph containing a chapter entitled “Twelve-Note Harmony,” which he defines as “those successions of note groupings which *do not offend musical reason*, however complex the result,” which are created by “the artistic use of all the myriad possibilities of the total-chromatic.”¹⁴²

140. Peter A. Evans, review of *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, by Vincent Persichetti, *Music and Letters* 44, no. 1 (1963): 78.

141. Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, 263.

142. Reginald Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 62 (italics in original).

6 *Music for String Orchestra and Serial Harmony*

Keith Potter's *Four Musical Minimalists* offers the most extensive description of *Music for String Orchestra*. Reich's attitude toward Juilliard as a conservative school (as we have seen in Schwarz's claim) is affirmed by Potter's own interviews with Reich. In these, Reich is reported to have said that Juilliard was "the last stronghold of the dying Americana, the end of the Aaron Copland tradition," and, Potter adds, Reich "felt little better about the contemporary music scene in New York generally," partly explaining his move to (West Coast) Mills College.¹⁴³ From the same interviews we learn that Reich described the pieces he composed at Juilliard as "somewhere between [Bartók's] Third, Fourth and Fifth Quartets [and] the Webern of Opus 5" and that he "never wrote a piece where [he] didn't feel a harmonic centre" (156). Concerning Reich's subsequent study in California, Potter presents "Reich's most frequently told anecdote about Mills" of the attempt to "simplify—or subvert—serialism by composing twelve-tone music which entirely avoided inversions, retrogrades and transpositions," by way of a quote from Ford's interview (see p. 64 above).¹⁴⁴ This anecdote functions as the introduction to Potter's (slightly less than one page) description of *Music for String Orchestra*, the "first piece in which he adopted the twelve-note procedure ... and actually the last composition Reich wrote while in New York."¹⁴⁵

Potter's description—I feel obliged to quote it in full—runs as follows.

143. Reich in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 155–56.

144. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 157.

145. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 157. The claim that it was his last composition in New York is questionable in light of the fact that, according to Potter, Reich left Juilliard in the summer of 1961 and arrived in San Francisco in September (156). *Music for String Orchestra* was finished on 10 May. Pencil sketch of score, last page, among the *Music for String Orchestra* papers, Steve Reich Collection, Paul Sacher Foundation, Basel, Switzerland.

[Reich's] approach to a technique more commonly construed as an ideal way to avoid pitch repetition and create a constant state of flux met with a predictable response from Berio, to whom he showed the score after his enrolment at Mills. "He liked it," says Reich, "but he began to realise that those tones weren't going to do anything but repeat." "If you want to write tonal music," he apparently said, "then write tonal music."

The manuscript reveals a twelve-note set subjected to constant repetition. The set on which *Music for String Orchestra* is based [see Ex. 1] concerns itself chiefly with semitones and minor thirds, making it possible to segment it into small groups of notes along the lines Webern used, though Reich is less rigorous



Ex. 1 Tone-row of *Music for String Orchestra* according to Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, Ex. 3.1, p. 158 (version β 1 of the row; see main text below)

in his construction. The composer argues that the close-position voicing of some of the clusters formed from these segments creates "a static and somewhat tonal situation: ambiguous, odd, but nevertheless not what was intended by the use of twelve-tone technique," and relates it to the kinds of harmonic vocabulary he still uses today; the notion of "stacking" the same interval, or two intervals, makes a somewhat tenuous connection with his subsequent practice. The set of *Music for String Orchestra* is far less triadic, or in any other sense "tonal," than that of, say, Berg's *Violin Concerto*; and the music to which it gives rise is actually as secundally dissonant as most post-Webernian serial compositions, making Berio's observation a little hard to understand. Yet the interest displayed here in static harmony and repetition is the earliest indication in his pre-minimalist output of the direction Reich's mature music would take.¹⁴⁶

By means of this description, the problematic aspects of the Berio anecdote, as posed in the previous chapter, can be brought to a conclusion. Especially interesting is Reich's claim that Berio liked the piece.

146. Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 157–58 (the quotes are from his interviews with Reich).

Diametrically opposed to those claims made by Gottwald (“resignierte Ausruf”) and Schwarz (“may have been intended sarcastically”), this shows how the Berio anecdote has apparently been subjected to all too easy interpretations. This is not only entertaining (as commented by Sachse); it also neatly exemplifies how dubious interpretations can be projected on such an anecdote in hindsight. Because Reich’s minimal music shows many dissimilarities with those by Berio (and Boulez, Stockhausen, etc.), Berio could not have shown any interest in the “minimal” techniques used in *Music for String Orchestra*. It points to the fact that Reich’s later minimal music compositions are considered so different from Berio’s music that possible points of congruence are excluded beforehand. Reich himself projects the harmonic language he used in his later works all the way back on his use of static harmonies in *Music for String Orchestra*. I would agree with Potter that this is a “somewhat tenuous connection.”

6.1 The Row, Symmetries, and Anton Webern

Potter also rightly observes that the twelve-tone row Reich used is far from triadic in any conventional sense. Surprisingly, Berg’s *Violin Concerto* (1935) is never mentioned by Reich—not in his *Writings* nor in interviews. Another piece that could have served as an example is Luigi Dallapiccola’s *Quaderno Musicale di Annalibera* (1952), the row of which contains both a B-major and an A-minor chord. Instead, Reich and Persichetti appear to have turned to Schoenberg and Webern, avoiding the elephant in the room. Whereas the row and its application in Berg’s *Violin Concerto* clearly shows a triadic basis, and could have served as a model, Reich’s row stresses dissonance. It suggests dissonant rather than tonal music.

Reich’s twelve-tone row is actually not the basis for the whole piece. Rather, only the outer sections and a middle section employ the twelve-tone row. Formally, the piece can be represented as ABA’CA’’. Sections B and C both represent a climax and a solo (one for cello and one for violin), and only the A sections are based on the twelve-tone row. The order solo-climax in section B is reversed in section C. Taking this into account, one can represent the overall form of the piece as A(sc)A’(cs)A’’, in which *s* is a

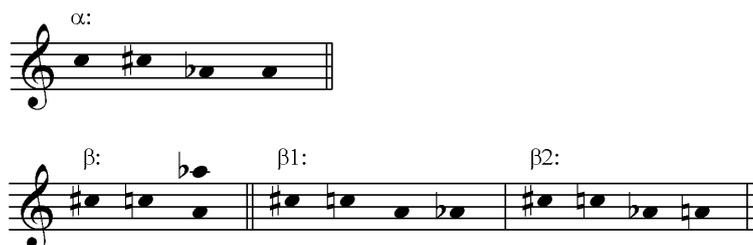
solo and *c* a climax. Thus, and this points to Bartók's influence (as stated by Reich), the piece can be said to resemble an arch form.

In the A section the row is repeated four times. A' presents one full presentation of the row, after which a second is started but, probably to accommodate a D–C#–B–A# descend in the first violin part, only the first three notes are presented in order. (The first presentation of the row in this middle section contains an extra F, again because of linear or melodic considerations.) A'', then, is a somewhat altered version of the very first presentation of the row in A, rounding off the piece by returning to its beginning.

Potter's version of the row (Ex. 1 above)—the only published musical example of the piece—shows the first two notes in the order C#–C. This order, however, pertains only to the final section (A''). In the middle section (A') the C# appears both before and immediately after C (C#–C–C#). In the second and fourth of the four presentations in section A, the order is C–C#. So it is only really in the final section (A'') that Potter's C#–C order can be found. (In the first and third presentation of the first section [A], the notes C and C# enter simultaneously.) Thus, there are two different orders of the very first notes. In the interview by Essellier (p. 59 above), Reich confessed that he would often make mistakes in modulations. Although his ambiguity with respect to the order of these first four notes might also be interpreted as a mistake, it is safer to assume that Reich allowed himself some freedom in applying his twelve-tone row. As Persichetti notes, “serial music of any type of row or set construction must be aurally created ... and not alone by manipulative procedures. Serial technique does not in itself insure communication. ... When automatic writing is avoided, the unifying power of serial practice allows great harmonic variety.”¹⁴⁷ This freedom is also demonstrated by sections B and C, in which Reich deviates from serial technique. His combination of serial and free atonal sections shows how Reich confined “automatic” writing to clearly delineated areas, allowing for freedom in the other sections.

147. Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, 267.

Another problem with the version of the row as presented by Potter is the order of notes 3 and 4. Whereas the notes A and Ab appear simultaneously in two of the six presentations, the other four times the order is Ab–A instead of the A–Ab order found in Ex. 1. In all, three versions of the row are possible (see Ex. 2). The one underlying section A and A' is that beginning with C–C#–Ab–A (henceforth the row

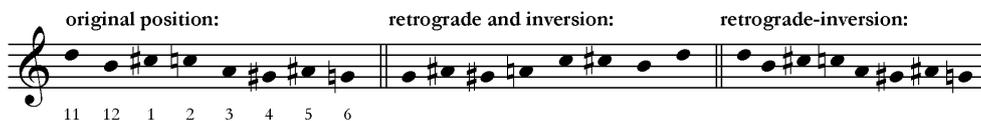


Ex. 2 First notes of tone-row in sections A and A' (α); and two possible versions of those in section A'' (β1 and β2)

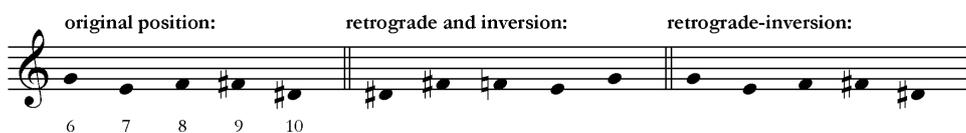
starting with this order is labeled α). In section A'', two versions are possible (β1 and β2), of which Potter presents the first. Possibility β2 will be discarded in the remainder, because versions α and β1 both show a special feature.¹⁴⁸

Both these two versions of the row contain two symmetrical regions. Notes 11, 12, and 1 to 6 of both versions of the series form their own retrograde-inversion if mirrored around a pivot between A# and B (or inverted and transposed up five semitones), as shown in Ex. 3. (Changing C#–C–A–Ab to C–C#–Ab–A does not affect the fact that this section of the row is symmetrical.) Notes 6 to 10 show the same characteristic: their retrograde is their inversion transposed down five semitones (or mirrored with F as pivot; see Ex. 4). Notes 9 to 12 are another example, forming their retrograde by transposing their inversion down a fifth. The outer minor thirds of this section of the row overlap with the last and first interval of the other two symmetrical regions. Finally, notes 5 to 7 exhibit the same feature. Connecting

148. Actually, because both C–C# and Ab–A enter simultaneously in the very first presentation of the tone-row, C–C#–A–Ab is a fourth possibility. This possibility will also be disregarded in the remainder.



Ex. 3 Series' notes 11, 12, and 1 to 6 (version β_1); their retrograde—which is their inversion around a pivot between A \sharp and B; and their retrograde-inversion (T-5)



Ex. 4 Notes 6 to 10; their retrograde and mirror around F; and their retrograde-inversion (T-4)

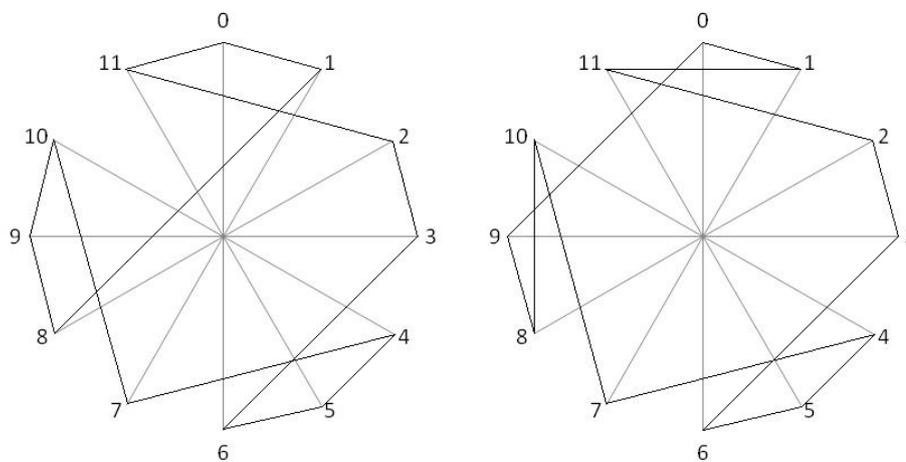
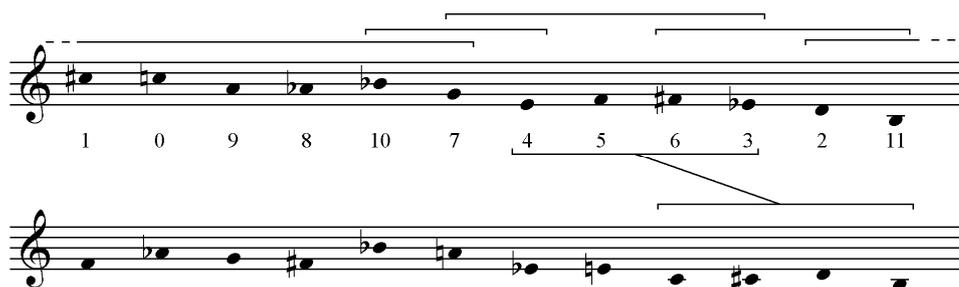


Fig. 5 Clock diagram of series version α (left) and version β_1 (right) showing the symmetrical connections between pitch classes

the pitch classes of the series in a clock diagram is an easy way to show such symmetries (Fig. 5).

All four of the symmetrical sections (consisting of 8, 5, 4, and 3 notes) of the series overlap, as shown in Ex. 5. Symmetrically constructed series occur in the music of the Second Viennese School. The series

of Webern's Opus 21, for example, is a palindrome. The row of Berg's Violin Concerto is another example of a symmetrically conceived series. In fact, five percent of Schoenberg's and twenty percent of Webern's series are fully symmetrical, whereas only 0.13 percent of all possible twelve-tone rows exhibit this feature.¹⁴⁹



Ex. 5 Version $\beta 1$ of tone-row (with pitch classes) showing the four overlapping symmetrical portions (above); and the series of Webern's Symphony (below)

There are some similarities between Reich's row and that underlying Webern's Symphony. This row employs eight different intervals (minor seconds and thirds, major thirds and diminished fifths; all of them both ascending and descending). In both Reich's and Webern's row, the most common succession of intervals is a second followed by a third, and both show the succession of two ascending minor seconds followed by a descending minor third (see Ex. 5).¹⁵⁰ (Henceforth shorthand notation of intervals will be used. In this case $m2\uparrow - m2\uparrow - m3\downarrow$, with lowercase m denoting minor and uppercase M major.) These

149. David J. Hunter and Paul T. von Hippel, "How Rare Is Symmetry in Musical 12-Tone Rows?" *The American Mathematical Monthly* (February 2003): 131, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2191071/How-Rare-Is-Symmetry-in-Musical-12Tone-Rows> (accessed 14 July 2010).

150. In Allen Forte's parlance, both series contain instances of the unordered pitch class sets [0,1,2] (twice), [0,1,4], [0,2,3], [0,3,4] (twice), [0,3,6], and [0,1,2,4]. (Included are the intervals between the last and first note of the rows.) Cf. Allen Forte, *The Structure of Atonal Music* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1973), 3–6.

groups of intervals betray an atonal rather than tonal construction. Smith Brindle, for example, divides all possible twelve-tone series into two groups: “tonal” and “atonal,” of which the latter “is usually formed of note-groups of a chromatic nature, such as ... two semitones, ... one semitone and a tone, one semitone and a minor third, one semitone and a major third, and one semitone and a fourth.”¹⁵¹ As might be expected, Smith Brindle uses Webern’s Symphony-row as an illustration of the “atonal” series. Another, more conspicuous similarity is the fact that both rows end with D–B in their *Grundgestalt*.

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff contains a twelve-tone row with notes: C, C#, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, B, A, G. Below the notes are numbers: 0, 1, 8, 9, 10, 7, 4, 5, 6, 3, 2, 11. The bottom staff contains a twelve-tone row with notes: G, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, F#, E, D, C#. Below the notes are numbers: 9, 10, 1, 0, 11, 2, 3, 6, 5, 4, 7, 8. A bracket under the first seven notes of the bottom row is labeled '(T+5: 2 3 6 5 4 7 8)'. Another bracket under the last seven notes of the bottom row is labeled '(T+5: 7 8)'. Lines connect the notes of the top row to the notes of the bottom row, showing that the bottom row is a retrograde of the top row transposed up five semitones.

Ex. 6 Similarities between Reich’s tone-row version α (above); and the tone-row of Webern’s *Variationen für Orchester* (below)

Despite these similarities, the row underlying Webern’s *Variationen für Orchester* seems to have served as a more prominent example for Reich. Nine of Reich’s notes are the retrograde of notes 3 to 11 of Webern’s row (Ex. 6). Like the row of his Symphony, this row shows a special feature. Its first seven notes are the same as the last seven, transposed up five semitones (see brackets below the row in Ex. 6 and compare Fig. 6 to Fig. 5).¹⁵² As a consequence, notes 6 to 11 of Reich’s series form the retrograde of the first six notes in the same five-semitone transposition (see brackets below the row in the example and Fig. 6). It seems likely that Reich examined several of Webern’s rows, while constructing his own.

151. Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition*, 12.

152. Another way of saying the same is that Webern’s series is its own retrograde-inversion transposed up eleven semitones.

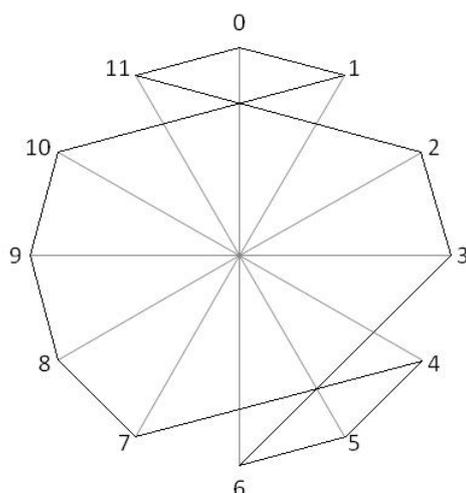


Fig. 6 Clock diagram of series in Webern's *Variationen*, op. 30

In total, six full presentations of the twelve-tone row can be found—four in section A, one in A', and one in A"—all of them presenting the row in the manner Reich describes many times in interviews; that is, without transpositions, inversions or retrogrades. One of the theoretical consequences is that Reich's row is not as abstract as those employed by the Second Viennese School. Whereas the twelve-tone row, as intended by Schoenberg and his followers, is an abstract ordering of pitches and intervals (*Grundgestalt*) that can be transposed, retrograded, and inverted, Reich's order is less abstract as only octave transpositions of individual notes of the original row are employed.

6.2 Octave Transpositions, Duration, and Elliott Carter

The most frequent interval in Reich's row being a descending minor third, possible triadic implementation of the row could involve "stacking" minor thirds. A resulting diminished triad (for example the one formed by notes 5 to 7) has a rather weak sense of root. Its common practice function as leading tone triad might have been exploited by Reich as its "leading-tone root" (E) is followed by a minor second ascend (to F). In the actual application of the row, however, only the one presentation of section A" shows these notes sounding at the same time, accompanied by other sustained notes (C, A, A#).

The actual application of the row shows some other features. The first presentation of the row (mm. 1–6) is presented in Ex. 7. Most prominent is the chord found in measure 4. In terms of conventional harmony, it can be described as an A-major-seventh chord (A–C#–E–G#) with an augmented ninth (B#), if enharmonic spelling is employed. (Enharmonic spelling will be employed in the remainder without

Ex. 7 First presentation of twelve-tone row in *Music for String Orchestra*, mm. 1–6

explicitly stating so.) Because Reich notates an A^b and C, this is probably not the way these harmonies were conceived. Apart from that, the inclusion of an augmented ninth (or minor tenth) suggests a rather dissonant, “weird”—to quote Reich—conception of harmony. In terms of functional harmony, no relation exists between this chord and its “resolution” (F). The preceding chord (m. 3) is even more difficult to describe (let alone, in terms of functionality). With its two minor thirds, two minor seconds, one major second and diminished fifth, it clearly defies categorization in terms of conventional harmonies. Finally, the last chord in this presentation of the row could be described as a major as well as a diminished triad on the contrabass B. This suggests a dissonant rather than tonal texture.

The second presentation of the tone-row shows a similar “harmonic” built-up (see Ex. 8). Reich’s claim that he would first form a chord of the first four notes, then use the first three as a melodic fragment, while the fourth note joins the next three, is demonstrated by this next passage. It shows that, whereas in the first presentation the first six notes form a chord (m. 3), the second presentation gradually builds up a chord by using the first five notes, the sixth note joining a “melodic” fragment of notes 7 to

Ex. 8 Second presentation of tone-row, mm. 7–9

10. This second presentation ends in an ambiguous major and minor third over bass note B. Not surprisingly, this chord is as impossible to describe as the chord in measure 3. Like this chord, the chord formed by the first five notes of the row reflects the minor seconds of the twelve-tone row, forming a semitone-aggregate chord in which only a B is missing (G#–A–A#–C–C#).

In both these chords, however, the semitones occur as major sevenths, reflecting Persichetti's advice that "the voices containing the sharpest dissonant interval should be well separated."¹⁵³ Discussing "chords by seconds"—essentially chords consisting of stacked major and/or minor seconds—Persichetti observes that when "used in close position they cramp easily," and recommends that "spacing in intervals of the seventh and ninth gives the muscle-bound chords by seconds linear freedom and room for activity" (122). Smith Brindle devotes most of his chapter on twelve-note harmony to this principle, noting that "the varying degrees of consonance and dissonance are less perceptible when notes are far apart."¹⁵⁴ In each of the first two presentations, the spacing of the dissonant minor seconds clearly shows this separation, allowing only thirds to be close-positioned (as in the first presentation). In fact, this seems to be the leading principle in all of the presentations of the row.

153. Persichetti, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, 193.

154. Smith Brindle, *Serial Composition*, 73.

Whereas, according to Potter, Reich claims that the close-position of the clusters available in the series creates static harmony, this must be based on a misunderstanding. In the interview by Rainer Nonnenmann (see p. 70 above), Reich indeed claims the opposite, namely, that the actual strategy is to space the semitones in the series at least a seventh apart to avoid “cramped” chords. The opening C–G#–B–E–A chord in the third movement of Schoenberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, op. 16 is an example of this procedure. Its C–B interval is spaced a major seventh apart and G#–A a minor ninth. Reich must have been somewhat fascinated by this chord, because in his *Music for Two or More Pianos or Piano + Tape* he used it as one of the nine chords this piece comprises (Ex. 9).¹⁵⁵ As for the spacing of seconds, Webern’s *Fünf Sätze für Streichquartett*, op. 5 is another example. The opening chords of the fifth *Satz* allow for thirds, fourths, (diminished) fifths, and sixths to be spaced closely, whereas close-spaced (minor and major) seconds are avoided (Ex. 10).

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Schoenberg, op. 16 first chord: | Music for Two or More Pianos sketch: | Music for Two or More Pianos fifth chord: |
|------------------------------------|---|--|

Ex. 9 Comparison between Schoenberg’s op. 16, opening chord (left); a chord designated “Op. 16” on a sketch page for *Music for Two or More Pianos* (middle); and the fifth chord of the actual score (right)

155. The score, consisting of nine chords and performance instructions, is printed in Hillier, introduction to *Writings on Music*, Ex. Intro-1, 12–13. Only the chords are printed in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, Ex. 3.4, 163.



Ex. 10 Webern, *Fünf Sätze*, op. 5, fifth *Satz*, mm. 3–5 (reduction)

Ex. 11 Third and fourth presentation of tone-row and remainder of section A', mm. 10–17

The last two full presentations in section A unambiguously confirm this principle (see Ex. 11). The five semitones present in the series are spaced at least a major seventh apart (or appear in succession as in m. 13). The third presentation shows that the first four notes form a chord and the fifth joins a descending line. Thus, in each of the first three presentations the number of notes forming the first chord decreases from six to five to four, similar to Reich's description of the way he would deal with the row. The last two notes of the third presentation join the fourth, possibly reflecting the eight-note symmetrical part of the

row. In both these presentations, Reich allowed several notes to be repeated, disrupting the original order in the case of G \sharp and C \sharp in m. 13.

A more disruptive event, in terms of strict twelve-tone technique, occurs in the four measures after the fourth presentation. Strictly adhering to the order as presented (assuming C–C \sharp –G \sharp –A as the original), while omitting repeated notes (F, F \sharp , A and C \sharp in m. 15), notes 1, 3, 2, 4, 12, 6, and 7 succeed each other. These four measures form a kind of transition to section B, in which Reich temporarily deviates from twelve-tone technique. A strong indication for this deviation is the fact that pitch class D \sharp is missing between measures 13 and 38, resurfacing in the next twelve-tone section (A').

Section B, like section C, contains a climax and a solo. The two climaxes are interesting with respect to several repeated patterns. As promised in the introduction I will refrain from connecting the piece with later works by Reich. Although the repeated patterns could be interpreted as precursors of Reich's use of repetition, such a claim is rather tenuous. In Webern's *Fünf Sätze*, for instance, the repeated pattern in the bass notes (Ex. 10 above) cannot possibly be interpreted as repetition in the sense of minimal music. With respect to sections B and C, I will therefore limit my analysis to the solos they contain.

The four-measure cello solo of section B does not seem to have any serial basis. Still, it is built of only four different intervals, each occurring four times; that is, if octave transpositions are employed. Four descending minor and four descending major thirds occur alongside four major and four minor seconds. One minor second descends, the others ascend; one major second ascends, the others descend. The order can be represented schematically as follows. m2 \uparrow –M3 \downarrow –m2 \uparrow –m3 \downarrow –m2 \downarrow –M2 \downarrow –M2 \downarrow –M3 \downarrow –m2 \uparrow –M3 \downarrow –m3 \downarrow –M2 \uparrow –M3 \downarrow –m3 \downarrow –M2 \downarrow –m3 \downarrow . Thus, although there is no strict series at the basis of this solo, some pre-compositional decisions seem to have been made. The first-violin solo of section C is likewise built of only four intervals. Five minor and four major seconds, four minor thirds and three perfect fourths. One minor and one major second ascend, whereas the others descend; perfect fourths descend; the minor

thirds occur twice descending and twice ascending.¹⁵⁶ Although less rigorous than the solo in section B, the restricted use of intervals reflects possible pre-compositional decisions.

Before turning to the twelve-tone presentations of section A' and A'', a peculiar event in the A section deserves attention. In this section a change of tempo takes place from measure 9 to 10. This change of tempo is a perfect example of metric modulation as practiced first by Elliott Carter. Reich alluded to his interest in this practice in the interview by Enzo Restagno quoted above (p. 78). In the score, Reich explicitly notated the equivalence of a normal eighth note in the first nine measures with a triplet eighth note in the following section (providing the actual quarter note tempo in parentheses). This seems to be an explicit reference to Carter's practice. Later in the piece (m. 53) the tempo is reversed to that of the beginning (again explicitly stating the equivalent note-values and providing the actual quarter-note tempo in parentheses). Thus, these tempo changes divide the piece into three sections as in an ABA form, reflecting the fact that the last section (A''; mm. 54–63) is a recapitulation of the first twelve-tone presentation in A (mm. 1–6). The change of tempo that results from this metric modulation is more-or-less countered by the fact that most of the notes in the first nine measures can be regarded as being in triple meter, whereas those immediately following the modulation in measure 10 and 11 are in duple meter. Only when the triplets reoccur in measure 12, an increase in tempo can be experienced, reinforced by the sixteenth-triplet (corresponding to a note-value of one ninth of the quarter notes in the previous section). This change in tempo could have easily been effected by a different rhythmic notation on either side of the metric modulation. Still, Reich insists on this peculiar way of tempo change, reflecting his interest in Carter's metric modulation.

With respect to the duration of the first three twelve-tone presentations, it is interesting to note that the first presentation lasts 12 seconds (12 quarter notes times 1 second), the second lasts 6 seconds (disregarding the triplet eighth rest), and the third 3 seconds ($4\frac{1}{2}$ quarter notes times $\frac{2}{3}$ seconds); that is, if

156. Scheme: m2↓-M2↓-m3↓-M2↓-m3↓-m2↑-m2↓-m2↓-m2↓-p4↓-m3↑-M2↑-p4↓-p4↓-m3↑-M2↓.

the last 2 notes of the third presentation are considered part of the fourth. This is yet another indication that Reich might have conceived of these particular notes as the first of the symmetrical eight-note portion of the series. (The fourth presentation does not fit into this neat scheme, with or without these notes.)

Now let us turn to section A' (Ex. 12), in which the fifth full presentation of the row is followed by a kind of transition (in a similar idiom) to section C. This section is clearly separated from section B which ends in a *fortissimo* climax (m. 32). Again Reich forms chords by sustaining notes of the row. Several

Ex. 12 Fifth presentation of tone-row and transition to section C, mm. 32–45

successive harmonies are formed in this way. Most striking—considering our search for harmony—is the sustained fifth in the lower parts of measures 38 to 40, complemented by an A, forming a minor triad. The other notes, however, do not neatly fit in a conventional harmony, so the passage is still dissonant in nature. Reich does keep to his technique of avoiding “cramped” semitones and whole tones. Only at the very end of this presentation (m. 40), whole tones can be found. What follows after this presentation is a surprisingly tonal-sounding passage. This is accomplished by the pull downward of successive whole

tones. As such, it seems like a distant relative of a compositional practice reaching back all the way to Corelli (see reductions in Ex. 13). If there is any point in this piece where Berio's comment would fit, it is this brief passage. For the most part, however, it is only after the twelve-tone presentation that Reich sets up this tonal reference. Another noteworthy aspect of this passage is the motif of the upper parts in measure 45, which is clearly a variation of that in measure 12 (see Ex. 11 above).



Ex. 13 Tonal-sounding progression in mm. 40–43, upper parts (left); and a tonal passage from Corelli, Concerto Grosso No. 1 in D Major, 3rd mov., mm. 52–53, upper parts (right)

The last twelve-tone presentation (section A²) is a recapitulation of the first presentation in A. The piece ends with a repeated B in the bass, which can be seen as a unifying motif, as it surfaces *trice* in the piece (mm. 6, 17, and 63). Two alterations can be observed (Ex. 14). First, the first two notes in the lower parts are sustained to join the entrance of E in measure 57. Instead of the six- and five-note chord formed in the first presentation of section A (Ex. 7), the first seven notes of the series are sustained, forming two

Ex. 14 Sixth presentation of twelve-tone row, mm. 54–63

six-note chords (one containing C; the other E). Secondly, the remaining notes form the exact same five-note chord as in the first presentation, but, to accommodate a quiet *piano* ending of the piece, they are stretched out from two to five measures. These alterations, however, do not change the overall harmonic feel of the passage. As experienced (at least upon multiple hearings) the same chords sound in both the A and A' sections. Reich's claim that he would create static harmonies from the untransposed twelve-tone row is confirmed with respect to the first presentation and its recapitulation. Thus, the search for harmony in this (partly) twelve-tone piece does not yield any specifically tonal elements. Any connections with the "resurgence of tonality" seem rather farfetched in light of this composition. Instead of any tonal considerations, Reich seems to have tried to instigate a sense of harmonic constancy taking works by Schoenberg and Webern as templates.

Conclusion

Reich's comment that his involvement with twelve-tone technique showed him how not to compose, should not be taken too literally. In part 1 the many sides of minimal music were outlined in order to sketch the cauldron of activity out of which minimal music emerged. Although many of the authors discussed in this first part focus on the new-ness of minimal music, I would agree with those who point to formative influences within twentieth-century Western "classical" music as well. That baroque, non-Western, jazz, and popular music have been influential and should not be disregarded in an assessment of minimal music and its origins seems clear. Not taking into account avant-garde or modern music—or even bluntly stating that these are fully absent—is, however, an approach that is highly questionable. I would only partly agree with those professing that minimal music is a reaction against serialism. Even if this would be the case, an aesthetic of new-ness (whether interpreted as avant-garde, modern, or anti-avant-garde) seems to be present in both.

In the second part of this thesis, Reich's involvement with avant-garde or modern music by Webern, Schoenberg, and Carter is unambiguously confirmed; not only from an extensive presentation of Reich's own comments and those authors interpreting them, but also in the analysis of his earliest extent work (as encountered in the Reich Collection at the Sacher Foundation). The chance, for example, that Reich coincidentally used the retrograde of a nine-note section of the series underlying Webern's *Variationen* is almost negligible; the more so because Reich frequently alludes to his interest in this piece by Webern during his academic period. His self-proclaimed interest in Carter's metric modulation is pretty solidly confirmed in the same analysis. The "open-positioning" of dissonant intervals in Reich's piece shows similarities with interval spacing in pieces by Schoenberg and Webern. One could even claim that Reich's approach seems to be a kind of hybrid between Webern's use of sparseness and constancy of intervals, Schoenberg's use of sustained chords, and Carter's metric modulation.

There seems to be no question, then, that aesthetic—if not straightforward compositional—approaches present in the academic climate of the American 1950s and 1960s must be considered formative and influential in considering Reich’s later minimal works. Similar studies of early works by other canonized composers of minimal music could be undertaken to add to an understanding of this particular part of the “Gebräu” out of which minimal music emerged.

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Appendix: Michael Nyman, “Minimal Music” (11 October 1968)

Walking home from the Fugs’ concert, organised by the Middle Earth at the Round House last week, I was shocked by the 4 a.m. silence—by its awesome superiority to a lot of modern music, and by its unfamiliarity. But I listened harder—having trained myself never to take things at ear-value—and heard a medium-pitch humming in my ears not unlike the buzzing of electric fences with which the controlling hand of man has added his audible presence to country silences. The buzzing was the only musical memory I had left of the warm-up group, Spooky Tooth, whose amplification system, as is usual, acted as a physical conditioner: the amplified pulse of bass guitar and drums striking simultaneously through ear and floor, charging the frame with an obsessive sound transfusion.

Such crude physical involvement is, of course, disruptive in theory, habit-forming in practice. Yet the violent political message of the Fugs is embodied in gentle, nostalgic, even elegiac music, some of which would not be out of place in the *Burl Ives Song Book*. This scatological [*sic*], crass, entertaining unconfined and imaginative show was the climax of a fortnight’s off-the-beaten-circuit concerts, which had led me to cultivate a receptive mindlessness, rather than the more or less rational perceptivity that most forms of music require.

My journey to the underground has also led to the conclusion (not particularly new) that our existing concert halls may be adequate for the classics, but not for some types of new music which need a more theatrical setting. But there I was, in the Wigmore Hall of all places, absolutely mesmerised by Cornelius Cardew’s *The Great Digest* last week. This was the piece which caused a riot at this year’s Cheltenham Festival—taking into account the musical backwardness of the locals, the comparative sophistication of the London audience and the gentle honesty of Cardew’s music, it is not surprising that this un-English outburst was not repeated. Cardew’s piece, an enlightened commission by the Macnaghten Concerts, succeeded, where pop and chanting failed, in completely clearing the mind. And with very slender means—an opening concertante passage for massed stones; a long organ solo, brilliantly realised by Michael Chant, which created by the persistent prolongation of held notes very delicate tensions; finally an alternation of solos for any kind of whistling instrument (performers individually interpreting the hieroglyphics of the score), and a speaking group who intoned a beautiful short text of Confucius, recommending introspection and ‘watching with affection the way people grow.’ The whole was as real as a drizzly afternoon, gradually eating away at our blinded and cluttered musical mentalities.

David Rowland's *Degrees* for chorus and brass—again the Louis Halsey singers managed brilliantly to overcome a slight fifth-form-dormness at having to perform so many unchoruslike activities—is based on a powerful Leroi Jones poem and dedicated to the people of Czechoslovakia. But, since it could not make up its mind whether to be an abstract phonetic effects piece or a sound summary of the meaning and emotion of the poem, it failed on both counts: on the one hand, it lacked an overall structural pattern; on the other, the imaginative but generalised sound moods were no match for the intense imagery of the text.

I also deduced a recipe for the successful 'minimal-music' happening from the entertainment presented by Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik at the ICA. Simple idea, straightforward structure, intellectual control, theatrical presence and intensity in presentation. These all contributed to Paik's spellbinding performance of *Springen* by Hennig [*sic*] Christiansen, a hypnotic ten-minute piece which consisted of nothing but a series of parabolas traced by the fingers, arms and eyes of the performer in ever-widening arcs. First from middle C on the piano to top C, from top C to the C below middle C and so on, gradually taking in the whole stage which became an imaginary extension to the keyboard. The rest of the programme by this most famous American happening duo in the business was a celebration of the cello of Miss Moorman, who in one piece fought with it in a large blue bag with zippered orifices.

This kind of act, though it uses no words, is as inventive as the Fugs in flinging artistic insults (some rather old) at the audience. In one terrifying piece Miss Moorman listens to a recording of bombardment and responds by violently attacking her cello, as if to express the futility of art attempting to compete with the horror of the 'real' world. Yet the whole performance seemed curiously muted and polite. Perhaps the ICA was trying to 'reach' as large an audience as possible. Such compromises do not work.

To Ravi Shankar we owe the introduction of Indian music to the West, yet his concert at the Festival Hall was marred by compromises of another kind—necessary shortening of pieces which are theoretically endless, a certain amount of glossy packaging, and the charming but schoolmasterly manner of Shankar's verbal explanations. However, there were some stunning performances, notably by two drummers, who produced a range of nuance and rhythms unthinkable in western music.