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The Historiography of Minimal Music and the Challenge of Andriessen to Narratives of American Exceptionalism (1)

Ian Pace

Introduction

Assumptions of over-arching unity amongst composers and compositions solely on the basis of common nationality/region are extremely problematic in the modern era, with great facility of travel and communications. Arguments can be made on the bases of shared cultural experiences, including language and education, but these need to be tested rather than simply assumed. Yet there is an extensive tradition in particular of histories of music from the United States which assume such music constitutes a body of work separable from other concurrent music, or at least will benefit from such isolation, because of its supposed unique properties. Such nationalistic assumptions feed into the historiography and aesthetic examination of minimal music, which is in theory a stylistic/generic categorisation. This is far from being the only area of modern music for which this is the case – certainly the common dichotomy between ‘avant-garde’ and ‘experimental’ music has long been mapped onto a ‘European’ vs. ‘American’ divide. The historian Richard Evans has argued cogently that history is a ‘myth-busting’ rather than ‘myth-making’ discipline¹ and with this in mind I seek here to cast a sceptical eye upon some existing musico-historical mythologies. I will outline some of the dominant themes and underlying assumptions of much recent writing on minimal music, argue how these reflect restrictive nationalistic and exceptionalistic ideologies, consider how the music of Andriessen (focusing on the works up to around 1980)² is incorporated into these but also confounds them, and suggest how his music can help to nuance some alternative historical and aesthetic models.

The Formations of Historical and Aesthetic Narratives around Minimal Music

The term ‘minimal’ music took a few years to become established in critical discourse. While the first works now generally canonised as such date from the late 1950s, with Terry Riley’s *In C* (1964) widely viewed as a pivotal work, it was not until the mid- to late-1970s that Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and La Monte Young became regularly referred to as composers of ‘minimal music,’ though commonalities between their work had been observed at a much earlier stage.

A first ‘period’ in the development of the concept can reasonably be dated from the first allusion to the concept by Barbara Rose in 1965, then the coining of the term by Michael Nyman in 1968, through to the publication of the first monograph on the movement by Wim Mertens in 1980. The term ‘minimal art’ had first gained exposure through a 1965 essay by the British philosopher Richard Wollheim, who used it to refer to Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt and Robert Rauschenberg.³ In a subsequent essay that year, also on minimal art, Barbara Rose drew some links with developments

¹ (Evans: 2013).

² I am in agreement with Yayoi Uno Everett, who argues for a quite new phase in Andriessen’s writing from the 1980s onwards. See (Everett 2006: 140).

³ (Wollheim 1968: 387-99).

in music and sound.⁴ To Rose, the minimal style emerged above all from Kazimir Malevich and Duchamp (and later manifested itself as a shift away from Abstract Expressionism). She presented various artists as more or less aligned with either figure (with Cage mentioned in relation to Duchamp, and Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Dan Flavin presented in an intermediate position).⁵

Rose also drew attention to an early sonic manifestation, Morris's performance work *21.3* (1964), in which he drank water during a reading of a text by Erwin Panofsky, and a tape played a sound of water gurgling whenever he poured the water into the glass.⁶ She also evoked Erik Satie and Roger Shattuck's view of how his forms can 'be extended only by reiteration or "endurance",' alongside Gertrude Stein on 'Portraits and Repetition' (1935), linking both artists to dance and the work of La Monte Young, specifically his *Dream Music* (probably the *Pre-Tortoise Dream Music*),⁷ which she compared to Andy Warhol's film *Sleep* (1963). Rose identified Satie's *Vexations* as a precedent, noting its performance by Cage and others in New York on 9-10 September 1963.⁸ Furthermore, she linked minimal art to 'the *pianissimo* we associate with, for example, Morton Feldman's music.'⁹

The emergence of the concept in the writings of Nyman and Johnson: reduction of resources, Cagean provenance and the transatlantic divide

Michael Nyman coined the term 'minimal music' in an article for *The Spectator* in October 1968, writing about the Danish composer Henning Christiansen's *Springen*, in a performance at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, with Nam June Paik at the piano, playing 'a series of parabolas traced by the fingers, arm 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....'¹⁰ The following year, in the context of an article about Harrison Birtwistle, Nyman referred to 'the new American "minimal" music,' in which 'A single idea gradually blooms, revealing a vibrating inner life (especially in Terry Riley and Steve Reich). No structure, they cry,' as something which various critics bemoaned.¹¹ In 1970-71, Nyman wrote other pieces on Reich, Riley and Young,¹² drawing attention to their engagement with Indian and African musics¹³ and identifying distinguishing aspects of the work of Reich and Glass during their first European tour in 1971 (Reich's focus on pulse, use of uniform instrument groups and consistent high volume, Glass's use of instruments of mixed timbres, rhythmic unison, and extended melodic patterns altered by permutation, addition or subtraction).¹⁴ Nyman also began to develop aspects of the American/European dichotomy which would inform his book *Experimental*

⁴ (Rose 1968: 274-97).

⁵ (Ibid.: 275-8).

⁶ (Ibid.: 284).

⁷ 'Dream Music' was also a rival title for the Theatre of Eternal Music, so the term was used widely. See (Grimshaw 2011: 100).

⁸ (Rose 1968: 286-90).

⁹ (Ibid.: 296).

¹⁰ (Nyman 2013a: 43).

¹¹ (Nyman 2013b: 80).

¹² (Nyman 2013c: 203-208, [in which Nyman discusses Riley's *Keyboard Studies*]; Nyman 2013d: 211-24).

¹³ (Nyman 2013e: 117-9).

¹⁴ (Nyman 2013f: 119-120).

Music, published three years later. He contrasted a ‘ruthlessly single-purpose’ American creative mind with a European one which is ‘accumulative, allusive, all-comprehending,’ which ‘takes what it can from any available source and transforms it into yet another component for his highly personalised expressive system,’ with Stockhausen as the epitome of this, his appropriations including the work of Reich, Riley and Young.¹⁵

The concept of the minimal in music was developed further by Nyman and by composer Tom Johnson, in a series of reviews for the *Village Voice* from 1971,¹⁶ in which Johnson responded favourably to the ‘minimal, slow-motion’ approach of highly static works by Alvin Lucier, Stuart Marshall and Mary Lucier.¹⁷ He characterised Glass’s *Music with Changing Parts* (1970) and part of *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971-4) as ‘hypnotic music’ which is ‘highly repetitious, and employs a consistent texture, rather than building or developing in traditional ways,’¹⁸ and identified for the first time in print Young, Reich, Riley and Glass as a group: the ‘New York Hypnotic School’ (to which he linked Gavin Bryars, though felt Frederic Rzewski, Philip Corner and David Behrman to be rather different). Despite clear differences between the composers, Johnson felt all wrote a music which was ‘flat, static, minimal, and hypnotic;’ the primary focus on sound made their work more accessible to a lay audience than other contemporary music.¹⁹ He went on to examine Riley’s move towards tonality and free improvisation and Reich and Glass’s borrowings from African and India traditions,²⁰ and between mid-1973 and late 1974 ‘hypnotic’ morphed to ‘minimal’ and ‘minimalism’ (for a while used interchangeably), though Johnson then felt the movement to be declining.²¹ Nonetheless, he also identified works of Eliane Radigue, Charlemagne Palestine, Pauline Oliveros, Harold Budd, Michael Byron, Tom Nixon and Rhys Chatham with the early movement.²²

Nyman incorporated a section on minimal music in his 1974 book *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, which was founded upon stark Anglo-American/continental European oppositions prefigured in various writings and pronouncements of Cage and Feldman in which the ‘experimentalists’ were argued to have rejected the whole history of European music as individual expression since the Renaissance.²³ In a

¹⁵ (Nyman 2013g: 116).

¹⁶ Beginning with Tom Johnson, ‘Steve Reich’s “Drumming”’ (Johnson 2002b: 20). Reproduced in *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972-1982*. (Johnson 2002a, Digital Edition), (page numbers refer to those of the PDF, not marked on the actual pages). Available at <http://www.editions75.com/Books/TheVoiceOfNewMusic.PDF> (accessed 10 March 2019). In this review, however, Johnson did not use the term ‘minimal’ (or ‘hypnotic’).

¹⁷ (Johnson 2002c: 23).

¹⁸ (Johnson 2002d: 24).

¹⁹ (Johnson 2002e: 29).

²⁰ (Johnson 2002f: 35); (Johnson 2002g: 44); (Johnson 2002h: 45).

²¹ See (Johnson 2002i: 58-9); (Johnson 2002j: 66-7); (Johnson 2002k: 79); and other subsequent articles.

²² (Johnson 2002j: 66-7); (Johnson 2002g: 44); (Johnson 2002l: 174); (Johnson 2002i: 58-9); (Johnson 2002m: 107).

²³ (Nyman 1999). Nyman himself pointed out (in interview with the author, City, University of London, 29 May 2018) that he was asked to write this book as part of a bigger series on ‘experimental’ architecture, theatre, painting, dance and cinema published by Studio Vista (all the other books were first published in 1970-71), and when required to come up with a definition of ‘experimental music’ at relatively short notice, used that supplied by Cage.

systematic examination of the work of Young, Riley, Reich and Glass, he noted its use of tonal material, compared to earlier indeterminate work, but also observed Young's roots in the serialism of Webern, concluding from this that 'the origins of this minimal process music lie in serialism.'²⁴

In 1971, Nyman had also celebrated the British 'post-Cardew scene,' including John White, Gavin Bryars, Brian Dennis, Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton, Hugh Shrapnel and Alec Hill, comparing some of their techniques with various forms of visual art, including minimal art.²⁵ In the 1974 book he distinguished these figures from their American counterparts, who had engaged with various non-western musics, while the British composers drew upon the Western classical tradition for source materials, and used less restricted processes.²⁶ Such oppositions were also explored at by figures associated with the British movement, including Brian Dennis and Michael Parsons.²⁷

That minimal music came out of a Cageian tradition was implicit in Rose, developed further in Nyman's book, and then also by Joan la Barbara in a piece on various artistic practitioners operative in SoHo, NYC,²⁸ and in an important paper given at the Institut für Neue Musik und Musikerziehung, Darmstadt by Dieter Schnebel in April 1977, also concentrating on the Fluxus movement (with which he had been loosely involved himself),²⁹ and Young's work with this.³⁰ A Cageian provenance featured in short early references to minimal music in wider histories by Arnold Whittall and Siron.³¹ Whittall, like Rose, looked back to Satie's *Vexations*, influential on the young Cage, a connection later made by Clare Polin.³² However, in Reich's influential 1968 essay 'Music as a Gradual Process,' in which he proposed that it was essential that musical processes be audible, he had criticised the inaudibility of the processes in Cage's indeterminate music.³³

Difference and repetition, and anti-teleological music

The writer Ivanka Stoianova, who argued that practically all music involves repetition, linked minimal music to other European developments, including the music of Messiaen, which she also linked to Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* and to the anti-teleological *Produktionsprozesse* as theorised by Dieter Schnebel in the context of his own *Maulwerke* (1968) and *Schalmusik* (1973).³⁴ Ernstalbrecht Stiebler had also compared the weightlessness of minimal music to the last movement of Schoenberg's Second Quartet.³⁵

²⁴ (Ibid.: 139-40).

²⁵ (Nyman 2013h: 126-31).

²⁶ (Nyman 1999: 157-71). It was not even clear that Nyman regarded the British composers' work (even pieces such as Skempton's *Waltz* [1970] or Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* [1971]) as 'minimalist.'

²⁷ (Dennis 1974: 1036-8); and (Parsons 1976: 815-8).

²⁸ (La Barbara 1976: 252-75).

²⁹ See (Nauck 2001: 71-79).

³⁰ (Schnebel 1978: 8-14).

³¹ (Whittall 1977: 211); (Siron 1981: 98-9).

³² (Polin 1989: 228).

³³ (Reich 2002a: 35).

³⁴ (Stoianova 1977: 64-6).

³⁵ (Stiebler 1978: 18, 20).

Stoianova's work constituted a systematic attempt to explore repetition more widely, drawing upon Gilles Deleuze's *Différence et Répétition*, as well as wider ideas from Kierkegaard, Freud, Ernst Bloch and Julie Kristeva. She distinguished two types: the repetition of stable elements, as in a strophic song or a rondo, which she linked to Reich's *Violin Phase*, or modifications of sonic events and their vicinity, as in some Messiaen, Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*, and Schnebel's *Produktionsprozesse*. The repetition in work of Riley, Reich and Glass was defined as '*repetition modified so as to assume the de-centralizing and non-directional movement of an iterative, non-teleological utterance*' (Stoianova's italics).³⁶ In general, this type of repetition was identified as producing a 'homogenous iterative texture, which consciously avoids any build-up of tension,' being founded instead on a type of Freudian pleasure principle,³⁷ and differed from traditional music in the rejection of narrative, directionality and functionalism.³⁸ The idea of an anti-teleological music was also developed in the writings of Schnebel and Stiebler, and later Wim Mertens.

Nyman's view that minimal music constituted a break with post-Renaissance Western music was also picked up by Whittall who, writing in 1977, argued that this music was morphing into a form of neo-tonality, and might 'give tonality a new lease of life,'³⁹ a prescient observation borne out in later music and writings.

Minimal music as the culmination of the avant-garde in the work of Mertens

Many of these threads came together in the first book-length study of minimal music by Belgian composer Wim Mertens, published in 1980 with an English translation following three years later, in which the title was modified crucially from *American Repetitive Music from the perspective of the evolution of Western European Music* to simply *American Minimal Music*, perhaps to avoid alienating an American audience.⁴⁰ Mertens recognised that musical repetition was not new, but delineated minimal music through its non-narrative and a-teleological forms, lack of dialectical musical arguments and emphasis on process, drawing upon the ideas of Stoianova.⁴¹ He also insisted that repetition was fundamental to European Renaissance polyphony (which would have disqualified it from Nyman's 'experimental' category) and earlier French and Italian music of the 14th century, and maintained that 'minimalism' was equally a characteristic of Indian, Balinese and West African music (a stronger claim than Reich or Glass might have made).⁴²

Mertens expanded and nuanced the Nyman 1974 model, presenting Young's work in three linked periods: serial (influenced by both Webern and Schoenberg), Fluxus (influenced by Cage), and repetitive.⁴³ Riley's work was linked not only to jazz and improvisation, but also Stockhausen, with Mertens arguing, for example, that Riley's

³⁶ (Stoianova 1977: 66, all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated).

³⁷ (Ibid.: 67-8).

³⁸ (Ibid.: 69-71).

³⁹ (Whittall 1987: 211).

⁴⁰ *Amerikaanse repetitieve Muziek in het Perspectief van de Westeuropese muziekevolutie* (Mertens 1980), translated as *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Mertens 1983).

⁴¹ (Ibid.: 16-17, 88-91).

⁴² (Ibid.: 12-15).

⁴³ (Ibid.: 19-32).

Spectra (1959) for three wind and three strings clearly borrowed from Stockhausen's *Zeitmasse*.⁴⁴ Mertens paid greater attention to Riley's *Keyboard Studies* than *In C* (with which they share techniques but with more restricted pitch content),⁴⁵ and emphasised continuities with subsequent freer works. His chapters on Reich and Glass were straightforwardly descriptive of their developing methods, if more detailed than in any previous writings. But, like Nyman and Stoianova before him, Mertens had no doubt of the modernist provenance of repetitive music, which was:

..the final stage of an anti-dialectic movement that has shaped European avant-garde music since Schoenberg, a movement that reached its culmination with John Cage, even though his music has a very obvious polemical-intellectual background and orientation completely absent from repetitive music.[...] Thus 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.⁴⁶

Recognising 'how consistently composers of repetitive music have spoken out against the intellectualism of the avant-garde,' Mertens maintained that nonetheless 'they cannot escape its influence.'⁴⁷ A link between Young and Riley on one hand and Reich and Glass on the other was argued through all four composers having produced a comparable effect, entailing a type of 'non-historical time' and as such referring to 'the mythical ending of history.'⁴⁸ Mertens wrote at some length about a pre-history for this phenomenon, using Theodor Adorno's conception of the decline in the work-as-object, from Schoenberg's atonal fragmentation and alienation of form and content in his dodecaphonic works, to Webern's atomisation of material, new forms of sonic control in electronic music, and the lack of a centre in post-serial music, so that (as conceptualised by Henri Pousseur) one has a 'field' rather than a 'work.' Responses to this included Stockhausen's moment form, and aleatoricism: a mythic, non-historical conception of 'macro-time.' Repetitive music then represents the furthest remove along this line away from the traditional concept of the work.⁴⁹ Mertens' contextualisation of minimal music within a European intellectual and aesthetic tradition went further than any writer on minimal music before or afterwards.

Germanic perspectives on non-European counter-culture and postmodernism

This was quite unlike the view presented in 1984 by Swiss-German writer Hermann Danuser in 1984, who contrasted European negation and destruction of tradition with more innocent searches for new languages on the part of American composers. For Danuser, like Stiebler, Riley's *In C* and some of Glass's work were part of counter-culture, linked to pop as much as to more conventional new music.⁵⁰ Danuser developed this theme further in an influential essay published a few years later, delineating a counter-tradition from Ives and Henry Cowell, through Cage and the New York School, to Young, Riley, Reich and Glass.⁵¹ The latter were held up as exemplars of postmodernism (then a much-debated concept in German artistic and

⁴⁴ (Ibid.: 36).

⁴⁵ (Ibid.: 37-42).

⁴⁶ (Ibid.: 87).

⁴⁷ (Ibid.)

⁴⁸ (Ibid.: 91-2).

⁴⁹ (Ibid.: 95-109).

⁵⁰ (Danuser 1984: 296-9).

⁵¹ (Danuser 1987: 101-12).

intellectual circles),⁵² more so than the more iconoclastic work of Cage.⁵³ In this way La Monte Young represented a ‘postmodern’ development of Webernian stasis, compared to the ‘modern’ development in the hands of Karel Goeyvaerts and Henri Pousseur.⁵⁴

Early minimalism in the historiography of American music

A plurality of models informed the first major books on American music to feature minimal composers. John Rockwell presented Glass as the major figure and noted the composers’ success in Europe, while tracing a few Western precedents, such as the passacaglia and chaconne and pieces such as the Prelude to Wagner’s *Rheingold*, Ravel’s *Boléro* and some of Orff’s work.⁵⁵ Rockwell was more circumspect about a Cageian influence, unlike Charles Hamm, who like Danuser outlined an ‘American Avant-Garde,’ from Varèse through Antheil to Nancarrow and Cowell, Cage and Feldman, Robert Erickson and Roger Reynolds, *In C* and the work of Young, Reich and Glass.⁵⁶ The latter points also informed the third editions of Gilbert Chase’s history,⁵⁷ and that of H. Wiley Hitchcock, though Hitchcock continued to stress an influence from Webern and the New York school.⁵⁸ Hitchcock was one of the first to use the term post-minimalism, to encompass Riley’s work from *Shri Camel* (1975-6), Reich in some ways from *Drumming* onwards and definitely from *Tehillim* (1981), Glass from *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), Alvin Lucier, Tom Johnson, Harold Budd, Rzewski, Pauline Oliveros, Peter Garland and John Adams, and popular music from David Byrne and others.⁵⁹

Contexts and terminology

Other writers on minimal music at this time attempted to penetrate deeper into its aesthetics and provenance. In their book on Stravinsky, *Het Apollinisch uurwerk*, first published in Dutch in 1983,⁶⁰ Andriessen and Elmer Schönberger cited a repetitive passage from the ‘Pas d’action’ from *Orpheus* as ‘a prophetic premonition of . . . the music that Steve Reich and his followers would write twenty years later’.⁶¹ Three years later, composer Christopher Fox noted precedents for some of Reich and Glass’s innovations in Stravinsky’s *Le sacre* and the *Symphonies d’instruments à vent*, whilst drawing attention to a range of European composers engaged in related compositional work.⁶²

Composer and musicologist Clare Polin contrasted works from Young’s *Composition 1960 #7* to pieces of Reich and Glass with ‘super-organised serial music.’ Nonetheless, she perceived a tension between the desubjectivisation of minimal music

⁵² See (Tillman 2002: 75-92), for a fair if not wholly comprehensive summary of the German debate.

⁵³ (Danuser 1984: 392-3).

⁵⁴ (Ibid.: 393-7).

⁵⁵ (Rockwell 1983: 115-7).

⁵⁶ (Hamm 1983: 580-618).

⁵⁷ (Chase 1987).

⁵⁸ (Hitchcock 1988: 305-10).

⁵⁹ (Ibid.: 314-8).

⁶⁰ (Andriessen and Schönberger 1983).

⁶¹ (Andriessen and Schönberger 2006: 60-61). Reich had mentioned his interest in Stravinsky, as well as Bartók and Webern, in ‘Second Interview with Michael Nyman’ (1976), (Reich 2002b: 95).

⁶² (Fox 1986: 172-85).

and claims which were made for its fulfilling some 'human need' (a term which here seems to imply some sort of emotional content) absent from the avant-garde. Her context was more international than others, including *Vexations*, Cowell, Partch, Cage, but also composers drawing upon Asian inspirations including Debussy, Messiaen, Hovhanness and Varèse, while she speculated on influences from minimalism in Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, Berio's *Sinfonia*, and aspects of the work of Alfred Schnittke, Pärt and Vladimir Martynov.⁶³

Minimal music and neo-tonality, exoticism and iconoclasm

By the mid-1980s, most wider historians noted minimal music, but increasingly viewed it as a break with modernism and renewal of tonality, as predicted by Whittall in the 1970s.⁶⁴ Examples are the histories of Bryan Simms, Eric Salzman and Robert P. Morgan;⁶⁵ Simms was however the first major historian to incorporate seriously the work of Andriessen (mentioning briefly *De Staat* [1976], *De Tijd* [1981] and *Hoketus* [1977]), as well as Bryars, Nyman, Glenn Branca and others, while Salzman linked this tradition Weberian simplicity and economy, the sound 'objects' or masses in the work of Varèse, Xenakis, Ligeti and various Polish composers, but also the music of Arvo Pärt. Ulrich Dibelius, however, concentrated upon 'exoticism and mediation,' linking Riley and Stockhausen, viewing minimal music as a response to a desire to savour and immerse oneself in sound, a type of silent protest against the transitory nature of music, linked to psychedelia.⁶⁶

Strickland and the (American) origins of minimal music in the visual arts

Edward Strickland's monograph *Minimalism: Origins* explored music alongside the visual arts. With an almost exclusively American focus, Strickland still argued for some influence of Stockhausen on Young and Reich)⁶⁷ and also examined Yves Klein's *Symphonie monoton-silence*. This and Satie's *Vexations* were however viewed as anomalies rather than as at the head of a tradition.⁶⁸ Strickland insisted on the importance of Young as the originator, with Cage's *4'33"* a predecessor, emerging from the art of Robert Rauschenberg.⁶⁹ Young's *Trio for Strings* (1958), was notable for its dramatization of harmony through very long durations, while Riley, Reich and Glass's innovations were more in the melodic realm, through clear repetition of simple material.⁷⁰ Strickland also considered Feldman's *Piano (Three Hands)* and *Piece for Four Pianos*, both from 1957, but disqualified them as minimalist because of their emphasis on discrete musical events.⁷¹

Like Nyman and Mertens, Strickland explored commonalities between serialism and minimalism, above all stasis and antipathy towards romanticism, in the work of Young.⁷² Otherwise, he linked both Young and Riley to the art of Frank Stella,

⁶³ (Polin 1989: 226-33).

⁶⁴ Whittall's own picture was practically unchanged in the second edition of his book (1987: 210-11).

⁶⁵ (Simms 1986: 420-8); (Salzman 1988: 215-21); (Morgan 1991: 423-33).

⁶⁶ (Dibelius 1998: 475-7, 558-61, 569-70).

⁶⁷ See (Strickland 1993: 134-6, 163, 182, 184-5).

⁶⁸ (Ibid.: 32-7, 124).

⁶⁹ (Ibid.: 30-32).

⁷⁰ (Ibid.: 7, 10, 120).

⁷¹ (Ibid.: 123-4; see also 125 on Cage and minimalism).

⁷² (Ibid.: 125-9).

Donald Judd and others, while the 1968 recording of *In C* was said to be informed by the ‘rage for simplicity in the visual arts,’ and provided a type of affirmative music in a decade which saw many traumatic events.⁷³

Part 2: The Dominant Narrative since Schwarz

By 1996, when K. Robert Schwarz published what is now the standard text on minimal music for a general readership, *Minimalists*,⁷⁴ the plural interpretations outlined above had converged upon a particular historical narrative, subsequently frequently repeated elsewhere. In this narrative minimalism began with a radical period inaugurated in 1958 with La Monte Young’s *Trio for Strings*, consisting of long sustained pitches and chords (though using Weberian serial techniques). After a few subsequent pieces exploring other compositional possibilities, some closer to the world of Fluxus, Young became more uncompromising with his *Composition 1960 #7*, consisting simply of a bare open fifth ‘to be held for a long time,’ and also *Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) for Henry Flint*, in which one sound was repeated an indefinite number of times.

The most important other composer in Young’s circle was Terry Riley, who had known Young from classes at the University of California, Berkeley in 1958, and worked with him on joint projects. After developing some of Young’s ideas and use of drones, experimenting with tape loops in *Mescaline Mix* (1961) and *Music for the Gift* (1963) and, after hearing Young’s work with The Theatre of Eternal Music, Riley wrote *In C* (1964). With its incessant repetitions, underlined by a continuous beat, this ushered in a second period. Riley continued in a related vein with works such as *Dorian Reeds* and *Reed Streams* (both 1965), *Olson III* (1967), and *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1968) before moving into primarily improvisational work.

A young Steve Reich, with a certain background in serial composition, played in the premiere of *In C*. From this and earlier experience with tape loops, he composed *It’s Gonna Rain* in 1965. This and other works using phasing, including *Come Out* (1966), *Piano Phase* and *Violin Phase* (both 1967), enabled a final break with European atonal and serial traditions, as did a study of West African music soon afterwards culminating in his most extended work, *Drumming* (1971). Following this, Reich studied the Balinese gamelan, the influence of which was first manifested in *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ* (1973). With *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976), however, Reich moved away from his more austere early works towards a more extravagant and harmonically varied type of music, while retained the use of wordless vocals, a driving rhythmic pulse and ample use of repetition.

Philip Glass, like Reich, had studied for a while with Darius Milhaud, and in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, but turned against the Parisian musical scene and especially the work of Boulez at the *Domaine musicale*. He studied Indian music with Ravi Shankar and learned the principles of additive rhythms, and developed a new pared-down, repetitive idiom in his signature pieces, *Music in Contrary Motion* (1969), *Music in Fifths* (1969), *Music in Similar Motion* (1969), *Music in Eight Parts* (1969)

⁷³ (Ibid.: 143-4, 175-6).

⁷⁴ (Schwarz 1996a).

and *Music with Changing Parts* (1970), all using incessant lines in rhythmic unison, varying through additive/subtractive procedures, to be played by his own ensemble. The epic cycle *Music in Twelve Parts* (1974) featured a richer and more varied harmonic language which served as a transition to his later work. With *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) Glass achieved international prominence, now as an opera composer, and moved away from his earlier more abstract formalist aesthetic towards a more conventional musical language from *Satyagraha* (1980) onwards.

Overall, this narrative presents serialism (especially as manifested in the work of Milton Babbitt and the academic institutions in which he was influential) and 'experimentalism' as antagonistic tendencies, with minimalism developing out of the latter camp (token mention of Young's engagement with Webern notwithstanding). This view was fundamental to an influential essay by H. Wiley Hitchcock which rejected any European musical or artistic influence in favour of that of contemporary minimal visual artists such as LeWitt, Serra, Judd and Stella.⁷⁵

The dominant narrative reiterated with some additions: Lovisa, Potter, Götte and Fink

This narrative can be traced in a good deal of other literature from Schwarz to the present day, including the major monographs on minimal music which followed by Fabian R. Lovisa, Keith Potter and Ulli Götte, albeit with some nuances.⁷⁶ Published the same year as Schwarz, Lovisa's scholarly text acknowledged other figures both in and out of the USA (including Palestine and Daniel Lentz) in more depth than other commentators, and joined Danuser in linking minimal music to a postmodern aesthetic.⁷⁷ Potter returned to the modernism/minimalism link posited by Nyman, Mertens and Strickland, considering Young's debt to Webern, use of dissonance and technical procedures in early Riley and Reich, and Young and Riley's interactions with European composers, but maintaining that minimalism 'is rooted in American culture.'⁷⁸ Götte outlined a diverse 'second generation' (though made up of figures from different generations), including Adams, Nyman, Rzewski, Phill Niblock, Palestine, Goeyvaerts, Peter Michael Hamel and others.⁷⁹ He also cited precedents in work of Perotin, Dunstable and Satie, but also, more originally, the additive processes at the beginning of the last movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 or the third movement of his String Quartet op. 135, as well as tracing a line from here to Webern, taking in works of Wagner, Schoenberg, Berg, and a few of Liszt, Ravel and Messiaen.⁸⁰

Robert Fink's monograph on minimal music⁸¹ was closer to cultural studies than music history. It constitutes a hugely expanded rendition of arguments made earlier by Susan McClary, that the music of Reich and Glass is somehow a subversive force because it lacks clear tonal closure.⁸² In his rather aggressive anti-modernist, pro-

⁷⁵ (Hitchcock 1996: 308-19).

⁷⁶ (Lovisa 1996); (Potter 2000); (Götte 2000).

⁷⁷ Drawing upon (Dibelius 1989: 4-9) and (Becker 1983: 128-9), both cited in (Lovisa 1996: 128-9).

⁷⁸ (Potter 2000: 17). Potter surveys a wide range of definitions for minimal music but never clearly outlines his own (Ibid.: 14-17).

⁷⁹ (Götte 2000: 158-191).

⁸⁰ (Ibid.: 192-6).

⁸¹ (Fink 2005).

⁸² (McClary 1991: 121-3); (McClary 2000: 142-5).

consumer-capitalist polemic (echoing Thatcherite rhetoric when he says of ‘the commodity form, unremitting consumption, and pure sensation’ that he ‘will apologize for none of it – for what is the alternative?’),⁸³ Fink dismisses those who suggest that minimal music might stand outside such a culture or conversely those, like Mertens, Strickland, Elliott Carter and also Andriessen, who argue for its complicity.⁸⁴ The book embodies an extreme distillation of the familiar nationalistic narrative in Schwarz.

Stravinskian origins

The year after Fox’s article, Richard Toop had asked sardonically whether Reich’s *The Desert Music* was ‘*Les noces* all over again, with an unwelcome drop of Walt Disney thrown in?’⁸⁵ However, in 1998, Jonathan Cross looked more sympathetically at this connection, comparing Reich’s *City Life* (1995) with the final chorale of Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, in terms of scoring, parallel harmonic motion, exclusively diatonic harmony, contrary stepwise motion between highest and lowest notes, and rhythmic factors. He also made wider comparisons between Stravinsky and the music of Reich and Glass, citing primitivism, orientalism, the relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, objectivism, additive/subtractive processes, use of symmetry, superimposition of materials, but stuck essentially to the then-dominant narrative, and claimed that *In C* (and Cage’s work) ‘formed in part a critique of the received Western (European) tradition.’⁸⁶

Minimalism *contra* modernism reinforced: Taruskin, Ross, Gann

The dominant narrative has informed a diverse range of other more recent wider histories. Célestin Deliège, whose history has a strong avant-garde focus, offers just a short section on ‘American minimalism,’⁸⁷ while Richard Toop sticks to the standard narrative.⁸⁸ Richard Taruskin devotes a significant chapter in the final volume of his *Oxford History of Western Music* primarily to Young, Riley, Reich and Glass, viewing them as emerging from but transcending the avant-garde and enlisting Reich in particular for his populist anti-modernist stance.⁸⁹ The same is true of Alex Ross: in his popular history *The Rest is Noise* he argues that minimalism and post-minimalism (not least the work of Adams) are the way of the future, as opposed to European modernism.⁹⁰ The hegemonic claims for this are only sustainable if one assigns a benign, non-hegemonic role for the commercial music industry, responding to the wishes and desires of consumers rather than actively shaping these.

⁸³ (Fink 2005: xi). The earliest prominent use of the phrase by Thatcher (here ‘there really is no alternative’) was at a press conference for American correspondents in London on 25 June 1980, at <https://www.margarethatcher.org/document/104389> (accessed 2 April 2019).

⁸⁴ (Fink 2005: xi, 5-7, 18-20, 33-4, 63-6).

⁸⁵ (Toop 1987: 44).

⁸⁶ (Cross 1998: 170-4).

⁸⁷ (Deliège 2003: 631-48).

⁸⁸ (Toop 2004: 466-9).

⁸⁹ (Taruskin 2005: 351-96).

⁹⁰ (Ibid.: 391-2, 402-5).

Later histories of American unsurprisingly maintain an exceptionalist view of minimal music,⁹¹ none more so than Kyle Gann's 1997 book, in which he presents such work as closing 'The Gap' between composer and audience which he views (negatively) as a defining feature of twentieth-century music.⁹² Gann thus discusses Young with no mention of Webern, adds Meredith Monk to the primary pantheon of composers,⁹³ views Adams as more of a new romantic than a post-minimalist,⁹⁴ and presents post-minimalism itself as a multi-faceted movement unified only by diatonic tonality and a steady or motoric beat.⁹⁵

Part 3: 'Euro-Minimalism' in the Literature

But what about European composers who could be associated with minimal music? The earlier writers had divergent perspectives on the importance or centrality of such figures. We have seen how the term was coined to describe a piece by Henning Christiansen, but then how the pantheon of Nyman and Johnson became exclusively Anglo-American. Stoianova and Schnebel considered only American composers, but Stiebler connected Young, Riley, Glass and Reich to the work of Folke Rabe, Peter Michael Hamel, Luc Ferrari and György Ligeti, and compared the weightlessness of minimal music to the last movement of Schoenberg's Second Quartet.⁹⁶ These types of loose associations with music 'outside' the dominant minimal canon have existed throughout the historiography but very few writers have drawn conclusions which might challenge fixed hierarchies embedded in the dominant narrative.

Centre and Periphery

Merten's book, for all the international reach of its intellectual basis, nonetheless adheres strictly to the geographical/sociological model of 'centre' and 'periphery.'⁹⁷ This model has been applied to cinematic history, surveying the dominant view of Hollywood as the centre and 'world cinema' as the periphery.⁹⁸ A similar phenomenon can be observed in the majority of writing on minimal music. Mertens places the four main Americans in the centre, with just a brief mention of Nyman, Bryars, Andriessen, Richard Pinhas, Peter Michael Hamel, Michael Fahres, Karel Goeyvaerts, Frans Geysen and Dominique Lawalree, as well as the French group Urban Sax, and some music of Klaus Schulze, Kraftwerk, early XTC and Public Image Ltd. All of the latter were made more peripheral by Mertens' insistence that their relationship was one of technical similarity rather than aesthetic overlap.⁹⁹ Later in the 1980s, Dan Warburton created a category of 'European minimalists' for

⁹¹ As does Joseph Auner in his wider history *Music in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (2013: 278-95), though Auner does recognise some commonalities between *In C* and some music of Penderecki and Ligeti.

⁹² (Gann 1997: 184-5).

⁹³ (Ibid.: 187-212).

⁹⁴ (Ibid.: 229-34).

⁹⁵ (Ibid.: 325-51). In a book which does look critically at the concept of the 'maverick' American composer, Michael Broyles nonetheless follows a similar narrative (omitting the factor of Webern) and features a simple tripartite formulation – serial/aleatoric/minimal – of post-1945 music. See (Broyles 2004: 243-67).

⁹⁶ (Stiebler 1978: 18, 20).

⁹⁷ For a brief outline of the origins and development of these concepts, see (Scott and Marshall 2005: 61-2).

⁹⁸ See (Nagib 2006: 30-37).

⁹⁹ (Mertens 1983: 11).

Nyman, Mertens and Diderik Wagenaar,¹⁰⁰ and a more peripheral role for Ligeti, Andriessen, Pärt and John Tavener, said to have ‘brought more “classical” (or classically avant-garde) concepts of organization into the minimalist field.’¹⁰¹

While Strickland made no mention of any European composers, Schwarz devoted a final chapter to ‘Europeans: Nyman, Andriessen, Pärt.’¹⁰² Nyman and Andriessen were said to have had ‘a creative epiphany’ after hearing the work of Riley, Reich and Glass which ‘changed the direction of their compositional careers,’ while in Pärt and Górecki ‘an American musical language was made to sing with an overt (and very un-American) spirituality.’¹⁰³ However, he did note Nyman’s distance and discomfort with Reich’s appropriation of African and Asian traditions, drawing instead upon European art music in pieces from *In Re Don Giovanni* (1977) onwards.¹⁰⁴

Expanded peripheral canons

As early as 1980, an initiative was begun in Utrecht, known as the European Minimal Music Project, run by composer Michael Fahres, together with advisors Hans Emons, Mertens and Ernst Vermeulen, publishing a collection of essays in 1982,¹⁰⁵ and maintaining a database of European minimal composers, though the criteria for entry were vague, as were various of the writings.¹⁰⁶ Some writers in the 1990s did seriously consider more heterogenous contexts, and in the process suggested alternative, though always peripheral, canons. Glenn Watkins, in his rich history of twentieth-century music,¹⁰⁷ recognised that European as well as American composers alluded to East Asian musics, cited Schoenberg’s ‘Farben,’ op. 16 no. 3 (1909) and Cowell’s *Ostinato Pianissimo* (1934), and followed Nyman, Mertens and Strickland in attempting to view *In C* in the context of Boulez’s *Structures Ia*, Stockhausen’s *Kreuzspiel* and Cage’s *Music of Changes*.¹⁰⁸ He also created a new category, ‘nonpulsed minimalism,’ in which he included various works of Ligeti, as well as textural works of Karel Husa, and even Kagel’s *Transición I* (1958-60), tracing this back to works of Varèse, Stravinsky and Messiaen.

Lovisa presented a clear centre and periphery, but recognised the importance of parallel traditions and aesthetics, such as the ironic employment by Nyman of materials from Western tradition in a context more akin to popular music.¹⁰⁹ Writing on Andriessen, he relied heavily on the composer’s own words and those of a few of his circle, but nonetheless made available a more comprehensive view of the composer than any other at that stage not published in Dutch.¹¹⁰ More striking was Lovisa’s presentation on Karel Goeyvaerts: like Hermann Sabbe he saw Goeyvaerts’ *Compositie no. 4 met dode tonen* (1952) and *Compositie no. 5 met zuivere tonen*

¹⁰⁰ (Warburton 1988: 139-40).

¹⁰¹ (Ibid.: 136-7).

¹⁰² (Schwarz 1996a: 194-217).

¹⁰³ (Ibid.: 194).

¹⁰⁴ (Ibid.: 197-200).

¹⁰⁵ (Fahres 1982).

¹⁰⁶ This project is discussed in more detail in (Beirens 2005: 147-52).

¹⁰⁷ (Watkins 1995).

¹⁰⁸ (Ibid.: 572-6).

¹⁰⁹ (Lovisa 1996: 130-38).

¹¹⁰ (Ibid.: 157-77).

(1953) as minimalist works ten years ‘avant la lettre’¹¹¹ (although this assumed that the four main American composers were ‘la lettre’). Because these works were practically unknown until the 1970s, by which time Goeyvaerts had developed a pared-down modal idiom based upon repetition, Lovisa focused on this later body of work.¹¹² He also considered the work of Zoltán Jeney from the 1970s onwards (linking his *Impfo 102/6* [1978] for six antique cymbals to *In C*), the *Neue Einfachheit* movement of that decade in Germany, Pärt’s ‘tintinnabuli’ music from 1976 onwards and the work of Górecki from *Drei Stücken im alten Stil* and *Refrain* (1965).¹¹³ Furthermore, he considered the looping techniques of Erhard Grosskopf and the freer work of Hans-Karsten Raecke and Hamel as German representatives of minimal music.¹¹⁴

The other writer to develop a wider canon was Götte, who gave a moderately prominent position to Goeyvaerts and Hamel, as well as shorter vignettes on a colourful array of composers from Garret List, through Hans Otte to Horatiu Radulescu.¹¹⁵ From Andriessen, Götte considered briefly *De Volharding* (1972), *Il Duce* (1973) and *Hoketus* (1977), in terms of the relationship to Reich and Riley, but oddly not *De Staat*.¹¹⁶ From all of this, Götte delineated three categories of modern composers whose work may be linked to that of the principal minimalists: (i) ‘renegades’ who could eventually be seen as minimalists in their own right, such as Goeyvaerts and Andriessen; (ii) those who have clearly and explicitly drawn upon repetitive concepts in some works, such as Ligeti and Rzewski; (iii) those in whom one might find traces of minimalist thinking, in which category he placed Pärt, as well as Manfred Trojahn and Feldman.¹¹⁷ None of these theoretical models attached to peripheral canons have yet been pursued properly by others, but they will inform my conclusion.

‘Holy Minimalism’ or ‘Spiritual Minimalism’

Schwarz acknowledged that many would not categorise Pärt as minimalist, but claimed of *Fratres*, *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* and *Tabula Rasa* (all 1977) that ‘it was not unreasonable to assume that these three instrumental pieces were some East European offshoot of American minimalism,’ because of their ‘extreme reduction of musical means.’¹¹⁸ He used the term ‘spiritual minimalism’ to characterise the religiously-inspired work of Pärt, Górecki, Giya Kancheli and John Tavener, as he had done in a *New York Times* article in October 1993.¹¹⁹ The precise origins of this term are unclear: the earliest sources I have found are a March 1993

¹¹¹ This view is put most completely in (Sabbe 1983: 203-8).

¹¹² (Lovisa 1996: 177-85).

¹¹³ (Ibid.: 186-202).

¹¹⁴ (Ibid.: 206-230).

¹¹⁵ (Götte 2000: 178-91). Works cited by Götte include Hans Otte’s *Das Buch der Klänge* (1982), Tom Johnson’s *Four Note Opera* (1972), Wagenaar’s *Tam-Tam* (1978-79), James Tenney’s *Harmonium Nos. 4 and 5* and *Saxony No. 2* (all 1978), Joan La Barbara’s *Voice Piece: One-Note Internal Resonance* (1974), Pauline Oliveros’s *Sonic Meditations* (1974), Horatiu Radulescu’s *Inner Time* (1983), Eliane Radigue’s *Psi 847* (1973), Piero Milesi’s *Modi II* (1978-80), and many others.

¹¹⁶ (Ibid.: 181-2).

¹¹⁷ (Ibid.: 199-210). Götte also considered a range of popular music drawing upon Riley, from Brian Eno and Mike Oldfield, to some techno and other dance musics.

¹¹⁸ (Schwarz 1996a: 212-4). Nonetheless, Schwarz did add that ‘If this was minimalism, it was of a sort far removed from the rapid-fire, kinetic, pop-influenced repetitions of Reich and Glass’ (Ibid.: 214).

¹¹⁹ (Schwarz 1993).

review by Tom Sutcliffe of Jonathan Harvey's *Passion and Resurrection* (1981),¹²⁰ and a July 1993 review by Jonathan Wix of Skempton's *Lento* (1990).¹²¹ 'Holy minimalism' appeared in print at least as early as August 1992, in a review of John Tavener's *We shall see Him as He is (Ikona of the Beloved)* (1992) by Andrew Porter.¹²² David Dies, in an article interrogating the term 'spiritual minimalism,' suggests it emerged between 1984 and the late 1990s, but does not give precise references.¹²³

British minimal music

British 'minimal' composers were always both distinct from their American or Dutch counterparts and marginalised in the historiography (except that of Nyman). With little of the chromaticism of Andriessen, Nyman's music was rejected by the Hocketus group,¹²⁴ and certainly constitutes a quite distinct phenomenon. Hardly any writers mention Colin Matthews¹²⁵ and his *Fourth Sonata* (1974-5): premiered on 2 April 1976, almost eight months before the premiere of *De Staat* on 28 November, it could be considered the first orchestral piece of minimal music. Few have noted the quasi-minimal aspects of works by Christopher Fox such as *Straight lines in broken times*² (1992) or the *clarinet quintet* (1992), though the work of Steve Martland does register as a British extension of the Hague School. Virginia Anderson presents a taxonomy of "'minimal' minimalism,' 'random-process minimalism,' 'found or "trouvé" systems and "readymades",' 'systems with blurred edges,' and 'strict systems' but her focus is very narrow and factional, centring on the Cardew circle (Christopher Hobbs, Skempton, John White, Michael Parsons) and just a few early works of Nyman and Bryars.¹²⁶

Nationalism and marginalisation

Other writers were determined to marginalise non-American outsiders, especially when they might be linked to other manifestations of modernism. Fink's book has an American focus, but he says of Andriessen's *Hocketus* that it transposes 'the American pattern of static, process-driven plateaus in ascending linear sequence into his overtly modernist idiom,' and compares the work to advertising.¹²⁷ In a later essay on post-minimalism, Fink portrayed *Hocketus* as 'an attempt to rewrite music history, to construct an alternative post-minimalism in which American Pop would not triumph over, but synthesize dialectically with European modernism.'¹²⁸ Other Europeans – Ligeti, Goeyvaerts, Simeon ten Holt and Hans Otte – receive brief mentions as composers who had drunk from the American minimal fountain as an antidote to European modernism.¹²⁹

¹²⁰ (Sutcliffe 1993).

¹²¹ (Wix 1993: 419). The term also appears in (Holland 1993), and in numerous pieces of music criticism thereafter.

¹²² (Porter 1992).

¹²³ (Dies 2013: 317, 320). The term was likely used verbally before being committed to print.

¹²⁴ (Everett 2006: 145).

¹²⁵ Potter presents Matthews as one English composer (the other being Simon Bainbridge) said to have been influenced by Reich. See (Potter 2000: 249).

¹²⁶ (Anderson 2013: 87-106).

¹²⁷ (Fink 2005: 153-7).

¹²⁸ (Fink 2004: 545).

¹²⁹ (Ibid.: 542).

Taruskin presents a no less nationalistic, even imperialistic view, as revealed by his subtitle: 'Minimalism: Young, Riley, Reich, Glass; Their European Emulators.' For him, minimalism is 'the musical incarnation of "the American century"' (though recognising this to be a loaded term), and he goes on to portray Andriessen as composing minimalism with dissonant harmonies and question the association of these with political resistance.¹³⁰ His essentially sympathetic presentations of Pärt, Górecki and Tavener recognise that these musics developed independently, although this raises questions of why they were placed in a chapter with such a heading.¹³¹ Ross writes patronisingly that 'only a few European composers understood that something revolutionary was happening in American music' when Riley's *In C* was played in Darmstadt in 1969, and portrays Andriessen as a 'Europeanised' rendition of American minimalism.¹³² Later I will consider how Andriessen's relationship to American music is constructed in specialised literature on his work, and propose a new type of historical model.

¹³⁰ (Taruskin 2005: 396-400).

¹³¹ (Ibid.: 400-410).

¹³² (Ross 2007: 394-5).