

Rethinking Minimalism:
At the Intersection of Music Theory
and Art Criticism

Peter Shelley

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Reading Committee
Jonathan Bernard, Chair
Áine Heneghan
Judy Tsou

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Peter Shelley

University of Washington

Abstract

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Peter James Shelley

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jonathan Bernard
Music Theory

By now most scholars are fairly sure of what minimalism is. Even if they may be reluctant to offer a precise theory, and even if they may distrust canon formation, members of the informed public have a clear idea of who the central canonical minimalist composers were or are. Sitting front and center are always four white male Americans: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. This dissertation negotiates with this received wisdom, challenging the stylistic coherence among these composers implied by the term minimalism and scrutinizing the presumed neutrality of their music.

This dissertation is based in the acceptance of the aesthetic similarities between minimalist sculpture and music. Michael Fried's essay "Art and Objecthood," which occupies a central role in the history of minimalist sculptural criticism, serves as the point of departure for three excursions into minimalist music. The first excursion deals with the question of time in minimalism, arguing that, contrary to received wisdom, minimalist music is not always well

understood as static or, in Jonathan Kramer's terminology, vertical. The second excursion addresses anthropomorphism in minimalist music, borrowing from Fried's concept of (bodily) presence. Relying heavily on Adriana Cavarero's philosophy of vocality, differences in bodily expression are explored within and between the music of Young and Reich. The final excursion deals with objecthood itself, disrupting the commonplace that minimalism makes no political or cultural statements. Following art critic Anna Chave, I argue that tropes of masculinity have been disguised in minimalist music by the presumption of neutrality. Masculinity, however, must be redefined with the onset of the 1960s. Following Peter Stearns and Michael Kimmel, I argue for an austere, isolationist masculinity, whose presumed omnipotence produces an immanent fragility. Reich's minimalism in particular can be distinguished from that of Riley and Young on account of its recontextualization of American masculinity.

Overall this dissertation is a dissertation of difference. By attending to time, corporeality, and masculinity – subjects too often subordinated within the field of music theory – I would undermine the stabilizing and homogenizing claims implicit in the stylistic heading of “minimalism.”

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation, which ranges across a variety of approaches to minimalist music, is united by a commitment to difference. Difference, over recent decades, has grown to be an important academic concept; many scholars concerned with social justice and theories of identity have grown rightly critical of disciplinary approaches that favor the universal, acknowledging that too often this happens at the expense of those who occupy the margins. Difference has often been adopted—explicitly or implicitly—as a point of focus in order to escape the gravitational pull of universals. While it will remain important throughout this dissertation, there are two areas in which difference serves as *the* essential point of departure: stylistic definition and gender. A great deal of ink has been spilled pursuing the definition of minimalism in music, attempting to identify the essential feature or features that allow us to identify a minimalist composition as such. This dissertation will not take up a position in this debate, but instead will argue for difference in the place of sameness, for an undefined minimalism. Gender will appear throughout this dissertation both because the analyses below will often incorporate cultural criticism, and because the question of difference and definition is a question of abstraction, and, as Gayatri Spivak asserts, “the thought of gender is the first abstraction.”¹ The work of this dissertation will be more rigorously to pursue the differences within the minimalist canon and to account for them in terms of the play of gender and difference within society more broadly.

One of the hallmarks of academic work done on minimalist music has been the attempt to establish a meaningful definition, one which justifies the author’s choice of objects of analysis

¹ Gayatri Spivak, “What is Gender? What is Europe? Walking with Balibar,” The Fifth Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe (April 21, 2005), 3. Accessed 7/29/2013, http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/WP-Texts/200605-UHL_Spivak.pdf

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and extends a larger field to which the reader might employ similar methods. Part of the reason for this impulse was surely the comparative lack of familiarity with minimalism through the 1980s. Scholars today enjoy the pleasant circumstance of no longer needing to justify or defend an academic interest in minimalist music, yet the problem of definition would seem to linger. What began as a scarcely acknowledged radical compositional practice is now viewed as one of the dominant musical developments of the second half of the twentieth century. While early scholars were obliged to devote a considerable amount of time to describing minimalist music to an audience unfamiliar with it, today it is common for undergraduate music students to be able to identify and discuss at least the most prominent pieces from the minimalist repertoire. A number of minimalist compositions are now included in the canon of twentieth-century music, and many present-day composers, both inside and independent of the academy, produce work indebted to minimalism.

In spite of—or perhaps owing to—this increased prestige, there remains considerable disagreement about which composers and pieces of music should be considered minimalist. While most early scholars were faced with the problem of defining minimalism for an uninitiated readership, the twenty-first-century scholar is instead confronted with minimalism as an established, though disputed, fact. Nevertheless, it is clear from the diverse character of minimalist scholarship, from the often contradictory meanings attributed to minimalism by different scholars, that minimalism as a *fait accompli* entails not a convergence of meanings but a practical multiplicity. For some scholars, minimalism is a practice that died out almost as soon as it began, exhausted by its necessary simplicity; for others, minimalism is still amongst the most vital of contemporary practices, with at least three generations of distinguished composers. Some critics use the word “minimalism” to indicate specific aesthetic and compositional

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concerns, effectively limited in scope to American—and especially New York—composers in the late 1960s and early 1970s; others consider minimalism’s simplicity, relative especially to the New Complexity, as a sufficient criterion for definition, allowing a much more diverse set of composers to share the designation. There is no universally agreed-upon definition or delimitation of minimalism in music, and any study of minimalism in music must take account of this circumstance.

There are a number of factors contributing to the diversity of definitions of minimalism in music, but it is surely significant that the term itself easily functions in both a technical and a colloquial sense. Edward Strickland has enumerated many of the diverse deployments of “minimalism” as a term in late twentieth-century English-language discourse, including its use in advertisement and fashion, and surely every reader in an English-speaking community regularly encounters both “minimal” and “minimalist” used as generally descriptive terms, independent of any specific art- or music-historical context.² The more technical definitions of minimalism, both in the plastic arts and in music, develop from the art-critical discourse of the mid 1960s, when “minimal” emerged as the favorite of several epithets used to describe the work of a diverse collection of artists producing cool, reserved, and/or simple work. Those writing decades later on the art of the 1960s generally agree on a canon of minimalist artists: Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, and Carl Andre. Several other artists appear just as often, with occasional qualifications: Sol LeWitt and Mel Bochner are perhaps too conceptual; Anne Truitt and Frank Stella are perhaps too subjective or compositional (though Stella’s earliest stripe paintings are canonically minimalist); Agnes Martin and Eva Hesse are perhaps insufficiently geometrical;

² Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993). See especially “A,” 1–16.

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Tony Smith's and Ronald Bladen's work is perhaps too large; Robert Smithson's is perhaps too geographical; Walter de Maria's work is perhaps too referential; Richard Serra's work is perhaps too dependent upon chance. Music too has canonized a small group of minimalist composers—La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass—with quite a few composers considered occasional, partial, or peripheral minimalists, from John Cage and Morton Feldman, to Frederic Rzewski, Alvin Lucier, and Pauline Oliveros, to John Adams, Arvo Pärt, and Meredith Monk.

If one is going to look seriously at present-day definitions of minimalism, one must first acknowledge the essential problem the word “minimal” poses. To the casual or uninitiated observer “minimalism” is likely to suggest music and art that have very few components; minimalist art and music are supposed to have less of something than expected. However, acquaintance with the work so termed will trouble this casual observer: La Monte Young's *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* is both very long (indeed eternal) and very loud; Carl Andre's *Lever* involves a great number of bricks; Philip Glass's *Music in 12 Parts* has rather a lot of performers (by contemporaneous avant-garde standards), is rhythmically diverse, and is long enough that it can't even be said to fill a minimal number of discs. And yet most critics classify all of these works as minimalist.

To begin to understand this we might first consider the phenomenon of expressionism in music. For most listeners it is fairly unproblematic to think of *Erwartung* as being both Expressionistic and highly expressive, but reasonable people could be expected to disagree with the claim that *Erwartung* is *more* expressive than, for example, Beethoven's *Hammerklavier*. Expression, that is to say, is a necessary characteristic of Expressionist music, but is not a sufficient characteristic. In fact, since so much music can be understood reasonably as

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expressive—some, though not I, would go so far as to claim that music is essentially expressive—expression turns out not to be a particularly useful term for defining Expressionism.

Expressionism is the extreme example of a musical epithet that derives its meaning almost entirely from its usage rather than from its etymology. We can observe that impressionism suffers from this effect only slightly less, and that classicism suffers from it almost not at all. Minimalism suffers from a slightly different problem. We may be able to think of most music as expressive while retaining a particular meaning for expressionism, but it is far more difficult to think of most music as minimal. Even when considering mammoth pieces such as *Music in 12 Parts* it is no great challenge to call to mind pieces that surpass Glass's piece in complexity in several dimensions—even if we cannot think of a comparably great number of pieces that are as long. However, it is still very easy to recollect pieces that are less complex, or more minimal, than any given minimalist piece. Explaining why these “more minimal” pieces are still not *minimalist* is difficult and troubling. “Minimal,” or even “minimalist,” can be used in two senses: it can designate a *comparative* paucity in one or many musical dimensions, and it can designate membership in a loosely defined school of composition known as minimalism. Especially when reviewing the historical record of minimalist reception, we do well to keep this in mind. It will not be the case that any use of the word “minimal” will indicate awareness of or interest in minimalist music as a school of composition; nor need it necessarily be the case that pieces included in the minimalist repertoire demonstrate an extreme reduction of compositional content.

Many scholars and critics who turn their attention to minimalist music feel obliged to resolve this problem, even if they don't necessarily articulate its exact nature. Because it is not immediately clear which pieces are designated by “minimalism” and why, scholars and critics

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often exhibit a strong compulsion to present more or less rigorous definitions of minimalism in music. This impulse is at least partially misguided. Because minimalism is (and has been for some time) a term in common usage, most musicians approach the subject already knowing fairly well what minimalism means, even while many reasonable people will disagree about what that meaning is. The tendency then is to set about the task of proving an assumption. This is not to say that one cannot talk at all about definitions; on the contrary, it is essential that we understand each other's assumptions about what minimalism is. The trouble arises in the attempt to systematize logically the structure of the definition; that is where some scholars begin the impossible work of proving the axiom.

The position adopted in this dissertation is still more radical than the refusal to adopt a single definition of minimalism. Instead of allowing that there may be multiple correct meanings of the word "minimalism," each made coherent by a single set of unifying essential characteristics, I will adopt the tautological position that minimalism is best defined as that which is minimalist. Within this framework, there is no unifying minimalist characteristic; any two minimalist compositions may share certain compositional techniques or aesthetic qualities in common, but they may not. Thus the objective of each of the preceding analyses will not be to establish whether or not a given composition or composer is minimalist, but to understand how it relates to other minimalist objects, through attending to difference.

Although I very rarely have occasion to cite him directly, Gilles Deleuze, especially in his *Difference and Repetition*, has had a considerable impact on how difference is incorporated below.³ In Deleuze's early mature writings, the very possibility of sameness is treated with

³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

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suspicion, and when sameness is admitted to, it is derived from a foundational difference. To do this, Deleuze must argue not only that no two things are authentically identical—an easy enough proposition to accept, since even exact factory replicas occupy different spaces and are composed of different atoms—but he must also argue that each thing is internally different from itself. One can never enter the same stream twice. By extension, even difference is different from difference, since a horse, for example, is always different from itself, but it is different from a cow in a much different way. Minimalism will be treated with this in mind. There may be wide gulf between Glass and Boulez, for example, but this will not obscure the difference within minimalism, between Glass and Reich, but also between one Glass piece and the next.

The analysis of the role of gender in minimalist music will be heavily influenced by feminist theory—particularly the work of Gayatri Spivak, Anna Chave, and Adriana Cavarero. Deleuze, it should be noted, was not a feminist—there is some debate as to whether his philosophy is even sympathetic to feminism⁴—but his insistence that difference occupy the privileged epistemological position is transparently useful for feminists, so long as one takes care. For caution I will look to Gayatri Spivak for inspiration. Spivak does not thematize difference to the same extent that Deleuze has, but it nevertheless remains an operative concept within her work. Much of Spivak's work grows out of an awareness of the necessity of error and the conceptual incapacity adequately to account for difference. In part because the staggering diversity of reality always escapes the necessary generality of language, all inquiries must begin with what Spivak variously refers to as mistakes or errors: structural decisions made in order to

⁴ For differing perspectives on this issue, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), and Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

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begin an argument that are not only unverifiable, but to some degree inaccurate. This deconstructive stance affects the present study in two important ways. First, as we will see underlined in our discussion of the emerging definitions of minimalism, in order to define what minimalism is we must already know what it is. (This is verified by the historical record.) By extension the homogenizing effects of a stylistic category such as minimalism are to some significant degree illusory. We know that a given set of compositions is minimalist, and there is a tendency to infer from this that these pieces therefore share some common discoverable feature. The deconstructive beginning acknowledges the error implicit in identifying minimalism; in order to talk about this historical body of work we must have a concept to unify it as an object of study, but the act of unification is justifiable only on a pragmatic basis. This does not mean we are wrong to talk about minimalism—far from it—but only that we must take account as best we can of the “mistake” of naming.

The second, more ethically pressing site to observe this sort of initializing mistake is in the arena of gender. Amongst the original battlegrounds for feminism was (and regrettably, often still is) the pernicious belief that women are inferior to men. But while this notion has been largely quashed in progressive, informed society—at least to the point where expressing belief in the superiority of men is rather seriously taboo—a broader notion, of which it is merely a particularly corrosive representative, too often goes ignored. This is the notion that women are united not in their difference from men, but in their similarity to each other. Most progressive feminists, Spivak amongst them, reject this assumption of essentialism as well. Within Spivak’s generally deconstructive method, however, we must acknowledge the founding mistake of naming women as such (as well as naming men), an act which must to some degree essentialize.

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The structures of our language compel essentialism, so we must use language strategically and cautiously.

Although this dissertation will not undertake to resolve the different practical and theoretical definitions of minimalist music and art into a “correct” formula, it will take as foundational an at least partial correspondence—perhaps most safely expressed by the term “relationship”—between early minimalist practice in the plastic arts and in the musical arts. The milieu in which minimalism developed was one of close contact between musicians and other artists (in particular sculptors). Terry Riley and La Monte Young worked together with Robert Morris (who also constructed a gong for a La Monte Young performance), Walter de Maria initially secured housing for Young in New York, Richard Serra and Sol LeWitt performed with Steve Reich and purchased Philip Glass’s manuscripts. Further, many early minimalist performances took place either in loft spaces or art galleries and museums, attracting crowds that were shared with or borrowed from the plastic arts; minimalism followed in the young tradition of New York avant-garde music in this respect, with composers attracting crowds composed of sculptors, painters, dancers, and filmmakers more often than of musicians. These facts, however, can lead in two directions: on the one hand, the shared circumstance may recommend art-critical terminology to music critics more on the grounds of a shared discourse than of any significant aesthetic similarity between the two disciplines; on the other hand, that same shared circumstance may reasonably be expected to foster a shared aesthetic commitment between closely associated sculptors and composers. As a preferred term of designation, minimalism’s staying power for the corresponding plastic and musical movements suggests, but cannot definitively confirm, that at least part of the conditions of the latter case have been met, and indeed one could go so far as to assert that *some* aesthetic correspondence between minimalist

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plastic art and minimalist music is self-evident. However, rather than taking either of these possibilities to be foundational, it is the hope of the current author that the work presented below will support the latter thesis: by discussing and detailing the connections between minimalist music and minimalist sculpture and painting this dissertation will provide evidence of aesthetic and conceptual cross-pollination.

Because the bulk of the influential criticism written on minimalist plastic art centers on sculpture, we will only on occasion discuss minimalist painting. With a few notable exceptions, minimalist plastic art tended toward the three-dimensional, even in the case of painting, where wide stretchers became the norm. As we will see, the minimalist critical bias toward three-dimensional art was largely based in a desired break from the recent artistic past. Sculptors Donald Judd and Robert Morris were particularly explicit about their desire to wrest artistic practice from the legacy of cubism. In many cases this impulse manifested itself formally, as sculptors deliberately eschewed anything that might be mistaken for an artistic formal decision. In art-critical terms, we can express the formal innovations of minimalism as a preference for arrangement over composition, for unity over relationality, or, in Sol LeWitt's terms, for logic over reason.

Since the adoption of the word "minimalist" to describe minimalist music and art was a relatively early accomplishment—1965 in art criticism, 1972 in music criticism, though both of these early uses of the term are rather ambiguous, as we will see below—our musical focus will be on early minimalism (roughly from 1960 to 1975). For ease of understanding, we will follow

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Keith Potter in generally using the terms “minimalist” and “minimal” to refer to output from this period, and “post-minimalist” and “post-minimal” for similar output which is dated later.⁵

The opening chapter of this dissertation engages the history of the reception and definition of minimalist music. It therefore differs from most historical accounts of minimalism by attending only very little to events of the 1960s. The most influential writings on minimalism date from 1972 or later, beginning with the critical writings of Tom Johnson in *The Village Voice*, followed by Michael Nyman’s advocacy for Steve Reich. K. Robert Schwarz and the translation of Wim Mertens’s work introduce minimalism into the broader academic public in the early 1980s. Even with the arrival of monograph studies on minimalism in the 1990s and 2000, authors remained preoccupied with identifying the common features that would allow their readers to identify a minimalist composition. Chapter 1 explores and challenges these definitions, offering a critical look at the academic history of minimalism.

Performing similar work with the reception and definition of minimalist sculpture would greatly distend the second chapter of this dissertation. Although minimalist music has waxed in popularity amongst scholars in recent years, the body of literature on minimalist music is still easily dwarfed by the collection of publications on minimalist sculpture. While music critics and scholars were still showing reluctance to accept minimalism into the canon, art historians were beginning to position it as *the* important development in American art of the second half of the twentieth century. This is surely in part owed to the general reluctance of the academic music community to endorse the most recent developments in our field, but it also reflects American

⁵ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16.

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plastic art's unique relationship to narrative history. Chapter 2 will discuss the relationship between minimalist sculpture and theories of modernism and postmodernism.

When the words “minimal” and “minimalist” art began to make their way into the art-critical lexicon of 1960s, it was in large part in reaction to the realization of American art critic Clement Greenberg's predictions regarding the formal reductivity of advanced modernism. Richard Wollheim first brought the expression “minimal art” to critical prominence through an article of the same name, although he did so in what seems to have been complete ignorance of *actual* minimalism, writing instead on the development of abstraction and the avant-garde.⁶ Barbara Rose quickly adopted the expression—amongst several others—to describe the rise of the cool in advanced American art, as artists turned increasingly not only toward formal reduction, but toward emotional and expressive reduction as well.⁷ Each of these articles testifies to the fact that while minimalism itself (as it is retrospectively understood) may have been a radical practice, reduction was approaching ubiquity, and had been doing so for some time. For Greenberg, this is a story of gradual formal reduction, and many critics look upon minimalism as the logical next step, or even conclusion, of this narrative, in spite of Greenberg's vehement and public objections. Many subsequent critics, in particular Hal Foster, have argued that minimalism also serves as the initiation of postmodernism in art, an issue Chapter 2 will also examine.

For better or worse, the ideas that have come to dominate the reception of minimalist sculpture in the 1960s are those of Michael Fried, especially they appear in his “Art and

⁶ Richard Wollheim, “Minimal Art,” in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1968), 387–399. Reprinted from *Arts Magazine*, January, 1965.

⁷ Barbara Rose, “A B C Art,” in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock etc. 274–297. Reprinted from *Art in America* (October–November 1965).

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Objecthood.” Fried’s own aggressive dislike for minimalism makes this a curious circumstance, and yet it as much the admires as the detractors who have adopted his argument as *the* important contemporaneous critique. This curious circumstance suggests that while many advocates for minimalism have dismissed the conclusions drawn by Fried—most specifically that minimalism poses a dire threat to the possibility of art—they have found his observations and arguments compelling. This dissertation follows in this tradition, offering some sharp criticisms (especially where gender is concerned), but making use of this important document, rather than allowing its flaws to render it useless. The final three chapters of this dissertation extend from important points in Fried’s argument.

Chapter 3 will take as its subject the matter of time in minimalism. Minimalist music’s often long durations and its slow rates of change have led many critics and theorists to comment upon the time of minimalism, with authors often going so far as to associate minimalism with the contradictory condition of temporal stasis. Fried’s comments on the time of minimalist sculpture might strike the reader as somewhat surprising, since sculpture, whether minimalist or not, usually does not change over time. Fried’s comments though are formal in nature, having to do with the process of perception as it relates to form, and consequently are not entirely dissimilar to the question of time in minimalist music. In order to explore this connection I rely principally on Jonathan Kramer’s *The Time of Music*, which has laid important groundwork for discussing the relationship between musical form and the perception of musical time.⁸ After several analyses, Chapter 3 will conclude with a few comments on the connection between form,

⁸ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer, 1988).

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process, production, and reproduction, suggesting a matrix of concepts closely related to gender which must be traversed with caution. Many of these threads will reemerge in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 will take the space of minimalism as its theme. Fried's theory of theatricality entails the encounter between the viewer and the sculptural object. Every such encounter involves a spatial relation between two or more bodies. For Fried this simple necessity is the strongest evidence for minimalism's theatricality; relationality requires accepting that the artistic encounter is not identical with the art object itself, but instead relies on the particularity of the viewing subject and the space in which the encounter takes place. We can observe that relationality in minimalist art is present in Donald Judd's advocacy for and Fried's dismissal of the category of interest: interest, borrowing from Hannah Arendt, is a function of relation, of inter-est.⁹ Adriana Cavarero, a feminist philosopher whose work draws upon Arendt, has developed a theory of human relation that derives from the voice as an indicator of human uniqueness, pointing out that the relational encounter is not merely about the presence of two generic things, but about the presence of two unique and distinct people. This characterization poses a serious challenge to Fried's theatricality, and I would like to consider, in Chapter 4, how Cavarero's writings on the voice can illuminate our understanding of vocal presence in minimalist music.

Finally, Chapter 5 will look at the bare material qualities of minimalism in sculpture and in music. Fried hinges his reading of minimalism on the claim that a minimalist sculpture is merely an object, that it fails to make the transcendental leap into art. The material status of minimalism soon becomes accepted wisdom, with postmodern critics such as Foster using

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 182.

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Fried's critique to foreclose the possibility of a subjectively based reading of minimalism. By focusing on Carl Andre—and by reading Steve Reich's music alongside Andre's work—we will bring the orthodox reading of minimalism as objectively neutral and non-referential into crisis with the implications within Reich's and Andre's work of a referential relationship to the urban scene of late-industrial labor politics. From here we will incorporate Anna Chave's incisive feminist reading of minimalist sculpture in order to refine a reading of Andre and Reich to understand their labor politics in terms of masculine gender performance.

Overall this will be a dissertation on difference. Stylistic epithets such as “minimalism” tend to have a cohering effect on our perception of music, which must overall be understood as a useful thing. Because we can conceptualize a group of music as minimalist we have the ability to theorize its relation to the flow of history. But while “minimalism” grants us stylistic coherence, it also tends to erase incoherence, obscuring internal differences by imposing a unifying term, and incoherence is surely just as important to our experience of music. This dissertation will look closely at the different ways coherence has been imposed upon the group of musicians most often brought under the heading of minimalism, but I dedicate most of its pages to pulling apart this coherence, looking at how minimalist compositions differ from one another, and how they differ from the general image of minimalism as blank, static, and neutral.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING MINIMALISM IN MUSIC

Because the central aim of this dissertation is to compare minimalist works in different media, it is necessary to address the question of what minimalism means. To begin this work we will examine the historical record, in order to understand both how the term arose and how the composers we now think of as minimalist were initially received. From here we will have a better capacity to engage more recent scholarly definitions of minimalism. These later definitions are more frequently at odds with one another, but it will not be the work of this dissertation to resolve these contending claims. Indeed, we will take as foundational the proposition that a precise definition of minimalism is desirable neither for our present interests nor generally.

THE EARLY RECEPTION

Both Keith Potter and Edward Strickland have looked closely at the historical origins of the application of the word minimalism to music.

¹ Strickland locates in Barbara Rose's "A B C Art" the first instance of a critic describing new music as "minimal" when she includes Morton Feldman and La Monte Young in a list of artists of various media engaged in the minimal *Zeitgeist*.² Rose's article, though, is not directed at a serious discussion of music, and certainly not at an attempt to establish categories for specific musical styles, which leads Strickland correctly to consider Rose's comments more as foreshadowing than as a terminological origin. Instead, Potter and Strickland both agree that *Village Voice* critic Tom Johnson, in 1972, is the first to use the word "minimal" as a musical

¹ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially 2–3. Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), especially 241–253.

² Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 241.

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classification. Potter also points out a review published in 1968 by Michael Nyman entitled “Minimal Music”—Strickland does not seem to have been aware of this admittedly obscure article—but rightly notes that there is no useful correlation between this early use of the term and its current categorical meaning.³ Nyman’s 1968 article is by no means as theoretical as Richard Wollheim’s “Minimal Art,” but the two articles share a broad use of the term and a lack of interest in establishing or delimiting any sort of stylistic school. Nyman does not elaborate explicitly on why he titled his essay “Minimal Music,” but the breadth of music discussed—from The Fugs to Cornelius Cardew to Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik—suggests an affinity with Barbara Rose’s *Zeitgeist* sense of “minimal.” The strongest thread connecting Nyman’s “Minimal Music” to other discussions of minimalism, whether in the plastic arts or music, is not the specific musical selections or even any broad aesthetic similarities, but rather Nyman’s interest in the theatricality of each of these performers, and the necessity of that theatricality for their success. In this instance Nyman identifies the same development in the production of culture that Michael Fried analyzed in “Art and Objecthood,” though Nyman is approbative where Fried is not.⁴ In any case, Nyman’s early use of the word “minimal” bears only a coincidental relationship to what is now termed minimalism in music.

Another critic from whom “minimalism” does not quite arise is Donal Henahan, a music critic for *The New York Times*, who used the phrase “minimal art” in a discussion of Reich’s compositional practice in 1970: “With a singleminded fervor, Mr. Reich is still obsessed with

³ Michael Nyman, “Minimal Music,” *The Spectator* 221/7320 (Friday 11 October, 1968), 518–519.

⁴ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 148–172.

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taking his minimal art as far as it can be taken, and without diluting its abstract purity.”⁵

Henahan’s propensity for puns, however, as well as the brevity of his own style make it difficult to determine whether his use of this expression is strictly descriptive, derisive, allusive of art criticism, or an attempt at categorization. Strickland’s analysis is surely accurate: “Henahan thus extended Rose’s analogy [of minimal art] to music other than Young’s ... though still not in a specifically denominative manner.”⁶ It is also worth noting that a year earlier Henahan aligned minimal art with Webern and nonrepetition.⁷ Henahan, who was generally dismissive of minimalism in music, seems uninterested in establishing a rigorous theoretical reading of any sort of minimalism.

In 1970 Nyman conducted an interview with Steve Reich (published the next year) in which the two briefly discuss possible terminological categorizations for Reich’s music up to that point.⁸ Reich expresses a preference both for “Live/Electric” and for “pulse music.” (“Pulse music” comes from a Donal Henahan review, in which he—mistakenly or otherwise—refers to all of Reich’s output with the title of a single piece.) At the time, the only terms Reich felt compelled to distance himself from were “‘avant-garde’, ‘experimental’ or ‘modern’, all of which are deadly.”⁹ Nyman uses the word “minimum” in regard to Reich’s compositional materials, but it is clearly used for convenience of description, and does not appear in the brief

⁵ Donal Henahan, “Steve Reich Presents Program Of Pulse Music at Guggenheim,” *The New York Times* (May 9, 1970) 15.

⁶ Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 241.

⁷ Donal Henahan, “Repetition, Electronically Aided, Dominates Music of Steve Reich,” *The New York Times* (May 28, 1969) 37.

⁸ Michael Nyman, “Steve Reich, Phil Glass,” *The Musical Times* 112, no. 1537 (March, 1971) 229–231. Nyman indicates in his brief introduction that the interview was conducted in the summer of 1970.

⁹ Michael Nyman, “Steve Reich, Phil Glass,” 229.

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discussion of categorization.¹⁰ The Nyman interview is also important as an early instance of placing Young, Riley, Glass, and Reich in an exclusive category, though Nyman proffers no generic epithet; they are linked through a theme that would become important in Nyman's subsequent *Experimental Music*:

One generation after Cage, they have replaced silence by a completely unbroken continuum, improvisation and indeterminacy by freedoms within severely circumscribed limits, and the multi-sensory experience with a completely new experience of time, largely by building their music against constants. LaMonte [*sic*] Young uses drones, Terry Riley a fixed pulse and tape loops, Philip Glass movement in parallel motion, and Reich himself unvarying dynamics, pitch and timbre.¹¹

Nyman includes in his brief description of this new phase in avant-garde music his countrymen, Maxwell Davies, Birtwistle, Goehr, and Cardew. However, the canonical quartet of American minimalists (not defined here as such) are alone amongst the post-Cage Americans Nyman lists.

Richard Foreman also explicitly discusses—however briefly—Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass as composers sharing a common aesthetic.¹² Foreman is principally interested in making a comparison between the films of Michael Snow and Glass's music, and while he does comment briefly on the connection between minimal art and Glass and Snow's work, he does so to establish a negative example. Foreman makes the unusual argument that Glass and Snow express a connection to a sort of background Spirit (a concept which he loosely appropriates from the philosophical writings of G. W. F. Hegel); for Foreman, minimal art contrasts with his conception of minimal music by being fundamentally nihilistic. Other composers are included only in a parenthetical aside as also taking part in the aesthetic project Foreman attributes to

¹⁰ Michael Nyman, "Steve Reich," 230.

¹¹ Michael Nyman, "Steve Reich," 229.

¹² Richard Foreman, "Critique: Glass and Snow," *Writings on Glass: Essays, Interviews, Criticism*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 60–79. Reprinted from *Arts Magazine* 44, no. 4 (February 1970), 20–22. Page numbers are taken from *Writings*.

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Glass and Snow. The only composers listed are Steve Reich, La Monte Young, and Terry Riley, which by no means indicates exhaustion of a set. Foreman also includes “filmmakers Ken Jacobs, Joyce Wieland, Ernie Gehr, Hollis Frampton; and also Yvonne Rainer in dance, Ken Kelman and [Richard Foreman] in theater.”¹³

Tom Johnson’s first critical use of the word “minimal” dates nearly four years after Nyman’s “Minimal Music,” from an article on Stuart Marshall, Mary Lucier, and Alvin Lucier.¹⁴ Johnson does not make any attempt here to categorize the Luciers or Marshall as “minimalists” or their art (musical or, in Mary Lucier’s case, not) as “minimal”; instead the use of the term “minimal” in this article is purely descriptive. “Minimal” appears only once outside of the article’s title, applied not to music itself but to the slow use of images: both Alvin and Mary Lucier’s pieces were visual, Mary’s entirely so. Insofar as Johnson’s article was meant to describe minimal use of imagery, Marshall, whose piece as described by Johnson seems best to fit any current definition of minimalist music, was apparently included in the discussion only because he took part in the concert under review.

Only one week later Johnson published a column on Philip Glass, using the term “hypnotic” rather than “minimal” to describe Glass’s “rich and sensual” sound, “because [the music] is highly repetitious, and employs a consistent texture, rather than building or developing in traditional ways.”¹⁵ The word “minimal” does not appear in this article. It becomes clear later

¹³ Richard Foreman, “Glass and Snow,” 85.

¹⁴ Tom Johnson, “The Minimal Slow-Motion Approach: Alvin Lucier and Others,” in *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982* (Eindhoven: Het Appolohuis, 1989), 31–33. Originally printed in *The Village Voice* (March 30, 1972).

¹⁵ Tom Johnson, “Philip Glass’s New Parts,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 33–35. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (April 6, 1972). Johnson briefly discusses *Music with Changing Parts* and *Music in Twelve Parts*.

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that same year that when Johnson used the word “hypnotic,” he referred only to those four composers now considered canonically “minimal.” In September 1972 Johnson published a column entitled “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass” in which he advocated for the adoption of the term “hypnotic music” to categorize this loose association of composers.¹⁶ Indeed, in what may be the earliest published piece of criticism to deal extensively and exclusively with these four composers under a single rubric (Frederic Rzewski, Philip Corner, David Behrman, and Gavin Bryars, though similar in important respects, are all excluded on various grounds), Johnson introduced the term “minimal” only to suggest that “hypnotic” is both more accurate and more useful: “‘Hypnotic’ is probably the best word for this music, because it comes closest to describing the effect that it has on the listener. The music never entertains or stimulates in an overt way. It simply lulls, hypnotizes, and draws him into its world.” Johnson did not, as Strickland suggests, dismiss the use of the word “minimal” generally.¹⁷ Johnson used “hypnotic” to refer to a particular style, and “minimal” to refer to a purely technical phenomenon: “minimal” indicates “the very small range of contrast within [Young’s, Reich’s, Riley’s, and Glass’s] pieces. The pitches, rhythms, and colors presented in the first few minutes usually define a specific kind of music, and the remainder of the piece will not depart very far from that.”¹⁸ Minimal music uses a minimal amount of contrast, relying for its content on those elements which are introduced in the “first few minutes”; Hypnotic music, over and beyond these minimal qualifications, also “lulls” and “hypnotizes” the listener.

¹⁶ Tom Johnson, “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 43–45. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (September 7, 1972).

¹⁷ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 243.

¹⁸ This and subsequent quotations from: Tom Johnson, “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass,” 45.

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When we consider the infrequency with which Johnson used either of these designations—hypnotic or minimal—over the next few years we are forced to conclude that it did not strike the critic as particularly important whether one called this music one thing or another. Between “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass” in 1972 and “The New Reich: Steve Reich” in 1975, Johnson wrote seven articles for *The Village Voice* dealing directly with the canonical four minimalists, using the word “minimal” not once (in any of its variations) and “hypnotic” only a single time.¹⁹ Johnson does, however, use “minimal” to describe Eliane Radigue’s spare, serene electronic music, which seems to share with canonical minimalism only its “minimal material,”²⁰ and the term reappears again in a survey article to designate one of the many compositional approaches available to modern composers.²¹ When discussing Charlemagne Palestine’s tape pieces in 1974, Johnson finds in them “perhaps the most severe form of musical minimalism I have yet encountered. Sometimes it is difficult to hear whether the sounds are changing at all.”²² Palestine’s vocal and piano music, Johnson goes on to

¹⁹ “Hypnotic” appears not as a stylistic designation but in its pedestrian adjectival function: “Those performances, with their hypnotic qualities and their extreme subtlety, can do good things for the listener and his soul.” In Tom Johnson, “A La Monte Young Diary: April 1974,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 133–136. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (August 1, 1974). The other articles in question are also found in Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music*: “Terry Riley Returns to Tonality,” 72–74 (April 12, 1973); “‘In C’ in Concert: Terry Riley,” 75–76 (May 3, 1973); “Steve Reich Tries out Two Works,” 77–79 (May 24, 1973); “A La Monte Young Diary: Feb. 1968–June 1973,” 89–93 (July 26, 1973); “Philip Glass in Twelve Parts,” 126–128 (June 13, 1974); “A La Monte Young Diary: July 1973–April 1974,” 130–133 (July 25, 1974).

²⁰ Tom Johnson, “Minimal Material: Eliane Radigue,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 70–72. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (March 29, 1973).

²¹ “And we are not dealing with the evolution of one school, but a burgeoning of activity in many new directions at once: maximal approaches, minimal approaches, cross-cultural approaches...” Tom Johnson, “New Music: A Progress Report” in *The Voice of New Music*, 104–106. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (January 3, 1974).

²² Tom Johnson, “Charlemagne Palestine: Electronics, Voice, and Piano,” in *The Voice of New Music* 108–111. Originally publishes in *The Village Voice* (January 31, 1974).

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report, shares this subtle yet stubborn relationship to change, suggesting that the epithet “minimalism” applies just as well to the rest of Palestine’s output as it does to his tapes. Each of these uses is consistent with the understanding of “minimal”—as distinct from “hypnotic”—laid out in “La Monte Young, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass.”

In an article on David Behrman (whom Johnson had only a year ago denied membership into the “hypnotic school”), Johnson again writes about “minimalism” rather than merely “minimal” music.²³ However, though minimalism has demonstrably grown in importance and coherence by this point in Johnson’s criticism, the aim of this article is not to foretell minimalism’s future but to announce the beginning of its passing. This assessment is echoed in the summer of the next year in a review of a performance of an early version of Steve Reich’s *Music for Eighteen Musicians*.²⁴ Even in these eulogies Johnson’s conception of minimalism must be distinguished from a definition of a style or school. The minimalism Johnson sees passing out of New York avant-garde music is not the specific stylistic or aesthetic practice of Young, Reich, Riley, and Glass—hypnotic music—but those technical features termed minimal in his earlier article on hypnotic music. Johnson lists, in addition to his four hypnotic composers and Behrman, Sergio Cervetti, Rhys Chatham, Harley Gaber, Charlemagne Palestine, and Laurie Spiegel as prominent examples of those composers who were in the process of becoming post-minimalists, of having moved beyond minimalism in favor of increased event density, change, and content. (It is noteworthy however that Johnson’s eulogy for minimalism corresponds fairly well with important changes identified by Potter as the beginning of post-minimalism.)

²³ Tom Johnson, “David Behrman: A 1974 Summary,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 156–159. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (December 30, 1974).

²⁴ Tom Johnson, “The New Reich: Steve Reich,” in *The Voice of New Music*, 182–185. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (June 9, 1975).

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Here Johnson's conception of minimal music—now termed minimalism—is still in the strict, adjectival sense: music with a minimum of content or incident. Though he may be credited for introducing the term to music-critical discourse in America, it is clear that he used the term neither to designate a specific set or school of composers nor to indicate a distinct aesthetic phenomenon, but instead to discuss one compositional tendency amongst many. We will see below that many present-day authors feel compelled to explain why much pre-modern or non-Western music is not minimalist; in Johnson's use of the term, no such distinctions are necessary since minimalism is a question solely of technique and content.

Since our current study focuses on minimal music from 1965 to 1975, it is important to understand how Johnson, as the first critic to discuss New York music as “minimal,” thought of minimalism. We have seen the genesis of his use of the term, but his work that precedes the word itself also sheds light on what this word meant for him. Though Johnson did not begin using the word “minimal” critically until March of 1972, his first article as music critic for *The Village Voice*, published in December of 1971, took as its subject Steve Reich's *Drumming*, a piece then recently completed and now frequently dubbed minimalist.²⁵ Johnson remarks on the piece's joyousness and warmth—terms surely new to criticism of Reich's music—as well as on the changes in Reich's work that inspire this change in critical reception: “Like most of [Reich's] work, the music moves ahead very gradually, one subtle little shift at a time, but the shifts are less predictable and more interesting than in his tape pieces, where machines are often in control.”²⁶ Johnson also remarks that for him, “the most gratifying thing about ‘drumming’ [*sic*]

²⁵ Tom Johnson, “Steve Reich's ‘Drumming,’” in *The Voice of New Music*, 26–27. Originally published in *The Village Voice* (December 9, 1971).

²⁶ Tom Johnson, “Steve Reich's ‘Drumming,’” 26.

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is that it achieves a human quality which I sometimes find lacking in Reich's work. Although there was a lot of amplification going on, the volume was never uncomfortable, and the effect was not as dependent on electronics as much of Reich's music is."²⁷

Johnson appends a brief postscript to this article when it is reprinted in his collection of criticism:

"Drumming" marks the real beginning of Steve Reich's composing career, and this article marks the real beginning at [*sic*] my tenure at the Village Voice, and this was probably the first occasion that any of the minimalist composers were taken seriously by any of the New York press. Many things were beginning, and it is appropriate that these paragraphs should now be the beginning of a book as well.²⁸

Here we can see that much of what we are treating in this dissertation as the core of minimalist composition is considered by Johnson, *ex post facto*, to be Reich's juvenilia.

The claim, made over a decade and a half after the article was originally written, that Johnson's *Village Voice* review of *Drumming* was the first serious critical acknowledgement of minimalism, is contradicted by the critical record. Though *Village Voice* critic Leighton Kerner dismissed Reich's *Livelihood* as an "old, worn-out, once amusing collage of words, syllables, and noises,"²⁹ and *The New York Times*' Henahan was, as we have remarked, less than enthusiastic about minimalism generally and Reich in particular, Carman Moore—Johnson's immediate predecessor as new music critic for *The Village Voice*—was warmer in his reception of Reich's music. In a 1966 review of an early performance of *Come Out*, Moore describes

²⁷ Tom Johnson, "Steve Reich's 'Drumming'," 26.

²⁸ Tom Johnson, "Steve Reich's 'Drumming'," 27.

²⁹ Leighton Kerner, "Peter Pan and Dada," *The Village Voice* (September 16, 1965). In this article Kerner is dismissive of the entire concert under review—as he tended to be of avant-garde music generally—describing it as "another occasion for amazement at the assiduous timidity—or is it consistent lack of imagination or ability?—of so many would-be composers in the face of the vastness of sonic resource at their disposal in the field." The program also included James Tenney, Alvin Lucier, and Gordon Mumma.

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Reich's music as "utilizing simple means to a complex end."³⁰ More interesting for our purposes, though, is Moore's remark relating *Come Out* both to industrial society and Indian music:

Elements such as rock and roll and the fan belts of large machines are of our time and in a sense experientially validate and clarify Mr. Reich's strident, reiterative work, though on one level Mr. Reich's work suggested a Raga exercise, distorting and distorting to incandescence.³¹

Nine Months later Reich made use again of the Park Place Gallery to perform, this time with live musicians, and again Moore remarks upon the minimal use of materials, without referring to them as such: "Mr. Reich's unifying element – in an age where materials of a piece are usually in constant asymmetry and contrast – is repetition," and "the fact that one can be surprised by the yield of one simple phrase of music comes as a surprise."³²

In 1969 Moore reviewed a performance by violinist Paul Zukofsky of Reich's *Violin Phase* and Glass's *Strung Out*.³³ Though the review was generally positive, especially regarding Zukofsky's support of and participation in the avant-garde, Moore is less effusive with respect to

³⁰ Carman Moore, "Park Place Electronics," *The Village Voice* (June 9, 1966). It is also notable that Moore, like Reich, was once a student of both Hall Overton and Luciano Berio.

³¹ Carman Moore, "Park Place Electronics."

³² Carman Moore, "Park Place Pianos," *The Village Voice* (March 23, 1967). The pieces named by Moore at this performance are *Four Pianos*, *Improvisation on a Watermelon*, and *Saxophone Phrase*; none of these titles appear in Reich's list of compositions. In an interview with William Duckworth, Reich explains that *Four Pianos* is an early version of *Piano Phase*, written for four electric pianos. *Improvisation on a Watermelon* is likely derived from the music Reich composed for the film *Oh dem Watermelons* (1965), but in the Duckworth interview Reich simply refers to this piece as "an improvisation." The music for *Oh dem Watermelons* (<http://youtu.be/lvs0-nPNha8>) employs heavy tape-looping, but is unsystematic and does not employ phasing. Reich confirms that *Saxophone Phrase* is piece we now know as *Reed Phase* (1966). See William Duckworth, *Talking Music* (Schirmer Books: New York, 1995), 299. Throughout his article Moore uses the word "phrase" where we would expect him to use the word "phase," and since Reich himself frequently used the latter term in describing his compositional technique from this period, it is likely that this error results only from Moore mishearing the composer.

³³ Carman Moore, "Zukofsky," *The Village Voice* (May 1, 1969).

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the compositions themselves, though it is Glass who fares the worst. Moore comments again on the severity of means employed in compositions:

The style of these two composers is similar in that they work short tonal tunelets over and over, with syllable stress changes and round-like counterpointings, into full-blown pieces (length-wise, at any rate). Of the two, Mr. Reich's clarity and logic appeals [*sic*] to me much more than Mr. Glass's sudden wandering.³⁴

Moore's concluding comments on the compositions reflect familiarity (or at least sympathy) with Reich's "Music as a Gradual Process": "The aesthetic of this style of music seems to involve the transporting of the compositional laboratory process to the stage."³⁵ Moore's reviews of Reich's and Glass's works in this period stop short of fully endorsing them, but it is clear that they were taken more seriously than juvenilia would have been. Further, they indicate both that what would come to be considered the music's minimal quality was, at this point in history, novel (whereas by the time Johnson took over Moore's post, minimal techniques were common), and that the character of the music involved more than a simple lack of diversity of resources.

Both Young and Riley had also been reviewed positively in *The Village Voice* prior to Johnson's 1971 review of *Drumming*. In her 1964 review of a concert by Young entitled "Welcome to a Presentation of Dream Music," Jill Johnston lauds Young's "Transcendental Purity," and places the composer in the tradition of Morton Feldman, though she notes that he occupies the opposite end of the dynamic spectrum.³⁶ In 1965 art critic David Bourdon offered a mostly descriptive review the next year of Terry Riley's collaboration with Ken Dewey,

³⁴ Carman Moore, "Zukofsky."

³⁵ Carman Moore, "Zukofsky." In Reich's words, "What I'm interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing." Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, ed. Paul Hillier (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

³⁶ Jill Johnston, "Music: La Monte Young," *The Village Voice* (November 19, 1964). Of particular interest to the discussion to follow is Johnston's overt Orientalization and sexualization of Young's music.

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“Sames.”³⁷ Though Bourdon warns readers that “Riley’s compositions usually run much longer [than an hour],” the review is both professional and respectful, supporting the claim made by Keith Potter that Riley, like Young were taken very seriously by New York artists in the 1960s.³⁸

When Michael Nyman returned to the term “minimal” in 1974 it was by way of concluding his narrative of experimental music.³⁹ To Cageian Multiplicity, the Fluxus composers (including Young) contrasted singularity. Minimal music, in turn, combines Fluxus’s focus on the singular with a new focus on determinacy. Nyman’s conception here is similar to Johnson’s in that there is an interest in controlling and minimizing the form and content of the music, but Nyman goes further by associating minimalism with a return to determinacy. Nyman repeats his preference for the American cohort of Young, Riley, Glass, and Reich, making it apparent that he has a relative definition of “determinacy” in mind: Riley’s pieces in particular incorporate a great deal of improvisation, though always within limits.⁴⁰ Riley’s constrained improvisations, while not fully determined from the outset, still lie a considerable distance from Cage’s multiplicity; it is not difficult to understand why Nyman would hear this new music in terms of determinacy. But because Nyman’s understanding of minimal music is fundamentally one of relation—especially relation to the past—he understands minimal music as originating in Young, and descending through Riley, Reich, and Glass.

³⁷ David Bourdon, “Art: Friends with Bail Money Should be Watching,” *The Village Voice* (December 30, 1965).

³⁸ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 133–136.

³⁹ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 139–171. First edition printed 1974.

⁴⁰ As he did briefly in his earlier interview with Reich, Nyman divides his chapter on minimal music into a section on the four Americans and a section on English composers; the division is more rhetorical than geographical, however, as evinced by his discussion of Rzewski in the latter section.

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In the same year, Joan La Barbara made use of the same grouping of composers—Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass—to map out a brief history of American avant-garde music.⁴¹ By the time of her article, the association of these four composers seems to have become commonplace: “La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass have been linked together in a school of composition based on repetition and exploration of minimal amounts of material.”⁴² La Barbara, who focuses here on the works of Glass and Reich, does not discuss “minimal” as an epithet for the music in question, but does suggest “steady state,” a term which she uses to designate what others have called minimalism’s lack of teleology (see below). However, La Barbara’s concluding paragraph sheds some light on why “steady state” is at least partly inappropriate for minimalism.⁴³ In Reich’s phasing pieces, La Barbara comments on the momentary excitement the listener experiences while the performers shift from one phase to the next. In Glass’s music, she directs the listener toward the shifting accents. In both cases, the emphasis is on the very gradual changes within the music, revealing that the music is only comparatively steady. One might say that Reich and Glass compose steady state music in much the same way that Riley composes determinate music: it is a question of emphasis and precedent, not form or structure.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Joan La Barbara, “Philip Glass and Steve Reich: Two from the Steady State School,” in *Writings on Glass*, 39–45. Reprinted from *Data Arte* 13 (Winter 1974). Page numbers taken from *Writings*.

⁴² La Barbara, “Philip Glass and Steve Reich,” 39.

⁴³ La Barbara, “Philip Glass and Steve Reich,” 45.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that by 1979 the consolidation of Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass seems to be a *fait accompli*. Even a critic as relatively uninformed as Art Lange had noticed and adopted this trend in the critical literature. See Art Lange, “Chronicle, 1977–1980,” in *Writings on Glass*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (1997) 87–93. This is a collection of three columns written by Lange for the *Chicago Chronicle*. The column in question was published in 1979.

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Wim Mertens's *American Minimal Music* is the first attempt to develop a systematic understanding of minimal music from an aesthetic position.⁴⁵ Tom Johnson used the term “minimal” to designate a consistently small amount of material, and “minimalist” to describe a method of composing in a “minimal” fashion, while “hypnotic” occupied a more specific aesthetic position in his thought. Nyman, in *Experimental Music*, began the work of solidifying minimalism into a specific group of composers, although he did not limit the cohort to the four Americans who received pride of place in his chapter on minimalism and who increasingly were being thought of as a school of composers. Mertens, by limiting his discussion to Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass, and by taking minimalism seriously as a cultural enterprise, lends much more substance to the supposition that these four composers are *the* important minimalists.

In *Experimental Music*, Nyman constructed a stylistic link between minimalism and Webern, via Young, as well as between minimalism and Cageian experimentalism, but remained largely uninterested in aesthetics. Mertens broadens these endeavors in two directions: first, he looks to tie minimalism to the tonal tradition, thus reaching back before Cage or Webern; second, he looks to understand minimalism in relation to contemporary culture, and in particular in relation to recent trends in European philosophy.

Mertens identifies the primary characteristic of minimal music as “the extreme reduction of the musical means the four American composers we are here concerned with use in their

⁴⁵ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, trans. J. Hautekiet (London: Kahn & Averill, 1983). Mertens's work relies in part on Ivanka Stoianova's “Musique répétitive,” which briefly explains her thoughts on Riley, Glass, and Reich. Because Stoianova's article has made little direct impression on the American music-theoretical community, and because it ignores Young, we will limit our discussion of it to its effect on Mertens's work. See Ivanka Stoianova, “Musique répétitive,” *Musique en jeu* 26 (February, 1977) 64–74.

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works.”⁴⁶ But unlike Johnson, who saw minimal practice as one fairly broad compositional perspective shared by quite a large number of composers, Mertens argues for the coalescence of minimal music into the cohort of the four composers in his book’s subtitle—the same group for whom Johnson reserved the label “hypnotic.” Mertens then must take care both to explain away similar minimal practices as inauthentic and to defend his selected label against imposters. Likely in deference to Ivanka Stoianova, “repetitive” music is deemed an equally suitable label—throughout the book “minimal” and “repetitive” are used interchangeably, in spite of the problems this causes with respect to Young—but “acoustical” and “meditative” are found wanting.⁴⁷ Similarly, a number of contemporaneous European composers and ensembles, as well as several renaissance and non-European practices, are dismissed on various stylistic and aesthetic grounds.

Though Mertens’s initial definition of minimalism is a question of technique, he soon makes it clear that his interests extend elsewhere. The use of minimal, repetitive compositional techniques leads to a negative relationship with what Mertens calls teleology: “The music of the American composers of repetitive music can be described as non-narrative and a-teleological.”⁴⁸ The terminology, if not the exact structure of the argument, is borrowed from Stoianova. For Stoianova, the a-teleology of repetitive music results not from a complete lack of telos, but from its repetitive structure. Repetitive music adopts repetition as its own goal: “The ‘goal’ of the

⁴⁶ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 11–12.

⁴⁷ Ivanka Stoianova, “Musique répétitive.” One of the many conflicts in Mertens’s book arises from his twin allegiances to Stoianova’s essay and Nyman’s book. This conflict manifests itself in the problematic status of Young, who is excluded from Stoianova’s essay but central to Nyman’s historicist understanding of minimalism. Mertens opts to follow Nyman in including Young, which often conflicts with the methodology he borrows from Stoianova.

⁴⁸ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 17.

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repetitive statement, non-directional and non-teleological in itself, is the organization and the configuration of repetitive movement as such.”⁴⁹ Mertens, on the other hand, aligns teleology with a goal as such, and argues that minimal music lacks any goal, even the goal of goallessness. This stricter, if less theoretically sound, position initiates a series of problematic synonyms with which Mertens establishes a rough history of European music. Teleology is equated with narrativity (by which Mertens indicates the dramatic flow of music toward and away from a climax), which is in turn equated with the dialectic: “Thus, Western music is essentially *dialectical*: development follows from the presence of a conflict between opposites and finally leads to a situation of synthesis, in which conflicts are entirely or partially resolved.”⁵⁰ While Stoianova defines lack of teleology positively (as music whose goal is to have no goal), Mertens proffers a negative definition, and though negativity seems more suitable to the construction of the concept of a-teleology, Mertens’s definition suffers from the lack of specificity. After all, while much nineteenth-century music follows a dramatic contour that corresponds to Mertens’s conception of the dialectic, this does nothing to explain why minimalism’s lack of narrativity is necessarily non-dialectic (in other words, supposing narratives are dialectic does not imply that non-narratives are non-dialectic). Further, even accepting the equation of dialectics and narrativity, this formulation brings us no closer to understanding the line Mertens has drawn between his four minimalists and the other composers whom Tom Johnson indicated with the term, such as David Behrman, Eliane Radigue, and Charlemagne Palestine, nor does it distinguish minimalism from post-tonal practice generally. For Mertens, however, this lack of

⁴⁹ “Le ‘but’ de l’énoncé répétitif, non directionnel et non téléologique en soi, c’est l’organisation et la configuration du mouvement répétitif comme tel.” Stoianova, “Musique répétitive,” 73.

⁵⁰ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 17.

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specificity is not seen as a drawback, but as a strength. While Stoianova is at pains to distinguish repetitive music from other avant-garde practices (especially that of Xenakis), Mertens looks to draw equivalences, particularly with Cage.

It is likely that Mertens's collapse of teleology and narrativity into the dialectic results from his reading of Adorno. Mertens extrapolates his history of Western music from Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*, arguing alongside Adorno that the development of the twelve-tone method coincides with the culmination of a crisis in the relation of form and content in music.⁵¹ Schoenberg definitively challenges the dialectical resolution Mertens finds in traditional tonal music by refusing to resolve the specific into the general, thus leaving form and content to persist in a negative relation.⁵² Again alongside Adorno, Mertens argues that the fundamental role the negative dialectic plays in Schoenberg's music creates insurmountable problems for the status of the musical work itself: because there is no ultimate resolution of the component parts, there is no totalized form, which in turn means there is no work as such.⁵³ Schoenberg, and much of modernity with him, takes part in a phase of musical production that is aesthetically and ethically distinct from nineteenth-century Romanticism—Mertens's dialectic music—because of its use of negative dialectics, its refusal to resolve the individual into the general (or content into form).

After Schoenberg, music enters a phase Mertens terms “anti-dialectic”; the struggle between form and content is laid to rest as the two are fused: “it is clear that repetitive music can

⁵¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

⁵² The simplified historicist argument Mertens relies upon here is much more complicated in Adorno. See, for example, Rose Rosengard Subotnik, “Adorno's Diagnosis of Beethoven's Late Style: Early Symptom of a Fatal Condition,” in *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 15–41.

⁵³ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 88. This theme runs throughout Adorno's chapter on Schoenberg, but see especially Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 29–31.

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be seen as the final stage of an anti-dialectic movement that has shaped European avant-garde music since Schoenberg [*sic*], a movement that reached its culmination with John Cage.”⁵⁴

Minimal music is worth studying, from Mertens’s perspective, exactly because of its position in the post-Schoenbergian avant-garde as the most recent and (apparently) clearest example of anti-dialectic music. Minimalism’s apparent relative clarity is likely due to its literalism (as Michael Fried might have said). Mertens hears so-called dialectic (that is, tonal) music as narrative, and therefore representational.⁵⁵ Minimal music, on the other hand, “stands only for itself,” to borrow Mertens’s quotation of Ernst Albrecht Stiebler.⁵⁶ Minimalism, of course, is not alone in the category of anti-representational music, it is merely the most obviously so. Indeed Mertens, now following Lyotard’s critique of Adorno, argues for a three-step history of Western music:

“*musica ficta*,” or representational, tonal music; “*musica fingens*,” or Schoenberg’s autonomous music of the negative-dialectic; and “*musica figura*,” “music that represents nothing, but refers only to itself,”—that is, for Lyotard, Cage; and for Mertens, the American minimalists as well.⁵⁷

Minimalism’s eschewal of representation—which in Mertens’s terms is equivalent to its anti-dialecticism, as well as to its non-narrativity and a-teleology—suggests to Mertens a connection to what he terms “libidinal philosophy,” by which term he indicates the work of

⁵⁴ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 87.

⁵⁵ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 16–17 (fn), 88. The definitions of representation in these two moments in Mertens’s text are somewhat at odds. In the former case, he takes representation in a literal sense (program music is the exemplary case), while in the latter he clearly means it to have a looser definition. For our purposes, the latter meaning is more appropriate.

⁵⁶ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 88.

⁵⁷ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 105–106. See also Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 35; and Jean-François Lyotard, “Adorno as the Devil,” trans. Robert Hurley, *Telos* 19 (1974), 133.

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Gilles Deleuze and Jean-François Lyotard.⁵⁸ The association is doubly fortuitous, for Deleuze takes philosophical representation as his principle conceptual problematic; Lyotard, at the same time, engages in a direct critique of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music*, and does so in political and ethical terms that are deliberately aligned with Deleuze's work. Through a strange nexus of Lyotard, Deleuze, Adorno, and Freud (whom he borrows directly from Stoianova), Mertens argues that the fundamental aesthetic and political project of minimal music is utopian—and therefore harmful. First, Mertens recalls (and misunderstands) Lyotard's pessimism with regard to classical Marxist rhetoric on revolution. Lyotard is critical of what we might term Adorno's hystericization of revolution, his conception of revolution as a dark, chaotic tunnel between two stable states. For Lyotard (and for Deleuze as well), revolution is the desired state itself. Mertens misunderstands this as defeatism in the face of the increasing ubiquity of capital; while Lyotard is fundamentally sympathetic to Adorno's cause (though critical of his methods), Mertens reads him as antagonistic. Second, Mertens follows Stoianova (following Freud) in associating minimalist repetition with Thanatos, the death drive, and therefore with a libidinal force that works against the ego. For Lyotard on the other hand, who like Deleuze would wrest libido from Freud's Oedipal grasp, revolution is closely linked to the flows of libido, of desire, broken free from the channeled flows of capitalism. Third, for Deleuze—especially the Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition*, which is one of Mertens's two sources for the philosopher—libido is

⁵⁸ Wim Mertens also occasionally refers to the work of Jacques Derrida, in spite of the fact that Derrida's thinking, even as Mertens cites it, is often at odds with the points Mertens is trying to make with Lyotard and Deleuze. For this reason, we will omit Derrida from the present discussion. The work by Lyotard that Mertens cites, was, according to Robert Hurley, "published in the wake of Deleuze and Guattari's [*Anti-Oedipus*:] *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie, Vol. I*." While not all of Lyotard's work stands in close agreement with Deleuze's, in the limited context with which Mertens concerns himself the association is not at all problematic. Robert Hurley, "Introduction to Lyotard," *Telos* 19 (Spring 1974), 124–126.

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contained, classically (Platonically) through representation; the political project of Deleuze's philosophy is to free libido from representation.⁵⁹ For Mertens it is a small step from Deleuze's painstaking and intricate critique of representation to the claim that minimalism's lack of representation, coupled with its libidinal repetition (in the service of the death drive), constitutes the same utopianism Mertens mistakenly attributes to Lyotard. Fourth and last, Mertens mobilizes Adorno's association of the suspension of time with anti-historicism to argue that minimalism's utopianism is itself anti-historical—in spite of the fact that it is only through hearing minimalism historically that he can arrive at this conclusion. For Mertens, all of this taken together is damning for minimalism, which like all anti-dialectic music “is not a solution but a symptom of the disease.”⁶⁰

If all of this taken together strikes the reader as excessively acrobatic, it is surely because Mertens reads libidinal philosophy through the bifocals of Adorno and Freud (Stoianova). Those familiar with Deleuze will not be at all surprised to find that reading Deleuzian concepts with a Freudian lens yields problematic results, and since the work by Lyotard in question is explicitly critical of Adorno, one must expect these problems to multiply. Put briefly, Mertens's critique of minimalism was predetermined by the alliances he infers between Adorno/Freud and serialism on the one hand, and Deleuze/Lyotard and minimalism on the other. Because Mertens sees these alliances simply (as equivalences), and because his own allegiance is with the former, he is fated

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Mertens other citation is Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). This critique of representation is maintained and more explicitly linked both to repression and capitalism in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984).

⁶⁰ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 124.

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to condemn minimalism. Mertens fails to think of representation outside of a representational context—this is evident even at the outset, when he debates which term best represents the music in question—which prevents him from evaluating Deleuze and Lyotard, and therefore (because of the alliance Mertens insists upon) minimalism, on their own terms.

RECEPTION SINCE 1980

When critics first began reviewing the music of Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass, they did so without intending to establish the existence of a school of composition. When Reich and Glass performed together there was the expected comparison, but rarely did considerations expand beyond the context of the concert itself. In the early 1970s, as more composers began to write in a reductive idiom, and as Reich and Glass increased in notoriety, it became more useful for critics to draw comparisons, both because it helped to explain why this new reductive approach to composition had increased in prevalence, and because Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass served as better points of reference as they became better known and respected. Thus we see from Tom Johnson through Nyman and on to Mertens an increased concern with establishing a better defined category of minimalism in music, which for all three critics helped to render recent developments in art music intelligible.

Of course critical and scholarly responses to music are neither static nor predetermined. While we find in Mertens an attempt to present these four American minimalists as a school of composition, when we turn now to the academic response to minimalism, beginning with K. Robert Schwarz's advocacy for Steve Reich's music, we can expect to encounter both the assumption that Mertens's categorization is "correct" and an unease with this same assumption. In every case we do well to bear in mind that minimalism is not an Idea; it does not exist as a

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concept out of history, but instead has been and continues to be created and adapted as critics, scholars, and musicians write about it. While it remains crucial to approach definitions of minimalism critically, our project is not to measure the divergence any particular definition might have from the truth. Rather, our interest is in understanding how these definitions function to arrange our contemporary concept of minimalism.

In between the publication of *American Minimal Music* and its translation into English in 1983, K. Robert Schwarz introduced Steve Reich to American music scholars.⁶¹ Like Nyman's *Experimental Music* and Mertens's *American Minimal Music*, Schwarz here is in large part concerned with describing new music to an audience that hasn't yet made its acquaintance, though the depth of Schwarz's analysis is notable. By far the largest part of this lengthy article is dedicated exclusively to understanding the development of Reich's compositional career from 1965 to 1980, but Schwarz does include some discussion of minimalism more generally, in part to provide context for Reich's compositions, and in part to recommend greater scholarly attention to new music.

Schwarz's definition of minimalism is not entirely dissimilar from Tom Johnson's:

Minimalism, whether in art, music, or theatre, is an aesthetic which deliberately and severely restricts the materials and resources that the artist, composer, or dramatist employs in his conceptions. It is an art which focuses on small details of structure or concept, and then magnifies these to form the basis of an entire work. As Reich has said, "By restricting oneself to a single, uninterrupted process, one's attention can become focused on details that usually slip by." ... For the sake of attempting to make some stylistic generalizations about the music of Reich, we will accept the label of "minimalism" for his work, but with one important qualification: most of the following generalizations concerning minimalism,

⁶¹ K. Robert Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process: Part I," *Perspectives of New Music* 19, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1980 – Summer 1981), 373–392. K. Robert Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process: Part II," *Perspectives of New Music* 20, no. 1/2 (Autumn, 1981 – Summer 1982), 225–286.

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while applicable to Reich, are only viable in relation to the music he composed up to 1971.⁶²

The crucial difference, which distinguishes Schwarz not only from Johnson, but from Nyman and Mertens as well, is the mention of “process.”⁶³ Process, and especially the identifiable use of a single process, provides a reference point for the rest of Schwarz’s essay, and it is the discussion of process that enables Schwarz to distinguish between Reich’s music up to *Phase Patterns* (1970) and the rest of his output: these earlier pieces all employ a single process, as well as a constant timbre and dynamic level, while the later pieces begin to mix processes, as well as to change timbre and dynamics. In short, the focus on process offers, for Schwarz, a clear division between minimalism and post-minimalism; this accounts for Schwarz’s preference for 1971 over Johnson’s later and more approximate date for the transition.

Schwarz shows little interest in establishing a defined cohort of minimalist composers, but he does mention in passing an affinity between Reich and Philip Glass and Terry Riley. Schwarz’s identification of conspicuous and singular process as a core element of minimalism illuminates the sympathy with Glass, but Riley would seem to be included on more generally historical or stylistic grounds—that is, the brief overlap in their careers, as well as their similar (though markedly different in terms of degree of rigor) use of tape loops and repetition—than through reference to Schwarz’s explicit understanding of minimalism. Indeed, though Schwarz makes no indication that he is familiar with Stoianova’s “Musique répétitive”, the two authors

⁶² K. Robert Schwarz, “Steve Reich: Part I,” 376.

⁶³ Mertens too wrote about minimalism and process, but in his case the term is borrowed from Adorno and is meant to distinguish between the work-as-process and the work-as-object. In this case “process” indicates the necessary incompleteness—the negativity, in Adorno’s terminology—of modernist compositions. The unfortunate coincidence with Reich’s terminology has led to some confusion, exhibited for example in Timothy Johnson’s “Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?” to be discussed below.

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were likely considering the same basic repetitive element when they drew these three composers together. Further, this basic similarity explains why Young receives no consideration from either author—though in his subsequent book on minimalism, Schwarz would revise this position. Regardless, it is clear that at this early phase, Schwarz’s understanding of minimalism went beyond a mere paucity of content or variation. These minimal components must be used in systematic—or as Nyman had said, deterministic—fashion.

Schwarz’s later conception of minimalism, as reflected in his book *Minimalists*, is more ambivalent.⁶⁴ Schwarz still explicitly links minimalism to a reduction of musical elements—“Minimalist music is based on the notion of reductions, the paring down to a minimum of the materials that a composer will use in a given work”⁶⁵—but the singular focus on process and its concomitant dynamic and timbral stasis is gone. This allows Schwarz to expand from Reich (with Glass and Riley in the periphery) to what he terms the “Fab Four,” the quartet of minimalists constituting Tom Johnson’s hypnotic school. However, the generality of his definition compels Schwarz to cite precedents of minimal music—Satie’s *Vexations* and the beginning of Wagner’s *Das Rheingold*, for example—which in turn must be explained as still not properly minimalist. The result is a replication of Mertens’s discussion of reductive music that is nonetheless not minimalist that makes use of Nyman’s genealogy of experimental music. Thus Young, whom Schwarz omitted from his early article on Reich, is returned to the place allotted him by Nyman as the link between minimalism and Cage. By implication, minimalism is defined in part as a return to determinacy in the avant-garde. (It is curious, however, that Schwarz then parenthetically suggests *4’33”* as the prototypical minimalist composition, in spite of its

⁶⁴ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, London: Phaidon, 1996

⁶⁵ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 9.

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dependence both on chance operations in composition, and on the indeterminacy of its realization.)⁶⁶

When Tom Johnson restricted his hypnotic school to Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass, he did so on compositional and aesthetic grounds. Several other contemporaneous composers were set aside not because they were deemed unimportant or inferior, but only after consideration of how well their music fit Johnson's definition of "hypnotic" music. For Schwarz, the collection of composers to be studied is a matter of received wisdom, making it difficult to infer whether composers such as David Behrman or Charlemagne Palestine are excluded on grounds of inferior quality or importance, or a lack of correspondence to proper minimalism, or simply for being non-canonical. We cannot suppose from Schwarz's text whether these composers we now tend to think of as peripheral are excluded through choice or custom. Meredith Monk, the beginning of whose career in New York coincides with that of Reich and Glass, receives some attention in *Minimalists*, but for reasons not entirely clear appears alongside John Adams as a post-minimalist, which position implies some historical subordination to her more prominent contemporaries. What is particularly perplexing about this formal decision is Schwarz's complaint that Monk is so often slighted by critics and historians, though Schwarz's focus on Monk's later work, from the 1980s and beyond, as well as her younger age relative to other early minimalists, alleviate this perplexity.

All of the authors discussed above have been concerned to a greater or lesser degree with the problem of defining the music we now call minimalist, and we have witnessed a transition, from Carman Moore's earliest reviews of Reich's and Glass's music to Schwarz's *Minimalists*,

⁶⁶ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 11.

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from the concern for seeking out a name adequate to the task of representing the music under discussion, to the concern of defining an established term. Rarely, though, is definition focused on so closely as in the writings of Kyle Gann and Timothy A. Johnson.

In his “Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism,” Gann proposes eleven characteristics of minimalist music: static harmony, repetition, additive process, phase-shifting, permutational process, steady beat, static instrumentation, linear transformation, metamusic, pure tuning, and the influence of non-Western cultures.⁶⁷ It is immediately clear that the items on this list are not all to be expected in a single piece: “This is hardly a complete list of techniques and features of minimalist music, but it does constitute a family of character traits. No minimalist piece uses all of these, but I could hardly imagine calling a piece minimalist that didn’t use at least a few of them.” Gann’s list is useful without being limiting; a longer list would risk becoming comically unwieldy, but minimalist pieces do not need to conform to any set number of characteristics. In short, Gann’s list is more descriptive than definitive. The advantages and limitations of this system are apparent: on the one hand, there is a great deal of flexibility afforded to the critic; but on the other hand, the definition or description is not at all concise, and it is not clear why such diverse considerations ought to fall under the same minimalist rubric. In order to overcome, to some extent, this limitation, Gann adds a twelfth trait that also illuminates the similarities between the previous eleven: audible structure. Indeed, from some perspectives, all eleven of Gann’s earlier categories can be characterized in terms of the audibility of the

⁶⁷ Kyle Gann, “Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism,” *Minimal Music: Maximal Impact* (November 1, 2001) <http://newmusicbox.org/article.nmbx?id=1521> (last accessed May 9, 2011). Also available in Kyle Gann, “Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism,” in Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner ed., *Audio Culture: Reading in Modern Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004) 299–303.

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structure, where “audibility” is understood as a function of the competence of the listener. And this, ultimately, is the weakness of Gann’s definition of minimalism: in “The Era of Audible Structure, 1960–1980,” the audibility of structure is strongly contingent upon the listener’s musicianship. We cannot say that a piece does or does not have audible structure; we can only say that a piece’s structure is more or less difficult to hear. Personal experience confirms that some non-musicians cannot identify even such seemingly lucid structures as those active in *Piano Phase*, while a theorist like Schenker will claim that he can hear the long-term voice leading structures active in the *Eroica*. Neither of these facts changes the categorical classifications of either of these pieces—the *Eroica* is not minimalist, no matter how well one might hear its voice-leading structure—and ultimately we can rely upon common sense to resolve any discrepancies that arise. This listener-dependent weakness is not so much a problem for Gann’s definition, but for definition generally (though it is more noticeable here than usual); the fact is that listeners hear things differently, owing amongst other things to the limits imposed upon them by their own experiences.

When Gann isolates audible structure as the most important minimalist characteristic, he is in part glossing Schwarz’s earlier article on Steve Reich. Schwarz, it will be recalled, stressed the importance of “process” in minimalism, but this emphasis presumes that the process itself is identifiable (Schwarz’s reliance on “Music as a Gradual Process” supports this presumption). We noted above that this definition places Terry Riley, amongst others, in a particularly precarious position with respect to his categorical membership. Gann’s shift from process to structure circumvents this trouble—as well as the trouble of the Adornian baggage that Mertens imported into the word “process”—by removing the need for any sort of temporally unfolding logic. The audible structure in Reich’s minimalism corresponds to a rigorous process (in Schwarz’s and

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Reich's sense of the word) but Riley's solo performances with his lag-time accumulator do not. However, since the audibility of structure is not an either/or proposition, but rather a question of degree, Riley does not need to follow a rigorous process in order to fit Gann's notion of minimalism.⁶⁸

Gann's "Attempts at a Definition" also ought to be understood in terms of his earlier arguments. In an article written for *The Village Voice* in 1987, after minimalism had ascended to a place of privilege and prestige among many musicians, Gann casts minimalism as the mirror image of the twentieth century's other much-celebrated musical accomplishment: serialism.⁶⁹ Both musical movements, Gann argues, are strictly objectivist; pitches, rhythms, and other compositional considerations are systematically determined while intuition and feeling are limited or eliminated. The only real difference, says Gann, is that minimalist composers make these objective systems obvious, while serial composers allegedly try to conceal them. Gann characterizes these as opposite sides of the objectivist coin, but if we think of minimalism in terms of audible process, then minimalism and serialism are opposite ends of a continuum—although perhaps the center of the continuum is largely vacant in modern compositional practice. Given an extreme point of comparison, Gann's definition of minimalism as composition with audible processes once again becomes clear and meaningful, particularly given the gulf between serialism and minimalism. Without a fixed point of reference, the audibility of a process is solely

⁶⁸ How Conlon Nancarrow, for example, would fit into this scheme is an interesting question to be sure. To my ears, much of his work is as lucidly structured as is Riley's, if not more so, as therefore ought to be included in Gann's minimalism. It is not clear that Gann would object to this, nor that he should.

⁶⁹ Kyle Gann, "Let X=X: Minimalism vs. Serialism," *The Village Voice* (February 24, 1987) 76.

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dependent upon the musicianship of the critic or listener, but when the serial antipode is invoked, audibility becomes notably less contentious.

Eleven years before Gann wrote “Let X=X,” Steve Reich anticipated the article’s central claim.⁷⁰ In discussing his compositional technique with Michael Nyman, Reich argues that even in his most rigorous moments, such as *Come Out* or *It’s Gonna Rain*, intuition remains a central and unavoidable element of his composition. The tape segment to be phased, for example, is a matter of taste, as is the speed at which the phasing takes place. Surely some of this argument is owed to Reich’s changing compositional attitude, which was quickly moving away from the position laid out in “Music as a Gradual Process.” Nevertheless, though Reich’s perspective may be motivated by personal changes in his approach to composition, the analysis remains accurate: no piece by Reich is devoid of questions of taste. Indeed, the consistency with which he applied rigorous processes serves to emphasize those moments of compositional taste that Gann claims are absent from both serialism and minimalism. Further, when we recall the ever-present socio-political content of both *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* the claim to absolute objectivity is impossible to maintain; questions of taste aside, these are pieces of emotional and political content, regardless of how unconventionally this content may be presented. We learn from Reich’s music, from this perspective, that both sides of Gann’s coin (or continuum) employ taste not only necessarily, but crucially; minimalism, especially Reich’s most overtly systematic minimalism, foregrounds these choices and their necessity by rendering systematic elements comparatively obvious.⁷¹ If Gann’s two claims—that minimalism is defined by audible structures

⁷⁰ Michael Nyman, “Steve Reich: Interview by Michael Nyman,” *Studio International* 192 (November/December, 1976) 300–307.

⁷¹ John Roeder also puts minimalism’s structural simplicity in the service of broader music-theoretical ideas when he uses Reich’s music to elaborate a modal theory of rhythm. See John

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and that minimalism (and serialism) is objectivist—are too simple, they are nevertheless illustrative, revealing important facts about minimalism as well as about music in general.

Timothy Johnson's attempt at defining minimalism, developed out of his Ph.D. dissertation on John Adams, adopts a pragmatic approach to resolving the crisis of definition in minimalism.⁷² The form of Johnson's argument is presented in the title: he suggests three definitions for minimalism, calling them aesthetic, style, and technique, and ultimately settles upon the third as the most preferable. The reason for Johnson's preference receives its clearest articulation as he concludes the essay:

Considering minimalism as an aesthetic or style may be useful and appropriate for historical references to the development of minimalism. These terms accurately reflect the essential aspects of groups of pieces that share numerous affinities ... But defining minimalism primarily as a technique clarifies the term and more accurately reflects the continuing influence of minimalism on recent composers and their works. Thus, labeling a work as minimalist simply identifies one of the compositional techniques used in the piece.... From this viewpoint the term may be seen as much less limiting than it would as an aesthetic or style, and composers and listeners may begin to appreciate minimalism more fully.⁷³

If the present dissertation were limited to selecting from Johnson's definitions, it is clear from this quotation that either aesthetic or style would be the more appropriate choice, since, from Johnson's perspective, they are more suitable to historical inquiries. Further, Johnson's preference for a broader, more inclusive concept of minimalism based upon technique would render the interdisciplinary framework of the present work unwieldy, offering impossibly many

Roeder, "Beat-Class Modulations in Steve Reich's Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 25, no. 2 (Autumn, 2003) 275–304.

⁷² Timothy A. Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 742–773. Timothy A. Johnson, "Harmony in the Music of John Adams: From Phrygian Gates to Nixon in China," Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo (1991).

⁷³ Timothy Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" 770.

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points of reference, both in music and in the plastic arts, to compare. Parenthetically I would like to wonder for a moment about why Johnson settles on the broadest definition based on its breadth. The preference, all other things being equal, for broader definitions over more narrow ones strikes this author as suspect, and is not defended or explained in Johnson's text. Since our concern is with discussing minimalism as it is and was, not as we would like it to be, the breadth or narrowness must be treated as something to observe, not to dictate, construct, or prefer.⁷⁴

Accepting Johnson's framework, from here it would appear that the next necessary step, having decided that Johnson's technical definition of minimalism is inappropriate for the current concern, is to decide between style and aesthetic. However, doing so would be to forego any critical analysis of Johnson's categorical approach. Johnson's argument takes as foundational the possibility of a sharp distinction between the categories of aesthetic, style, and technique, while the course of his argument reveals that this founding distinction is too problematic to leave unexamined. A comparison of Johnson's definitions of style and technique makes this problem clearer. Johnson's definition of the minimalist style is grounded in the general definition of style found in *The New Grove Dictionary*, which isolates five characteristics of style: form, texture, harmony, melody, and rhythm.⁷⁵ From observing music already understood widely as minimalist, Johnson identifies forms, textures, harmonies, melodies, and rhythms that can more

⁷⁴ It is possible, indeed even likely, that Johnson's preference for a broad definition derives from the observation that many people use the word to describe a broad set of pieces and composers. In this case, Johnson's decision would be grounded in practice, rather than in an abstract preference for inclusion. Nevertheless, this decision remains problematic, since it dismisses without argument those more narrow definitions of minimalism that Johnson himself not only acknowledges but makes use of.

⁷⁵ Timothy Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" 748. See also R. J. Pascall, "Style," in Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

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or less unproblematically be understood as minimalist. First, we must pause to observe the circularity of this sort of approach to definition: Johnson defines the parameters of minimalism based upon what minimalism is already known to be, and then determines which pieces are minimalist based upon these parameters. Second, we must compare Johnson's definition of minimalist style to his preferred definition of minimalist technique:

The principal features of the minimalist technique include the five characteristics of the minimalist style described above: a continuous formal structure, an even rhythmic texture and bright tone, a simple harmonic palate, a lack of extended melodic lines, and repetitive rhythmic patterns... The appearance of any one of these aspects alone would be insufficient to indicate that the minimalist technique is in use, since many pieces that are obviously not influenced by minimalism contain one of these characteristics in isolation... However, the appearance of two or more of these features in a piece would suggest that the minimalist technique is a compositional feature of the piece.⁷⁶

When Keith Potter states that Johnson's article suffers from a "confusion between 'style' and 'technique,'" he is surely noticing that the only difference between Johnson's minimalist style and minimalist technique is the number of technical devices used.⁷⁷ Both categories are defined by a list of techniques, but inclusion in the technical category requires fewer characteristic similarities than inclusion in the stylistic category would. Setting aside the circularity of Johnson's definitions—which recurs in his definition of technique when he insists on a minimum of two correspondences—we run up against the practical permeability of these ostensibly categorical definitions: style remains a question of technique.

Does this same difficulty remain operative in defining aesthetic? In defining the minimalist aesthetic Johnson relies heavily on the concepts of teleology and narrativity, which he borrows from Wim Mertens's *American Minimal Music* and Elaine Broad's "A New X," which

⁷⁶ Timothy Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" 751.

⁷⁷ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 15.

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explores the distinctions between minimalism, serialism, and experimentalism.⁷⁸ Mertens and Broad understand minimalism as both a supplanting of the work-as-object by the work-as-process, and of teleology by a-teleology. Johnson adopts these two characteristics to define the minimalist aesthetic.⁷⁹ His discussion of process ignores the Adornian origins of Mertens's term, instead looking literally for process in Schwarz's and Reich's sense of the word—a sense which is, of course, technical. The association of minimalism with a lack of teleology is nearly ubiquitous in music criticism, and occurs as frequently when the critic praises the music as when she or he condemns—praise of a-teleology accompanies, as often as not, poorly concealed orientalism.⁸⁰ If by teleology one means strictly the establishment of musical goals in time, then I am inclined to agree with Jonathan Bernard—whose work will be discussed below—when he suggests that the claim that minimalist music goes nowhere or has nowhere to go is at best too hasty, and more often simply incorrect.⁸¹ If teleology is simply a matter of establishing goals, then it is difficult to imagine any music more goal-directed than Reich's phasing pieces, which announce from their first moments exactly what path will direct the movement of the music. On the other hand it will be recalled that Stoianova defines a-teleology as the goal of goallessness,

⁷⁸ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*. Elaine Broad, "A New X? An Examination of the Aesthetic Foundations of Early Minimalism," *Music Research Forum* 5 (1990) 51–62.

⁷⁹ Timothy Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" 744.

⁸⁰ Cataloging the race politics of the reception of minimalism would constitute an entire study unto itself. For the present it will suffice to recall Jill Johnston, "Music: La Monte Young," discussed above, as well as Wilfrid Mellers's review of Mertens's *American Minimal Music*: "A Minimalist Definition," *The Musical Times* 125, no. 1696 (June, 1984) 328.

⁸¹ See, for example, Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in Elizabeth Marvin West and Richard Hermann eds., *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 262. It is also worth noting that for Bernard "minimalism is fundamentally an aesthetic . . . while it is really postminimalism that conveniently labels a whole host of styles and techniques." See Jonathan Bernard, "Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality," *American Music* 21, No.1 (Spring 2003), 133.

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which we might usefully revise as the goal of appearing goalless. This definition causes fewer problems with minimalist music, but is too close to meaningless to be of much use. Johnson relies more on Mertens than Stoianova when he settles on harmony as the crucial (technical) feature of properly teleological music; harmony ultimately excepts *Music for 18 Musicians* from the minimalist aesthetic.⁸² That is to say that the minimalist aesthetic, insofar as it relies upon the presence or absence of a telos, again returns to a question of technique—harmonic technique in this case. The three categories that Johnson proposes as distinct means of defining minimalism are in fact three different definitions that revolve entirely around the question of compositional technique. This ought to come as no surprise: technical issues necessarily inform stylistic and aesthetic issues, which in turn surely inform technique.

Most of the rest of recent scholarship on minimalist music treats definition as at best a secondary concern. This work can be usefully divided into three groups: the book-length works by Keith Potter, Edward Strickland, and K. Robert Schwartz, various music-analytic articles (usually dedicated to a single piece or to a few very similar pieces), and the work done by H. Wiley Hitchcock and Jonathan Bernard exploring minimalist music's correspondence to sculpture and painting. (This pragmatic division omits work, such as Robert Fink's *Repeating Ourselves*, which takes as its subject matter only music we are taking to be post-minimalist.)⁸³ Partitioning the secondary literature in this manner is of course a practical rather than a defining gesture, and it is important to acknowledge its shortcomings. Both Strickland and Potter, to a greater and lesser extent, concern themselves with the problem of interdisciplinary study on

⁸² Timothy Johnson, "Minimalism: Aesthetic, Style, or Technique?" 749. Mertens, it will be recalled, equated teleology with tonality and narrativity.

⁸³ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

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which Bernard centers; and Bernard's work is by no means devoid of analytical music theory. Nevertheless, since our aim here is simply to take stock of various understandings of what minimalism is, this practical partition will suffice.

Initially, analytical work on minimal music was discouraging for a number of reasons. There was an understandable degree of scholarly trepidation about approaching this new subject matter, music which might or might not make its way into the canon. Many scholars rightly worry at the prospect of tying their publication record to a body of music that would never fully emerge from obscurity. There was also a problem of access to scores. Most early analyses were done through transcription, adding a somewhat cumbersome step for interested parties (though much minimalist music is considerably easier to transcribe than other examples of concert music). But what may have discouraged research into minimalist music the most is the perception that the music, particularly in its earliest manifestations, is simply too simple either to warrant analysis or to reward time so spent. Indeed a marked difference between most analyses of minimalist music and those of more complex music is that in the latter case the analyst will often conclude with a comment that there is more work to be done, while analyses of minimalist music more often seem to exhaust the material under examination. As Bernard comments, "there may be less here than meets the eye."⁸⁴

K. Robert Schwarz's early article on the compositional career of Steve Reich, discussed above, addresses many of these early concerns scholars had about dedicating time to new music. Dan Warburton, some years later, attends to another deterrent that was surely on the minds of theorists who took an early interest in minimalist music: the perceived need to defend minimalist

⁸⁴ Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," 266.

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music against charges of popularity, and the concern that minimalist music would inevitably have a poor reception from an academic establishment whose system of valuation offers little for such a radically new mode of composition.⁸⁵ “Music analysis,” says Warburton, “... is generally predicated on the concept that a composition can be analyzed to reveal various hierarchical levels of structure, and that events on the surface of the music can be deemed to be more or less *valuable* in terms of their relationships to the structural hierarchy.”⁸⁶ And though his conviction that it is the unique “*in-time* listening experience” that places minimal music outside the orbit of Schenkerian and Fortean styles of analysis may miss the mark—surely tonal and serial music also require in-time listening, and just as surely any verbal or graphical account of a piece will remove the music from its temporal context—the distinction itself is well taken: minimal music’s open superficiality renders unlikely the discovery, particularly through the use of Schenkerian or set-theoretical models, of what we traditionally call deep structure.

Regardless of the source of the disparity between the traditional tools of musical analysis and the potential of minimal music as a new object of study, Warburton is determined to see this imbalance redressed. Though a sizable portion of the essay is devoted to establishing “minimalism” as the least problematic name for the music under investigation—several other terms are given subordinate domains, still others are dismissed outright—Warburton’s central interest is in doing just what his title promises: establishing a set of terms that can facilely be used to analyze minimal music.⁸⁷ Many of these terms appear frequently in other analytical

⁸⁵ Daniel Warburton, “A Working Terminology for Minimal Music,” *Intégral 2* (1988), 135–159. This article is developed out of Warburton’s Ph.D. dissertation: Daniel Warburton, “Aspects of Organization in the ‘Sextet’ of Steve Reich,” (1988).

⁸⁶ Daniel Warburton, “A Working Terminology,” 137.

⁸⁷ For the discussion of naming minimalism, see Daniel Warburton, “A Working Terminology,” 138–142. For the discussion of analytic terminology, see 144–158.

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writings—“phasing,” surely the most common, is not of Warburton’s invention—but even so the terms are simple enough in what they denote, and minimalism is a sufficiently infrequent object of analysis, that for the most part it causes no trouble simply to define them anew as the occasion for their use arises.

In an earlier analytical foray into minimalist music, Wes York also echoes Schwarz’s concern with the status of minimalist music in scholarship.⁸⁸ In his analysis of Philip Glass’s *Two Pages*, which is the earliest rigorous analytical work on minimal music, York argues immediately that serious analysis of minimalist music is needed, “to justify praise or criticism.”⁸⁹ An advocate for minimalist music, and particularly Glass, York establishes early on his goal of demonstrating the sophistication and nuance of Glass’s early music, using, as Warburton later would insist is necessary, new analytical tools. York gains significant ground in this argument when he demonstrates that *Two Pages* relies not on a single rigorous process, but on four processes; his terms for them are subtraction, addition, external repetition, and internal repetition.⁹⁰ According to York’s analysis, Glass applies these four processes to a set of five pitches to create a large-scale musical form with interesting symmetrical and proportional qualities. The result is “a compelling compositional framework. The piece concerns itself not with one single process, but with the interactions of several processes. In this interaction,

⁸⁸ Wes York, “Form and Process (1981),” in *Writings on Glass*, 60–79.

⁸⁹ Wes York, “Form and Process,” 60.

⁹⁰ Wes York, “Form and Process,” 63–65. In fact, the processes outlined by York number more than four. Since subtraction (process A) and addition (process B) are not inverses of one another in York’s model (by subtraction, York means the repetition of a melodic segment minus its last pitch: $A(g,c,d,e,f) = (g,c,d,e,f,g,c,d,e)$), and since their inverses are both employed, it is clear that there are at least six operators in play. Similarly, internal repetition would need an inverse, bringing the count up to seven. Strictly speaking external repetition does not have an inverse; a measure is repeated a given number of times, which determines the number times external repetition is used.

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ambiguities of several kinds act to propel the working out of the various processes toward the ultimate resolution.”⁹¹ York establishes a connection between determinate process in Glass’s work and a concomitant ambiguity that, in the context of process, is not expected; and the major contribution of “Form and Process” is just this: that it is through process that Glass cultivates ambiguity, thus developing a musical space that houses both complete determinism *and* a simultaneous feeling of confusion and uncertainty.

Paul Epstein’s early analysis of Reich’s *Piano Phase* declines the burden of legitimating minimalist music, but in spite of this provides a compelling argument for the inclusion of minimalist music in analytic discourse.⁹² Through the examination of the twelve different phase positions, and the transitions from one to the next, of the first section of *Piano Phase*, Epstein’s analysis like York’s reveals an unexpectedly high level of complexity from a piece ostensibly founded in simplicity. Of particular interest are the alternating moments of comparative dissonance and consonance (even-numbered phases are relatively consonant, while odd-numbered phases are relatively dissonant) and the emergence in phases two and ten of not two but four copies of the melody, with the third and fourth composed of alternating notes from the two pianists. The result of Epstein’s analysis is analogous to York’s: simplicity of process does not lead to simple music. What Carman Moore knew from listening analysis shows us empirically; it may surprise us how much simple music can surprise us.

Richard Cohn’s analysis of Reich’s early phase-pattern music expands the work done by York and Epstein in redefining the connection between minimalist music and simplicity.⁹³

⁹¹ Wes York, “Form and Process,” 78.

⁹² Paul Epstein, “Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich’s *Piano Phase*,” *Musical Quarterly* 72 (1986), 494–502.

⁹³ Richard Cohn, “Transpositional Combination of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich’s Phase-

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Contrary to Warburton's assertion that analysis of minimalist music would require the development of new analytical devices, Cohn achieves his analytical aims through the use of set-class analysis applied to rhythmic sets, borrowing techniques from Milton Babbitt.⁹⁴ Further, while York and Epstein challenge simplicity generally, Cohn directly targets the presumption that minimalist music is a-teleological. Cohn uses beat-class theory to track the changing rhythmic patterns of *Violin Phase* and *Phase Patterns*. By attending not only to the progressive asynchrony of each piece but also to the changing density of rhythmic events, Cohn is able to isolate a second trajectory in the music. As the phased voices of the music approach maximum distance from one another (half way in *Phase Patterns*, a third of the way in *Violin Phase* due to the use of multiple voices), event density too approaches its maximum, but not in linear fashion. Cohn argues convincingly that his analysis contradicts the commonplace assertion of minimal music's (especially early minimal music's) lack of teleology. Through analogy to some of Bach's keyboard music, Cohn argues that minimal music demonstrates a new method of achieving an old form; it is non-dramatic, like much of Bach's music, yet organized around definable goals which are pursued and achieved by logical if not necessarily linear means.

We have seen two dominant genealogical interpretations of minimalist music: Nyman's genealogy of experimental music and Mertens's quasi-Adornian modernist narrative, which reaches back to Schoenberg. Mertens's theory is problematic, as we have seen, but several other authors have established links between Webern and Young (especially when discussing *Trio for Strings*) that by extension in both directions implicate Schoenberg and later minimalist

Shifting Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (1992) 146–177.

⁹⁴ Milton Babbitt, "Twelve-Tone Rhythmic Structure and the Electronic Medium," *Perspectives of New Music* 1, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 1962) 49–79.

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composition. Through his use of beat-class analysis, Cohn offers a new link between minimalism and Webern. By overcoming music analysis's pitch bias and exploring rhythmic structure, Cohn reveals an unexpected structural similarity between Reich's minimalism and Webern's serialism.

Only a year later, Roberto Saltini looked to expand Cohn's work on Reich's phasing pieces, and in doing so pushed the critical pendulum to the other extreme.⁹⁵ Where Cohn saw a historical connection, Saltini saw equivalence.

No matter which path [Saltini's or Cohn's, for example] we choose to explore this music, it brings us to a perspective very different from the one commonly associated with Steve Reich's phase-shifting music. The composer is aware of what the process offers, and, in the traditional manner, he carefully chooses the basic pattern as a theme to be developed throughout the composition. The final product is a picture of this theme on an enlarged scale, and the path chose to reach this picture, with its many detours, is essentially a Western approach to the shaping of music.⁹⁶

Roberto Saltini, like Cohn, takes an interest in linking Reich to the canon, but the connection he looks to forge is a complete one. Cohn, on the other hand, puts his emphasis on the technical novelty of Reich's early music; his formulation is independent of the validity of claims for composerly originality—claims often put under the category of the modern—and is focused instead on the biases of our theoretical apparatuses:

Our theoretical apparatus is dominated by our ability to discuss pitch events, transformations on those events, larger events comprised of ensembles of transformations, and so on, in terms of high-level equivalence classes. By contrast, rhythmic categories are low level, and taxonomically rather than systematically oriented. If we claim to hear this music as static, it may simply result from a tacit belief that pitch monopolizes our various levels of awareness as much as it dominates our consciously held categories. Structure is pitch structure; when pitch ceases to develop, music has no structure.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Roberto Antonio Saltini, "Structural Levels and Choice of Beat-Class Sets in Steve Reich's Phase-Shifting Music," *Intégral* 7 (1993): 149–178.

⁹⁶ Roberto Antonio Saltini, "Structural Levels," 177.

⁹⁷ Richard Cohn, "Transpositional Combination," 171.

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Cohn allows us to leave in place an important claim common to both minimal music and minimal art, that there is at the very least a new kind of composer position articulated by this music. In K. Robert Schwarz's terms,

We must again force ourselves to set aside the nineteenth-century credo of originality being the prime essential in composition, and realize that much Western music, from the cantus firmus and parody masses of the Renaissance through the Baroque and Classical eras, has not always placed originality as the foremost goal of composition.⁹⁸

The results of these essays, and especially in Cohn's essay, warrant a reassessment of key elements in some definitions. The reliance on simplicity must be qualified by the fact that unexpected—and sometimes unnoticed—complexities manifest (though of course the complexity of this music still pales by comparison to much twentieth-century music). Further, and of greater importance, the common claim that minimalism in music lacks goals would seem to be refuted empirically by close analysis (though of course this depends entirely on how "goal" is defined). The above analyses examined only pieces by Reich and Glass, whose overt dedication to more or less rigorous process makes them a ready object of study. Analyses of Young's or Riley's work are more difficult to come by surely because they are more difficult to perform. There are few available recordings and scores of Young's early work (between *Trio for Strings* and *The Well-Tuned Piano*), though books such as Nyman's and Potter's have made this work much more accessible. Additionally, many of the works that we do have scores for (such as his Fluxus pieces) are so simple that analysis (of the kind done by Cohn, York, and Epstein) is entirely impossible. Both Kyle Gann and Alison Welch have done work on Young's *Well-Tuned Piano*, however, and though the performance of this piece as it is analyzed in these essays lies outside the chronological span covered in this dissertation, the fact that it was conceived of and

⁹⁸ K. Robert Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process, Part I," 379.

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begun during the period we are here calling minimalist indicates that we should briefly consider Welch's and Gann's work.⁹⁹

Welch's work explores the importance of the Indian tradition in Young's composition and concludes with an observation not entirely unlike Cohn's analysis of Reich, though of course quite different in origin and considerations. Discussing Pandit Pran Nath's use of improvisation gradually to introduce new pitches, Welch suggests a similar practice in Young's music:

One can understand why such an approach might appeal to an artist with an aesthetic oriented to the leisurely pace preferred by Young, for it permits directional development on an expansive temporal scale that approaches the static. Indeed, following Young's initial period of study with Pran Nath, stasis in *The Well-Tuned Piano* was no longer the prevailing aesthetic, but rather became subsumed within a larger temporal framework in which directional development played a primary role.¹⁰⁰

Welch's analysis highlights an important distinction between stasis and eternity; Young is not performing music that does not go anywhere; he is working with materials at a very slow but deliberate pace, which reflects, rather than contradicts, his conception of music as eternal:

Young describes this improvisational style as an organically developed approach where each note and rhythm determine those that follow. Composition by improvisation shifts the emphasis to the *process* of the work, a concept that resonates not only with Indian aesthetics, but also with Young's personal aesthetic of music as eternal composition with limitless possibilities of thematic expression and creativity.¹⁰¹

Kyle Gann's earlier article on this piece reaches similar conclusions, though through quite different means: Gann does not rely on comparing Young's music to the Indian tradition. His transcription and analysis of Young's *The Well-tuned Piano*—upon which Welch relies

⁹⁹ Alison Welch, "Meetings Along the Edge: Svara and Tala in American Minimal Music," *American Music* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1999) 179–199. Kyle Gann, "La Monte Young's Well-Tuned Piano," *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 1 (Winter, 1993) 134–162.

¹⁰⁰ Alison Welch, "Meetings Along the Edge," 184.

¹⁰¹ Alison Welch, "Meetings Along the Edge," 184. Here "process" is more closely aligned with Mertens than with Reich.

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heavily—reveal a very clear sense of development from one section to the next, dependent often on techniques quite like those described by Welch.

It is unclear how these analyses correspond to, for example, *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, a piece the inception of which predates Pran Nath's influence but demonstrates Young's interest in "eternal" music. Recordings of this piece are extremely rare, but it is certain that it was different each time it was performed; indeed, no portion was ever performed twice, but rather constituted a new section of an eternal piece. Some of Young's early music, such as *X for Henry Flynt* and *Composition 1960 #7*, clearly do not demonstrate the slow-but-steady goal orientation Welch identifies in Young's music after Pran Nath's arrival. The goal, such as it is, is only to repeat or sustain the piece's sole musical element. What is most significant for our current purposes, however, is the rough correspondence between later manifestations of *The Well-Tuned Piano* and the analytical results provided by Epstein, York, and Cohn; all four of these examples urge the listener to reconsider the commonplace definition of minimalism as static and a-teleological.

Though Welch and Gann partly echo Cohn's argument that the claims of minimal music's a-teleology are commonly due to an incomplete understanding of the music, it is important also to remark on the quite different sort of movement in Young's music as compared to the music under investigation by Cohn, as well as the refutation of stasis implied by York's work on Glass's *Two Pages*. These two previous examples—music by Glass and Reich from the late sixties—present a sort of internal movement; the music transitions from one state to another, with the second state consisting of the same material as the first, and even—to a greater or lesser extent—following a logical and predictable path from one state to the next (more so for Reich than for Glass, to be sure). Young, on the other hand, uses gradual, controlled change to

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transition from one harmonic/melodic object to another of much more distant relation. This difference recalls Mertens's much earlier claim that minimalist music—by which, it will be recalled, he indicated music by Young, Riley, Glass, and Reich up until 1980—continues the avant-garde revolution of the work-as-process. Young's eternal compositions consist of a movement from one state to another through a movement the rigor of which is entirely unknown to the listener; whether there is a predetermined connection is also entirely ambiguous. In other words, form is open; this is not work-as-object, but, more or less in Adorno's terms, work-as-process. There is no resolution of the parts into a totalized whole (though we must acknowledge that this solution to the problem of the dialectic is entirely distinct from Schoenberg's as perceived by Adorno, and would almost certainly be perceived by the Adorno as dangerously mythological). Reich and Glass, on the other hand, composed music that was—again especially in Reich's case—unprecedentedly closed. Though in Reich's terms this is clearly music of process, in Adorno's terms it is certainly not.

In their respective books, Keith Potter and Edward Strickland address different but overlapping problems. Potter updates our academic knowledge of the core minimalist composers, placing their compositions in a detailed historical setting and providing some musical analysis. Strickland illuminates the origins of minimalism in music, but devotes much of the book to sculpture and painting as well (because his thesis is that painting is the authentic origin of minimalism, the plurality of pages is dedicated to painters). Though there are considerable methodological divergences between these two books, both are remarkable for their contributions to our knowledge—both biographical and musical—of minimalist composers. Both authors mostly restrict their discussion of minimalism in music to Potter's four titular American composers; other composers, such as Terry Jennings and John Cale, receive some attention, but

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in both cases comments are usually organized in terms of how these composers, who are sometimes called peripheral, relate to the core four. In this respect these two books constitute important moments in the history of canon formation, and developing an understanding of present-day definitions of minimal music will rely on a close reading of how Potter and Strickland support their canonical choices.

The strength of Potter's book lies in part in its author's comparative lack of interest in a strict definition of minimalism. In his introduction, Potter suggests a few common characteristics of minimalism in music, but he stops well short of the sort of technical specifications present even in as broad a definition as Gann's. Like Nyman—and like most authors since Nyman—Potter connects minimalism to the American experimental tradition, and in particular to Cageian non-intention.¹⁰² While for Cage non-intention manifests in indeterminacy, the minimalists work instead with determinacy as a means of nullifying the need for composerly intervention in the work.¹⁰³ Potter's argument here is akin to Gann's "Let X=X," though while Gann focuses on the degree of audibility of the process employed, Potter is more interested in the determinacy of the process.¹⁰⁴ We do well to recall here as well Reich's aforementioned denial of the claim that his work lacks intuition or a composerly subjectivity, while also bearing in mind that Potter's claim of minimalist non-intention is best understood as a relative claim. Like Nyman's claim that minimalism is (relatively) deterministic, Potter's focus on non-intention applies better to Reich and Glass than it does to Riley. Young would seem to lie in the middle of both of these spectra.

¹⁰² Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 4.

¹⁰³ This is an example of the argument opposed by Saltini.

¹⁰⁴ Gann has this to say about the position of Cage in his theory: "Even Cage, for all his anarchic freedom, uses the most objective musical methods possible, and if there is a difference between Cage and Babbitt, it's that Cage uses better English." Kyle Gann, "Let X=X," 76.

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In all minimalist cases, however, it is easy to hear non-intention when this music is considered alongside the Viennese School or American neoclassicism.

Potter offers “Three consequences of the avoidance of ‘individual taste and memory’”:

[F]irstly, the concern to avoid the creation of conventional time-objects by stressing process rather than product [this seems to be Reich’s process, not Adorno’s]; secondly, the avoidance of previous notions of musical expression, in particular of music being in some sense about the composers themselves, their own preconceptions and predilections; and thirdly, the reconsideration of what we may call narrativity.¹⁰⁵

Potter quite rightly grants each of these points flexibility: like Gann’s eleven characteristics, each of these three apply better to some composers than to others. The strength of Potter’s method arrives in the four individual chapters, one dedicated to each of the composers under investigation. The detail of these chapters prevents Potter from too general claims, such as Young’s dominating influence over minimalism as a whole. Instead, though he may be “the first true musical minimalist,”¹⁰⁶ Young’s connection to Glass, for example, is illustrated as historically mediated through Riley and then Reich.

Although Edward Strickland’s *Minimalism: Origins* benefits from the same use of historical detail we find later in Potter, his approach to defining minimalism lacks Potter’s flexibility and nuance. Indeed Strickland deliberately disclaims any interest in interpretive categorization, instead opting for an intuitive yet rigid categorization:

This study, fundamentally stylistic and formal in orientation, also tends to ignore the deeper philosophical distinctions and concentrates on the physical facticity of the artworks, an approach validated by their own muteness. The first and foremost criterion for my description of the work under discussion as Minimalist, that is to say, is its appearance as opposed to anyone’s pronouncements about it, including the artist’s, which may be as deluded or irrelevant as anyone’s.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 8.

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This seems at first like a useful and pragmatic position. “Muteness,” however, proves a difficult concept. Painting and sculpture are nearly always literally mute (it is perhaps unfortunate from Strickland’s perspective that Robert Morris provides a rare exception with *Box with the Sound of its Own Making*), so in these media “muteness” must be to some extent metaphorical. When we consider a Judd alongside a David Smith, we gain some insight into Strickland’s claim; Anna Chave’s work, however (to be discussed at length in Chapter 5), has revealed that even this seemingly obvious muteness is contentious, and certainly not a matter of mere “facticity.” What all this suggests is that Strickland’s approach to understanding minimalism merely in terms of its facticity and muteness is heavily problematic (in what way were La Monte Young’s excessively loud performances of the late 1960s mute?). This approach to discussing minimalism obscures rather than critiques the assumptions that inform the development of a canon, and since Strickland is directly concerned with defining the limits of minimalism in this book, his foundation is all the more problematic.

Strickland, fortunately, does not confine his definition of minimalism to an invocation of muteness. The important features of minimalism, says Strickland, are “severity of means, clarity of form, and simplicity of structure.”¹⁰⁸ Strickland echoes Tom Johnson in conceiving of these characteristics as essentially “anti-artifice” rather than “anti-art.”¹⁰⁹ However, these features—which presumably amount to muteness—are correctly deemed inadequate on their own: “To call the builders of Stonehenge Minimalist is to evaporate the term.”¹¹⁰ The determining element of minimalism then is its historical location. Strickland rejects, however, the apparently arbitrary

¹⁰⁸ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 13.

¹¹⁰ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 4.

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decision endorsed by many art historians that minimalism begins in or around 1960. Instead, minimalism is located more broadly in post-war America, which allows Strickland to broaden his discussion of minimalist painting to include Newman, Kelly, and Reinhardt. Consequently, Strickland can make the usually unchallenged claim that minimalism in music begins in 1958 with Young's *Trio for Strings*, and the far more problematic claim that it begins in painting ten years earlier, with Newman's *Onement I*.

Strickland's unusually early starting point for minimalism in painting mirrors his slightly less unusual, though equally contentious, ending date for minimalism generally, with which he begins his book: "The death of Minimalism is announced periodically, which may be the surest testimonial to its staying power."¹¹¹ However, most of his examples of late minimalist practice come from marketing rather than concert music or the art gallery. Strickland later presents a model for minimalism that functions analogously to Timothy Johnson's distinction between the aesthetic and the technique of minimalist music. Strickland argues that while minimalism and the cultural products it has influenced live on, "bare-bones musical Minimalism" disappears around 1970.¹¹² If we interpret the end of "bare-bones" minimalism as the birth of post-minimalism, Strickland's date agrees with that of Schwartz, though it is at odds with Potter's and Tom Johnson's.

Strickland's approach to defining minimalism may suffer from an excessive interest in determinacy, but nevertheless it offers a rich context in which to consider the broad phenomenon of minimalism. His strictly descriptive approach to formalism—as opposed, for example, to Fried's or Greenberg's formalism—forecloses the sort of comparative work we seek to

¹¹¹ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 1.

¹¹² Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 228–240.

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accomplish in this dissertation, but his insistence on understanding minimalist music in the context of other forms of minimalism sets a good precedent for minimalist scholarship.

Though Strickland is unique amongst music scholars in the close attention he pays to the details of minimalist painting and sculpture, he is not the first musicologist to attend to the similarities between minimalism in music and in the plastic arts. H. Wiley Hitchcock's 1986 lecture "Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics" presents a brief but informative sketch of some of the correspondences between these two bodies of work.¹¹³ Hitchcock grounds his analysis in minimalism's simplicity and derives from this several useful criteria:

Their music had in common these features: radical reduction of the compositional material for each work; repetition of such material (accepting, in Young's case, a drone as repetition carried to the nth degree) and moreover repetition with unchanging timbre, pitch, pace, and level of volume (although the *texture* in a work of Riley or Reich might increase in density, by accretion, as one repetition was laid over earlier ones); static, euphonious, nonmodulatory harmony (if any at all); and lack of dramatic devices—by which I mean contrast, opposition, argument, climax, patterns of tension and release, sense of development.¹¹⁴

Hitchcock reminds us, though, that "Repetition is impossible," if for no other reason than the temporal displacement of successive iterations of identical events.¹¹⁵ The inevitable temporal difference between one note and its repetition is analogous to the necessarily temporal experience of painting and sculpture, particularly in the case of geometrically simple objects. Hitchcock argues that these peculiar experiences of time in both forms of minimalism are analogous. By implication, while minimalist harmony might be static—as Hitchcock claims it

¹¹³ H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Minimalism in Art and Music: Origins and Aesthetics," in Richard Kostelanetz and Joseph Darby eds., *Classic Essays on Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 308–320. Originally presented at the College Art Association, 1986.

¹¹⁴ H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Minimalism in Art and Music," 312.

¹¹⁵ H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Minimalism in Art and Music," 314.

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usually is—the music itself is not. Thus while minimalist music shares minimalist sculpture and painting's non-narrative, inexpressive predisposition, neither is well understood as purely static.

Many of the claims made by Hitchcock can be usefully understood in terms of Gann's "audible structure," though Hitchcock lends this sort of formulation greater specificity by recalling its interdisciplinary context. Hitchcock also takes Mertens's analysis of minimalism's non-narrativity and separates it from the problematic equations Mertens set up between narrativity, teleology, and tonality; instead, Hitchcock presents the non-narrativity of minimalist music in terms both familiar and useful to students of art criticism. With this new perspective, we can begin to understand a reading of minimalist music that makes use of Hal Foster's Jamesonian postmodernism rather than Mertens's quasi-Adornian historical dialectic. In the chapter to follow, we will examine Foster's postmodern criticism in greater detail, in particular with regard to its implications for minimalist music.

Jonathan Bernard offers a more detailed examination of the overlap between minimalism in music and in the plastic arts, which leads him to render explicit several of the implicit negative claims in Hitchcock's lecture: "Minimal music is not *static*," "Minimal music is also not *non-Western* in any meaningful sense," and "it is undoubtedly wrong to accuse minimalist composers of attempting specifically to hypnotize their listeners."¹¹⁶ These negative claims about minimalism in fact do the work of developing a positive definition of minimalism. Overstated claims of minimalism's stasis, non-Westernness, and capacity to hypnotize or dupe its audience have served primarily to differentiate minimalist music from the mainstream musical traditions to which minimalism is often considered inferior.¹¹⁷ Each of the claims that Bernard denies

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," 262–263.

¹¹⁷ The work to which Cohn responds is exemplary of this sort of critical over-reach.

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isolates a feature of minimalist music that distinguishes it from most preceding music and uncritically carries this feature to its extreme. When Mertens and others define minimalism as static, they lose sight of the distinct goals towards which minimalist music slowly progresses, and, as Hitchcock, Bernard, and Cohn all remind us, they lose track of the importance of the flow of time in minimalism. When authors overstate minimalism's non-Western elements, they risk recapitulating problematic Orientalizing tropes that simplify both minimalism and the music, both Western and non-, that minimalism is in dialogue with.¹¹⁸ And when critics, even those as sympathetic as Tom Johnson, invoke hypnotism, they deny the agency and interest of minimalism's public, foreclosing, amongst other things, musical analysis. By correcting the record with respect to these reflexive readings of minimalism, by negating negative definitions, Bernard—though his syntax is negative—re-establishes a space for positive definition.

In addition to presenting a reading of minimalism that does not rely on overstating its divergence from the tradition, Bernard also provides exemplary analyses to further our understanding of minimalism's aesthetic overlap in music and the plastic arts.¹¹⁹ Bernard expands on Nyman by detailing not only how minimalist music develops out of New York experimentalism—notably Cage and Feldman—but also out of a reaction to academic serialism. Bernard also connects this development to plastic minimalism's relationship to abstract expressionism. Emphasizing minimalism's intelligible relation to the recent past also helps us to guard against the common critical mistake—manifest especially in the claim to stasis—of understanding minimalism as a radical break with the past.

¹¹⁸ See also Jonathan Bernard, "I See Smoke, but Where's the Fire?" *Perspectives of New Music* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2001) 255–259.

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 31 (Winter, 1993) 86–132.

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Focusing first on how plastic minimalism relates to the past, Bernard relates three features that clarify minimalist art's relationship to abstract expressionism:

(1) [T]he minimization of chance or accident; (2) an emphasis upon the *surface* of the work, by means of the absolutely uniform application of color ... or by other techniques that produced an exceptionally smooth, "machined" finish; (3) a concentration upon the whole rather than the parts—that is, upon arrangement rather than composition—and a concomitant reduction in the number of elements, resulting in a spare, stripped-down look.¹²⁰

The analytical portion of Bernard's essay is then dedicated to understanding minimalist music in terms of these features. Of particular interest here is that Bernard arrives at some familiar conclusions through different means. Nyman characterizes minimalist music in terms of determinacy by relating it to Cage; Bernard does so by understanding plastic minimalism's relationship to Pollock and other abstract expressionist. Hitchcock explains plastic minimalism's surface orientation and flatness in terms of minimalist music's lack of structural background, while Bernard does just the opposite, arguing that the absence of a structural background derives from an aesthetic interest in flatness.¹²¹ Reversing this relation is surely appropriate, since the main body of minimalist composition, excepting Young's earliest efforts, appears after the bulk of minimalist sculpture and painting had already become quite common in New York galleries. And from an interdisciplinary perspective, this is the most notable contribution of Bernard's work: relocating minimalist music in its historical milieu.

Bernard's final observation about minimalism in music and art—that it exhibits a preference for the whole over the part—is particularly important to this dissertation, and bears further scrutiny. Bernard bases this observation on some fairly well-known statements by Morris,

¹²⁰ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music," 95–96.

¹²¹ H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Minimalism in Art and Music," 318.

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Andre, and Judd, which will be examined in Chapter 2. In the plastic arts, the movement since cubism away from coherent totality renders these arguments intelligible, even if we are also obliged to recognize some of the problematic deployments of gender in these arguments. For many artists, cubism's legacy of incoherence—which we might phrase as a deliberate conflict between composition and unity—is quintessentially European.¹²² Students of music, however, may find Bernard's argument at least partially confusing, since a more or less continuous stream of music scholarship—excepting work done in an Adornian or Deleuzian vein—has unproblematically privileged the whole over the part. American scholarship on tonal music is dominated by Schenker's legacy, which relies on the dual suppositions that tonal compositions form a coherent whole and that this formal totality is aesthetically valuable. Set-class analysis also overwhelmingly tends to presuppose that large-scale coherence is both interesting and desirable. And this privileging of the whole is not unique to music: it is common enough in literature to warrant the publication of an excellent book on the subject.¹²³ However, it is well worth noting that even in the context of an analytical method that actively pursues a totality, the compositional details of the surface still retain an active place: Schenkerian studies that reduce the importance of the foreground are bound to fail, and even while some set-theoretical analyses may be organized around identifying unifying qualities of a work, they do so through reference to specific surface details (sets of pitches, usually). In contrast, the preference for the whole that

¹²² Recall too Adorno's formulation in *The Philosophy of New Music*. It is always too simple to extend Adorno's work without extensive and reflective criticism, but here it is useful parenthetically to risk this simplicity to identify in plastic minimalism's critique of "European" painting and sculpture that negates Adorno's view of art in modernity generally.

¹²³ See Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

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Bernard identifies in the discourse of plastic minimalism operates not through the organization of detail, but at its expense.

Why is it remarkable, given this, that minimalism is more interested in the whole than the part? First we must reiterate plastic minimalism's reactionary stance toward cubism; minimalist composers were surely involved enough in the problems addressed by their colleagues in the plastic arts to have understood and likely to have sympathized with this stance. Second, it would be difficult to overstate the importance of John Cage to the musical community in New York in the 1960s. Cage's deployment of multiplicity presents a far more radical relationship to coherence; while minimalist sculptors and painters may have found composition and totality to be in irreconcilable conflict in "European" art, Cage's relation to the parts overwhelms totality entirely. In Cage there is no conflict between the part and the whole because the whole, presumably, does not exist. Thus in spite of music theory's analytical predisposition towards coherent totality, minimalist music's social, historical, and geographical proximity to Cage renders minimalism's totality newly remarkable.

* * *

This survey of the literature on minimalism returns us to our earlier decision not to define minimalism in this dissertation. We have examined two kinds of texts above: contemporaneous criticism and *ex post facto* theorizing. In the former case, authors have sought terminology that would adequately and concisely express the similarities perceived between different composers. In the latter case, authors look in part to explain what features make minimalism as it has been received a coherent category. This endeavor is essentially problematic. First, "minimalism" has neither a single origin nor a single path (compare Nyman and Tom Johnson, for example), creating contradictory contemporary definitions of minimalism for any given theorist to adopt

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and adapt. Second, the fact that our diverse and contradictory categories of minimalism are received renders the process of definition unavoidably circular (though this is seldom more obvious than in Timothy Johnson's work). This is in short to recapitulate the deconstructive formulation that one cannot begin a definition without already knowing what it is that is being defined. The process of definition remains valuable, but only because it allows the author to travel through and justify the system that defined the concept or category before the work was begun. The definition itself gains neither truth nor accuracy through the process, and it is for this reason that this dissertation will not pursue this particular question.

We have seen that the work done on early minimalist music since 1980 has moved in many often competing directions, but I have tried to argue above that the best of this work has done just what good scholarship ought to do: it has reassessed the initial claims made on behalf of minimalism in the explicit interest of understanding minimalism in its place in the stream of music history. In the best of cases, this has meant re-evaluating the most radical claims—in particular those regarding time and teleology—which have normalized our understanding of minimalism. Rather than a complete departure, minimalism is now audible as the sort of continuous disjunction that is really quite common in the history of modern music.¹²⁴ But it is crucial to avoid so complete a normalization that we lose sight or sound of minimalism's very real radicalism. Though minimalism presents a continuous relationship to its past, it also presents a break. Analyses such as Saltini's seek to overstate continuity at the expense of rupture, resulting in a banal image of minimalism as music that is simply music.

¹²⁴ With "continuous disjunction" I mean here to gloss Deleuze's concept of the inclusive disjunction, which is that non-dialectical moment of the inclusion of two contradictory states of affairs: in this case, minimalism is both continuous with the past and broken from it.

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An interdisciplinary analysis of minimalism in the plastic and musical arts will necessarily find itself situated in its historical context. After all, it is not simply because both bodies of work share the name “minimalist” that they are studied together; their emergence in the same place and time (though minimalist music arrived a few years later) is part of what lends this terminological coincidence its suggestiveness and importance. When scholars comment on the association between minimalism in the plastic and musical spheres they often stress the role that reaction plays in both of these disciplines. Plastic minimalism reacts against abstract expressionism and analytic cubism, while musical minimalism reacts against serialism and radical indeterminacy. Jonathan Bernard, we have seen in the previous chapter, derives useful aesthetic markers for minimalist music from this parallel reaction.

Art criticism has dealt fairly extensively, in both negative and positive terms, with the perceived rupture between minimalist practice in the 1960s and the more expressionistic abstraction that precedes it. Both in music and in sculpture and painting the aesthetic and formal changes wrought by minimalism were understood then as now as quite different from earlier advanced art, but, partly due to the comparative popularity of plastic minimalism and partly due to the larger role played by critics in the plastic arts, the break with recent artistic practices effected by plastic minimalism seems to have been received initially as a greater threat (and promise) than the analogous activities in music. Indeed minimalist sculpture in particular, and painting to a lesser degree, was understood by some influential critics of the time as a threat to modernist art itself, and by others as the greatest potential for truly new art. As a result, it is difficult to talk about the history of minimalist art criticism without engaging the topic of postmodernism.

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Postmodernism has played an important role in the scholarship on minimalist art since the 1970s, in particular in the scholarship of Hal Foster, whose works on postmodernism include editing *Anti-Aesthetic*—a collection of important essays on the already (in 1983) complex and contentious subject of postmodernism—and authoring *Return of the Real*, of which he dedicates a chapter to arguing that minimalist sculpture forms the “crux” between modernism and postmodernism, serving as both the end of the former and the beginning of the latter.¹ However, between the printing of the first criticism of minimalist art and the publication of Foster’s books, the questions of modernism and postmodernism have made many appearances. The question this chapter will address is: If it is meaningful for Hal Foster and other art critics to discuss minimalist sculpture in terms of postmodernism, can we do the same with minimalist music of the same period?

Postmodernism is famously difficult to define, and it will not be defined here. Many authors—indeed most who have written about it—have established some sort of definition for postmodernism, but none of these definitions has achieved any sort of canonical, uncontested status. Surely part of the cause of this confusion is the tremendous diversity of modernism itself; insofar as postmodernism, which is usually in part defined as pluralistic or incoherently diverse, comments on, rebels against, or supersedes modernism, one must expect postmodernism to exhibit even greater diversity than modernism itself. The compulsion to compose a comprehensive definition for postmodernism must surely be folly. However, while there may be

¹ Hal Foster, *Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), and Hal Foster, *Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

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no point in setting forth a definition of postmodernism—recall comments above on the trouble with definition generally—we must again contend with the definitions which precede us.

In order to understand what plastic minimalist postmodernism might say about musical minimalism I would like first to suggest a tripartite scheme for understanding the breadth of postmodern theories that will be confronted in what follows. This is not meant, it must be clear, to define postmodernism or to resolve the conflicting definitions that are in play, but instead to provide a framework for understanding some of the most prominent and potentially unresolvable differences. Speaking in these broad terms, theories of postmodernism tend to fall into three categories (understanding that some theories will fall into multiple categories): theories of art, theories of culture, and theories of subjectivity. In what follows, the dominant concern will be theories of postmodern art, by which is indicated theories of painting, sculpture, music, architecture, or any other art form that entails the development of a body of work that can be usefully understood in its historical relation to another body of work termed “modern.” Theories of postmodern culture, which often encompass or develop out of a theory of postmodern art, typically theorize important cultural changes—usually taking place or culminating in the 1960s—that indicate a fundamental shift in how society behaves. This new “postmodern” culture of fully globalized capitalism stands in contrast to the modern culture that accompanies the rise of global capitalism, and must also be considered in relation to the trauma of the two world wars. Finally, postmodern theories of the human subject take a further step beyond cultural postmodernism to argue for a fundamental ontological change in the citizen of postmodern society. Most commonly, postmodern theories of subjectivity argue that the subject, which under modernism was allegedly central, masterful, and coherent, is now fractured and decentered.

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When discussing the various postmodernisms theorized below, it will sometimes be necessary to take stock of which of these three fields the theory looks to describe.

Though both “modern” and the prefix “post-” have long histories, and have even occasionally intermingled, most authors agree that it was not until 1975, through the pen of Charles Jencks, that the two were conceptually united.² For his part, Jencks credits Joseph Hudnut for the invention of this “sinful term,” in his 1945 article “The post-modern house” (lower case) although Hudnut (prefiguring Nyman’s later “Minimal Music”) did not “mention the term in the body of his text or define it polemically.”³ In the case of Hudnut and Jencks, “postmodern” referred specifically to architecture, and in Jenck’s case it is in specific reference to new architecture that, through one method or another, is distinct from that post-Beaux-Arts style that had by then been canonized as “modern” or “modernist.” Though Jencks’s initially re-introduced “postmodernism” to describe new movements in architecture, it was not long before critics in the visual arts and elsewhere adopted the term. In architecture, where there is a widely agreed upon and understood movement called “modernism,” “postmodernism” carries a more or less immediate definition. Since the other arts lack an internationally recognized school of modernism, “postmodernism” becomes a challenging and contentious term as soon as it ventures outside of architecture.⁴

² Jencks himself cites his “The Rise of Post-Modern Architecture” as his first publication to use the term. Found in *Architecture—Inner Town Government* (Eindhoven) July 1975; and *Architecture Association Quarterly* 4 (1975). See Charles Jencks, “Postmodern and Late Modern: The Essential Definitions,” *Chicago Review* 35, no.4 (1987) 56.

³ Charles Jencks, “Postmodern and Late Modern,” 33.

⁴ “[In architecture] we know more or less definitely what ‘modern’ means, so we’re better able to tell what ‘post’ means when prefixed to ‘modern.’ Modern architecture means—to put it roughly—functional, geometric rigor and the eschewing of decoration or ornament.” Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” *Arts* 54, no. 6 (February 1980), 64.

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As we will see below, postmodernism is often used in a broad sense, associated with aesthetic or formal permissiveness, held in contrast to modernist rigor or rigidity. In its most derisive sense, postmodernism in the arts is used to indicate empty-headed pluralism, or an art that cares as little for quality as it does for effort. In slightly more positive usages, it is used in tandem with a caricature of modernism as thoughtlessly elitist, in contrast to which postmodernism is depicted as liberated, creative, and lively. The art critic John Perreault, for example, contemplates the uselessness of “arguments about what is or is not music or what is or is not art,” in a culture that has moved “from the self-satisfied security of modernism into the wide open, work-less and adventurous arena of Post-Modernism.”⁵ This construction, offered some seven years before Jenck’s article (and done so in a casual manner, suggesting that even if “postmodern” did not yet appear often in print, some critics were using it in conversation at this point), is amongst the most common. Often claims for or against postmodernism involve quite a bit more detail, sometimes entailing cultural or subjective observations, sometimes making assertions about the nature of art in general. At the heart of most of the discussions to be explored below are conflicting ideas of what art itself is and what it ought to do. Modernists tend to hold art to be valuable in itself, requiring no justification and indeed constantly in danger of being corrupted by justification. Theorists more supportive of postmodernism are more likely to see art as inextricably woven into social and subjective fabrics, thus making it sometimes difficult (or even unadvisable) to extract explicitly artistic claims.

⁵ John Perreault, “La Monte Young’s Tracery: The Voice of the Tortoise,” *Village Voice* (February 22, 1968), 27.

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Amongst the most significant pieces of early scholarship on postmodernism is the paper Jürgen Habermas presented when he received the Adorno Prize in 1980.⁶ Habermas's essay is in part a response to the 1980 Venice Biennale, which had for the first time admitted architects, and although he begins by responding to architecture, the purview of his essay rapidly broadens. (Jencks had a hand in organizing the new Biennale, which featured “ornament, convention, symbolism, and every other practice considered taboo.”)⁷ Habermas, like many subsequent German critics, found this new architectural practice dangerously conservative. Indeed Habermas's early negative impression of postmodernism led to a problematic discrepancy between the German understanding of postmodernism and the understanding that developed concurrently in the United States (which was heavily influenced by Habermas's philosophical rival, Jean-François Lyotard). Joakim Tillman, in his summary of the German debate on postmodernism, relates that German music critics, following Habermas's lead, applied the term “postmodern” to those composers, most of whom were born in the 1950s, who sought to revive romanticism.⁸ Like Habermas, the German critics—Tillman cites Hermann Danuser as exemplary—were concerned with the threat of political and cultural neoconservatism, which they find lurking in the music of neoromantic composers.

The conception of postmodernism exhibited by Habermas and those who followed him is in both senses reactionary; that is, they found the new work to be reactionary, and their reaction to this new work was itself reactionary. But we must bear in mind here the specific set of work

⁶ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” trans. Seyla Ben-Habib, in *Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster ed., 3–15.

⁷ Charles Jencks, “Postmodern and Late Modern,” 54.

⁸ Joakim Tillman, “Postmodernism and Art Music in the German Debate,” in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 75–92.

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these critics were reacting against. It was their claim neither that all new work was neoconservative or regressive, nor that all new work was postmodern. (These two possibilities likely amounted to the same thing in their eyes.) German postmodernism, in the hands of Habermas, is a theory of postmodern art first, and in so far as it implicates culture, it is a theory of conflict, not of homogeneity. It must be understood even before examining American art criticism closely that since American art critics of a progressive bent tended, from the late 1970s on, to speak of postmodernism in laudatory tones, that the American concept of postmodernism, at least in the realm of art critics, was quite different from Habermas's conception.

With this in mind it seems quite odd that Foster, who is generally supportive of postmodernism, would include Habermas's essay in his book on postmodern culture, and indeed Foster himself suggests that the German philosopher is somewhat out of place in *The Anti-Aesthetic*.⁹ The reasons for including Habermas are numerous, but the one most important to a discussion of minimalist art is surely the framework from which he derives his conception of postmodernism. First Habermas follows the literary historian Hans Robert Jauss in defining "modern." According to Jauss, from as early as the fifth century, Europeans have used "modern" or words of similar derivation (such as the Latin "modernus") to distinguish the present from its fixed classical past. Initially this construction contrasted early Christian Rome with its non-Christian past, but writers in later epochs found strategic advantages in constructing a relationship between their present and Greek and Roman antiquity. "With varying content," says Habermas, "the term 'modern' again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that

⁹ "But all the critics [that appear in this book], save Jürgen Habermas, hold this belief in common: that the project of modernity is now deeply problematic." Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ix.

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relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from the old to the new.”¹⁰ The practice of constructing the modern in relation to ancient Greece and Rome reappears intermittently in European history, whenever “the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients—whenever, moreover, antiquity was considered a model to be recovered through some kind of imitation.”¹¹

The Enlightenment disrupted this paradigm, replacing the imitation of the past with a belief in the progress of knowledge and civilization. The best society was no longer considered to be that which best appropriated classical knowledge, but that which progressed beyond its present state of knowledge. This, for Habermas, is the beginning of modernity. Modernity’s belief in progress renders society’s relationship to the ancients less relevant, replacing the role of the classical period with a new sort of classic. The new importance of progress in modern culture manifests in the arts in the ever-present pursuit of the new. Each successive generation of modern artists is obliged to move beyond the aesthetic achievements of the past generation. But this does not bring about a constant discarding of all work that has lost its freshness. On the contrary, the measure of success, for Habermas, of a “modern” work of art is whether or not it becomes a classic. Thus the initial value of Jackson Pollock’s *Number 1, 1948* derives largely from its innovation, but its value as we perceive it now derives from its longevity, its status as a classic. The difference, then, between a merely fashionable work of art and a truly modern work lies in its relationship to the future; successful modern art is institutionalized and classicized.

Those familiar with mid-century American art criticism will already detect in Habermas’s construction of modernity a strong sympathy with the work of Clement Greenberg, but before

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity,” 3.

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity,” 4.

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elaborating on this potential debt, there is one more aspect of Habermas's analysis that bears upon our discussion of postmodernism. As indicated above, the modern belief in scientific progress influences the development of art by establishing a drive toward novelty. As is the case in the sciences, the arts are expected to derive new and better working methods from the old. This led, according to Habermas, to a tripartite division of intellectual activity in modern society (following Max Weber): science, morality, and art.¹² Prior to the Enlightenment, it was quite common to find thinkers such as Descartes who were, in the tradition of Plato and Aristotle, experts and theorists in a broad array of subjects. In the modern context, specialization is the norm, surely in part because the progress of any given field renders a dilettante's knowledge drastically inadequate. Modernism, in addition to entailing a demand for progress and novelty, establishes institutional disciplinary boundaries, first between the studies of science, morality, and art, but also within these divisions, between painting, sculpture, architecture, and music, for example.

The conception of modernism as specialized also resonates with Clement Greenberg's writings. Greenberg may have been the most influential critic working in America during the middle two quarters of the twentieth century. His theories of modernist art remain influential, and he played a major role in the reception of both abstract expressionism and minimalism. Like the later Habermas, Greenberg considered the relation to the past and the separation of disciplines to be central to modernism. Disciplinary separation became an important factor in Clement Greenberg's art criticism early in his career, though he credits the development of his theory of distinct artistic disciplines not to the work of Max Weber, but to a much earlier source:

¹² Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity," 9.

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Gotthold Lessing's 1760 *Laocoön*. In "Towards a Newer Laocoon," Greenberg argues for the ideal of a rigorously divided field of artistic production, where each medium is separated from every other.¹³ In this sense Greenberg goes further than Habermas; the latter sees disciplinary segregation as a necessary feature of modernism, while the former considers this condition to be essential to a healthy art community in any era.

Greenberg's perspective on disciplinary segregation differs notably from Habermas's, particularly with respect to the role played by history. Recall that for Habermas disciplinary segregation derives from the French Enlightenment, partly in response to a new drive for progress. For Greenberg, on the other hand, segregation is essentially normative; periods in which the arts drift together or overlap are periods of "confusion." Great art in these times is not impossible; on the contrary, it is expected. But *good* art, in consistent quantities, is not to be expected whenever the arts encroach too much upon each other's territories. For Greenberg, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a period which for Habermas marks the beginning of disciplinary division—suffer from a profound and apparently new imbalance in the arts. Literature, Greenberg claims, holds too much sway over the other arts—particularly painting. Greenberg's history of art since this period is the story of a brave struggle on the part of the disadvantaged arts to distinguish themselves in a drive toward disciplinary purity.

At the early phases of Greenberg's narrative, literature dominates most of the other arts, and painting in particular. Music, it is interesting to note, stands somewhat aloof from this problematic. "Music," Greenberg remarks, "was saved from the fate of the pictorial arts in the

¹³ Clement Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, ed. John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1986, 23–38. Originally printed in *Partisan Review*, July–August 1940.

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seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by its comparatively rudimentary technique and the relative shortness of its development as a formal art.”¹⁴ Though Greenberg’s claim regarding the technical achievements of music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is dubious, it is clear that Greenberg is establishing a special position for music which will return when modernism proper finally arrives in the arts. Romanticism, which Greenberg calls “the last great tendency following *directly* from bourgeois society,”¹⁵ regrettably fails to extricate the pictorial arts from the bonds of literature. It is not until the middle of the nineteenth century, with the rising prevalence of Bohemianism, that the visual arts pulled themselves out from under the sway of literature. The key characteristic of the Bohemians, which plays a crucial role in Greenberg’s much later response to postmodernism, is their general antagonism toward the bourgeoisie. According to Greenberg, it is this opposition that finally gives the arts the means of overcoming the burdens of representation, which have been largely responsible for maintaining the submission of the visual arts to literature. Here music returns, this time characterized as non-figurative and immediate, providing the example of abstraction followed by the other arts. Greenberg clarifies that it is the ends that matter most: though the early avant-garde response to music was imitative, this interdisciplinary cross-pollination is justified by the fact that the imitation of music gives the pictorial arts the means of escaping literature through abstraction. (Years later, Greenberg would also emphasize the importance of the ends over the means when theorizing that sculpture, in order fully to enter into the domain of abstraction, would rely on painting as its example: “Here the prohibition against one art’s entering the domain of another is

¹⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Toward a Newer Laocoon,” 24.

¹⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Toward a Newer Laocoon,” 27. As we shall see below, Greenberg’s antagonism toward the bourgeoisie should not be equated with Marxism.

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suspended, thanks to the unique concreteness and literalness of sculpture's medium. Sculpture can confine itself to virtually two dimensions (as some of David Smith's pieces do) without being felt to violate the limitations of its medium, because the eye recognizes that what offers itself in two dimensions is actually (not palpably) fashioned in three."¹⁶

Bohemianism succeeded where Romanticism failed because it both encouraged and allowed the "escape from ideas"—which "came to mean subject matter in general."¹⁷ For Greenberg this move away from representation—figured here as a liberation from literature—serves both to preserve each individual art from the influence of other arts, and to establish the future trajectory of modernism in the arts: the progressive elimination of elements foreign to each art's medium. Where Habermas invoked a general notion of progress, Greenberg is specific: "The avant-garde, both child and negation of Romanticism, becomes the embodiment of art's instinct of self-preservation.... It was becoming important to determine the essential elements of each of the arts."¹⁸ Thus the drive toward disciplinary segregation, which is achieved, according to Greenberg, by copying musical abstraction and immediacy, implicates in turn the narrative of modernist progress with which Habermas begins his essay. Through quite different methodologies, these two authors arrive at similar understandings of modernism, at least in the arts.

¹⁶ Clement Greenberg, "Sculpture in Our Time," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O'Brian (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993) 59. Originally published in *Arts Magazine* (June 1958).

¹⁷ Clement Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon," 28.

¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Toward a Newer Laocoon," 28–29. Note that Greenberg is using "avant-garde" to indicate bohemian art, and that he typically switches to "modern" or "Modernist" to describe twentieth century American art.

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Although Greenberg holds that the preference for segregation in the arts is not unique to modernism, the specific means by which modern art defends its territory are unique to the historical period:

Art looks for its resources of conviction in the same general direction as thought. Once it was revealed religion, then it was hypostatizing reason. The nineteenth century shifted its quest to the empirical and positive. This notion has undergone much revision over the last hundred years, and generally toward a stricter conception of the positive. Aesthetic sensibility has shifted accordingly. The growing specialization of the arts is due chiefly not to the prevalence of the division of labor, but to our increasing faith in and taste for the immediate, the concrete, the irreducible.¹⁹

Here as elsewhere Greenberg identifies himself unmistakably as a formalist critic. Art is not valuable based on its power to evoke or represent, but owing to its immediate formal characteristics. Modernism, in this formalist conception, functions through its direct connection to the past, and more specifically through the capacity of art to be self-critical:

Modernism includes more than art and literature. By now it covers almost the whole of what is truly alive in our culture. In happens, however, to be very much of a historical novelty. Western civilization is not the first civilization to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the one that has gone furthest in doing so. I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost the exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as the first real Modernist.... The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.... The self-criticism of Modernism grows out of, but is not the same thing as, the criticism of the Enlightenment.²⁰

Like Habermas, Greenberg understands modernism as a type of relation to a shifting past.

“I cannot insist enough,” says Greenberg, “that Modernism has never meant, and does not mean

¹⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Sculpture in Our Time,” 55.

²⁰ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Clement Greenberg: Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 4*, ed. John O’Brian, 85. Originally published in *Forum Lectures* (Washington, D.C.: Voice of America), 1960.

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now, anything like a break with the past.”²¹ But by looking back to the art of the recent past, modernism reaches toward the future, as each successive generation of artists sees in its predecessors those elements which are inessential to the artistic medium:

It quickly emerged that the unique and proper area of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered “pure,” and in its “purity” find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence.²²

Modern art in Greenberg’s view arises from the successful efforts of the early avant-garde (the Bohemians) to wrest the pictorial arts from literature and begin to move down the path toward abstraction. Because of the importance of the segregation of artistic media, artists ostensibly became more and more interested in isolating those particular elements that were essential to their media. This has led to a lineage of modern art following a narrative of reduction, effected through a continuous link to the past. For Greenberg, this is achievable only through continuity and relation:

Nothing could be further from the authentic art of our time than the idea of a rupture of continuity. Art *is*—among other things—continuity, and unthinkable without it. Lacking the past of art, and the need and compulsion to maintain its standards of excellence, Modernist art would lack both substance and justification.²³

Slightly earlier in this same essay, Greenberg issues a warning to critics and journalists:

It belongs to journalism—and to the millennial complex from which so many journalists and journalist intellectuals suffer in our day—that each new phase of Modernist art should

²¹ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 92. This statement recalls, for example, Schoenberg’s attachment to Brahms, as exemplified in Arnold Schoenberg, “Brahms the Progressive,” in *Style and Idea* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 52–101.

²² Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 86.

²³ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 93.

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be hailed as the start of a whole new epoch in art, marking a decisive break with all the customs and conventions of the past.²⁴

Greenberg's trajectory for modernism thus involves two elements, both of which function in the service of preserving modernism's authenticity and its connection to the past. The first is the separation of the arts, and the second is the pursuit of the essential elements of the medium. This second leads to a modernism of reduction, as supplemental or superfluous elements are removed by successive generations. We must expect from this narrative of modernist reduction that painting had begun to show tendencies that might be considered minimalist in one way or another quite early on, and indeed critics find precedents for minimalism in work by artists as diverse as Mondrian, Kelly, Newman, Malevich, Rothko, and Duchamp. Most critics seem to agree that Frank Stella's 1958 black stripe paintings are the first definitively minimalist works—in this respect they play a role similar to Riley's *In C* or, for some, Young's *Trio for Strings*—and indeed it is clear from comments by Andre, Judd, and others that these paintings had a tremendous influence on the art of the 1960s.²⁵ As was the case with minimalist music, minimalist art precedes the criticism that bears its name, and it is important to take care to allow for diverse and contradictory meanings of the words “minimal” and “minimalist” when they begin to appear in the art literature.

Richard Wollheim, who seems to be responsible for introducing the word “minimal” into the vocabulary of American art criticism, discusses twentieth century art in somewhat similar terms, focusing on the gradual attenuation of manual labor in the form of faithful

²⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 93.

²⁵ For information and analysis of Stella's importance on and subsequent divergence from minimalism, see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

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representation.²⁶ Wollheim's "minimal" is at least partially different from our more recent understanding of the term as it relates to art history. Wollheim demonstrates neither interest in nor awareness of the most recent trends in American sculpture, instead focusing on slightly earlier abstract American art. "Minimal Art" is an unintentional reminder that "minimal" originates not as the title of a movement but as an adjective, and that it has often been used to express exasperation at the apparent lack of artistic effort or skill required to produce abstract art. In fact the issue addressed by Wollheim is not the rise of a new aesthetic, but the question of what categories of evaluation can be used for abstract art in general. Like Greenberg, Wollheim identifies a trajectory of reduction—Wollheim characterizes it as a reduction in work—running parallel with the development of abstract visual art. "Minimal Art" begins by linking "minimal" to the avant-garde: specifically to Reinhardt, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp, all of whom have produced work of "a minimal art-content."²⁷ Wollheim's article does not position minimalism as we know it in the stream of modernism—of all the artists mentioned in "Minimal Art," only Reinhardt comes close to being considered a minimalist—but it does corroborate Greenberg's identification of reduction with modernism.

Wollheim conceptualizes "work" as a condition of possibility for art of all kinds, a condition that has been cultivated "over the centuries." The importance historically placed on work is also linked to the belief that art ought to express something of the artist: "The connection between art and expression, which has been so elaborately reinforced in the art of the recent past, has of course in turn reinforced the connection between work and art."²⁸ In earlier phases of art

²⁶ Richard Wollheim, "Minimal Art," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E.P. Dutton Co., 1968), 387–399. Reprinted from *Arts Magazine*, January, 1965.

²⁷ Richard Wollheim, "Minimal Art," 387.

²⁸ Richard Wollheim, "Minimal Art," 395.

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history, work involved construction. In the case of painting, this involved “a very large number of non-repetitive brush-strokes,” executed in the interest of replicating an image.²⁹ While construction has always remained a factor in art, as history progresses construction diminishes in importance and incidence, while another form of work becomes more noticeable. Paintings emerge that, rather than exhibiting the work of constructing a representative image, are “the result of the partial obliteration or simplifying of a more complex image that enjoyed some kind of shadowy preexistence, and upon which the artist has gone to work.”³⁰ Construction is partially overcome by distortion.

The progression of distortion, of faithlessness to the preexisting image—which culminates for Wollheim in Reinhardt—is the story of abstraction, and parallels Greenberg’s narrative of reduction, though Wollheim is less interested in what propels the narrative than in what it uncovers. In addition to the work of construction and distortion, there appears something new.

[T]he production of an art object consists, first of all, in a phase that might be called, perhaps oversimply, “work” *tout court* ... But the second phase in artistic productivity consists in decision, which, even if it cannot be said to *be* literally work, is that without which work would be meaningless: namely, the decision that the work has gone far enough.³¹

In short, Wollheim’s analysis of the progression of modern art through more and more reductive abstraction reveals, by focusing on the means of production, work’s supplement—or a supplemental sort of work. We will see below that the method of performing this supplemental work—the work of deciding what to do and when to stop—can provide a source of critical

²⁹ Richard Wollheim, “Minimal Art,” 399.

³⁰ Richard Wollheim, “Minimal Art,” 396.

³¹ Richard Wollheim, “Minimal Art,” 396.

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justification or condemnation. Greenberg, for example, argues that these decisions must be instinctive and non-conceptual. Michael Fried, who was briefly a student of Wollheim's, is more willing to accept rational and intellectual approaches to this supplemental work, so long as the traditional terms of the artistic encounter remain intact.

The art critic Barbara Rose was quick to pick up on the usefulness of Wollheim's "minimal" designation, and adapted it to her more contemporary purposes. Indeed the work Rose discusses—most of the younger artists active in New York in the middle of the 1960s—were producing art even more "minimal" than that discussed by Wollheim. "A B C Art" approaches Wollheim's "minimal art-content" from a different strategic angle, with the object in mind of advocating for a new group of artists.³² Where Wollheim was content simply to point out the general reductive trend of distortionist art, Rose analyzes the sensibility of a group of young artists who stand somewhere between the positions anticipated by Duchamp and Malevich.³³ Though her canvas is quite large—and intentionally so—Rose's more extended analyses are reserved for relatively few artists. A few of these—Flavin, Judd, Morris and Andre—will come to be known as minimalist sculptors, but others—Artschwager and Warhol—will not (though some anthologies include Artschwager as a peripheral figure, and Edward Strickland considers Warhol's films to be properly minimalist). Four musicians are mentioned: John Cage and Erik

³² Barbara Rose, "A B C Art," in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock etc. 274–297. Reprinted from *Art in America*, October–November 1965.

³³ Rose's list is in three parts. Under Malevich's influence are Darby Bannard, Larry Zox, Robert Huot, Lyman Kipp, Richard Tuttle, Jan Evans, Ronald Bladen, and Anne Truitt. Under Duchamp are Richard Artschwager, Andy Warhol, and "the dancers and composers [who] are all, to a greater or lesser degree, indebted to John Cage, who is himself an admirer of Duchamp." Rose locates Robert Morris, Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Dan Flavin somewhere between the Malevich/Duchamp poles. (278) It is perhaps significant that the only artists on this list who are considered by all known sources to be minimalists are in the intermediate position—though of course Truitt and Bladen could quite reasonably be considered "true" minimalists as well.

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Satie serve as forefathers to Rose's ABC artists, and La Monte Young and Morton Feldman are included properly in her cohort.

The aim of Rose's article is not to mark out a minimalist style—she is quite uninterested in stylistic concerns, and makes only a small effort to bind Morris, Andre, Judd and Flavin together—but rather to examine the state of American art after abstract expressionism. ABC artists are bound together for Rose by a common discomfort with expression: “One has the sense that the question of whether or not an emotional state can be communicated (particularly in an abstract work) or worse still, to what degree it can be simulated or staged, must have struck some serious-minded young artists as disturbing.”³⁴ Rose finds, amongst interviews with and articles by these artists, that “statements with regard to content or meaning or intention are prominent only by their omission.”³⁵ If our interest here is in understanding the path of modernist art in the 1960s, then we can understand Rose in terms similar to Greenberg's: ABC art, the new, young art of the 1960s is legible through its relation to the past, and most of these artists have found “expression” to be an excessive quality, inessential to the artistic medium. Nevertheless, Rose's narrative implicitly contradicts Greenberg's, replacing Pollock and the rest of the New York school with Malevich and Duchamp. Amongst other things, Duchamp's apparent disregard for the integrity of artistic media prevents any orthodox Greenbergian reading of Rose's essay, but the genealogical or historical debt Rose argues for is in at least some sense modern.

The context gleaned from Wollheim's and Rose's articles lends important perspective for reading Yvonne Rainer's “A Quasi Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies...”³⁶ Like Rose,

³⁴ Barbara Rose, “A B C Art,” 280.

³⁵ Barbara Rose, “A B C Art,” 281.

³⁶ Yvonne Rainer, “A Quasi Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*,” in *Minimal Art*, ed.

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Rainer draws connections across disciplinary boundaries; in this case, she is interested in comparing dance to the plastic arts. But also like Rose, the subject of her analysis is the contemporary art scene, not necessarily or strictly what has now come to be known as minimalism. This is less clear in Rainer's case, because she chooses specific examples only from dance, referring only to "minimal tendencies" in the plastic arts. Thus hints about what she is referring to in the plastic arts must be extracted from her comments on her own dance. Perhaps the most useful example is her response to the question, "Why are they so intent on just being themselves?":

1) The artifice of performance has been reevaluated in that actions, or what one does, is more interesting and important than the exhibition of character and attitude, and that action can best be focused on through the submerging of the personality; so ideally one is not even oneself, one is a neutral "doer." 2) The display of technical virtuosity and the display of the dancer's specialized body no longer make any sense.³⁷

Here Rainer could quite easily be referring to an Andre stack of bricks or a Morris plywood construction; but, like Rose's analysis of her contemporaneous "minimal" artists, Rainer's conception of a new approach to phrasing is as applicable to minimalism as it is to most other artistic production from that time—most notably, in this case, Cage's radical aleatoricism.³⁸ Indeed, if a broad sense of "minimal" is adopted it becomes quite clear that Rainer is cataloging the parallel evolution of dance and sculpture broadly speaking.

From the examples of Rose and Rainer it is apparent that many of the newer movements in the arts in the 1960s fit only partially into Greenberg's theory of modernist art. Although Rose

Gregory Battcock, 263–273.

³⁷ Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey," 267.

³⁸ Other aspects of Rainer's analysis hold some interest for the discussion of music. In particular, her new conception of phrasing, which requires no pauses or breaks, her radical dehierarchization, and an unhurried sense of control (270), as well as her statement that "In a strict sense, neither is there any repetition." (271)

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shares Greenberg's understanding of the importance of the past, her preference for what Greenberg might have thought of as rogue strains of new art—and the disciplinary “confusion” evident in Duchamp's oeuvre—overshadows the similarities between the art she is writing about and that for which Greenberg advocates. Rainer presents an even stronger challenge to Greenberg. Although she is dismissive of any theory of isomorphism between dance and other arts, Rainer assumes in her essay not only that the arts influence one another, but that this influence is both fruitful and desirable.

The minimalism discussed in both Rainer's and Rose's essays is a very broad minimalism, encompassing much of the new art in New York in the 1960s. These essays present a curious phenomenon with respect to Greenbergian modernism since on the one hand the idea of reduction is surely being adhered to—both in a simple formal sense and with respect to the removal of expressive elements—but on the other hand there is the appearance of increased interdisciplinarity, which Greenberg opposes. Minimalism in particular increasingly seemed to signify the failure of Greenbergian modernism, in part because it apparently fulfilled the mandate for reduction while abandoning those intuitive and formal characteristics that Greenberg so greatly valued. Consequently, both Greenberg and the younger critic Michael Fried, who was much influenced by the former, launched pointed and polemical critiques against minimalism. But before looking closely at Fried's and Greenberg's writings on minimalism, it is important first to look at the writings of some of the artists these critics attack.

Some of the most influential critical reflections published during the 1960s come from the artists themselves. Amongst these is Donald Judd's “Specific Objects.”³⁹ The title refers to

³⁹ Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” in *Minimalism*, ed. James Meyer (New York: Phaidon, 2000), 207–210. Originally published in *Arts Yearbook* 8, 1965.

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what Judd argues is a new mode of artistic production, existing somewhere between painting and sculpture. Producing objects rather than paintings has become necessary because painting has run out of viable possibilities:

The main thing wrong with painting is that it is a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall. The rectangle is a shape itself; it is obviously the whole shape; it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside of it.... A form can be used only in so many ways. The rectangular plane is given a life span.⁴⁰

Frustration with the formal limits of the canvas edge were common in the 1960s, and though Judd's reaction was extreme, it was not unique to him.⁴¹ Judd's denial of the future possibility of painting can be read as strategic as well as philosophical. While a refusal to acknowledge a practice of art rooted in dialectical tension is consonant with Judd's lack of interest in the work of Kant and Hegel during his time as a philosophy student at Columbia, denying painting's continued efficacy also serves the more polemical purpose of making Judd's own work seem historically necessary.⁴² Judd does not deny the importance of historical progression. On the contrary, he takes some pains to acknowledge that the work being supplanted by new three-dimensional work is not implicitly flawed, but is merely unrepeatable. From this perspective, Judd's goals are modernist: in nearly Habermasian fashion, Judd is canonizing *very* recent work, making it newly classical, in order that his modern practice might become legible in relation. To complete his position, Judd also renounces sculpture, arguing that his work is three-dimensional, but separate from sculpture properly speaking. Judd's reading of sculpture has a mutually

⁴⁰ Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 207.

⁴¹ James Meyer suggests that many artists active in the 1960s, including Judd, Andre, and Mel Bochner (but not Stella), felt that Stella's stripe paintings had demonstrated the end of painting. See, for example, James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 171.

⁴² For a brief and informative recapitulation of Judd's academic career, see Thomas Kellein, *Donald Judd: Early Works 1955–1968* (New York: D.A.P., 2002).

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reinforcing relationship to his view of painting: painting has run out of ways to produce a unified totality; sculpture, since the influence of cubism, has had no interest in totality.

Most sculpture is made part by part, by addition, composed. The main parts remain fairly discrete. They and the small parts are a collection of variations, slight through great. There are hierarchies of clarity and strength and of proximity to one or two main ideas.... There is little of any of this in the new three-dimensional work.⁴³

In both moments, Judd reveals his aesthetic preference for the whole over the parts.

Judd's preference for the whole goes some distance to explain the frequent occurrence of box-like forms in Judd's output during this time, as well as much of the resonance between Judd's writing and Morris's "Notes on Sculpture"—more on this below—but it also reveals one of the more interesting conflicts between Judd and Michael Fried. When discussing Stella's work in "Shape as Form," Fried explicitly argues for an aesthetic *not* dependent on coherent totality, organic or otherwise.

Nothing, apparently, is more central to their [Stella's shaped paintings of 1966] conception than the desire to establish all shapes on an equal footing—to make pictures that comprise nothing but individual shapes, each of which is felt to stand or fall without reference, or appeal, to a single master shape, the support seen as a single entity. In fact, because in most of the new pictures the physical limits of the support are not perceived as constituting a single shape, there is even a sense in which—despite the nonrectangularity of their supports—the pictures in question are not shaped.⁴⁴

Because so much of "Shape as Form" is dedicated to attacking minimalism, and Judd in particular, it is significant that Fried reads Stella's post-stripe paintings specifically in terms of what he perceives to be their avoidance of unity. Fried is not himself opposed to unified forms; in this same essay, Fried contrasts Stella's (positive) lack of cohesion to Olitski's and Noland's

⁴³ Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," 209.

⁴⁴ Michael Fried, "Shape as Form: Frank Stella's Irregular Polygons," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 91. Originally published in *Artforum* 5 (November, 1966), 18–27.

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quite coherent forms; all three of these artists are deemed successful.⁴⁵ By reversing Judd's dictate of wholeness, Fried takes the final step in claiming Stella for his version of modernism. In most histories of the subject, Stella is considered minimalism's first authentic practitioner, and, as Meyer points out, his Stripe paintings occupy an important polemical position for Andre and Judd.⁴⁶ Followers of his work, however, will note that Stella's minimalist period was short-lived: by the mid-sixties he was producing work of a markedly different stripe. Stella's abandonment of the project he started with the black paintings is an important moment in the history of minimalism—Meyer, commenting on the rhetorical tug-of-war between Fried on the one hand and Judd and Andre on the other, refers to it as the “battle for Frank Stella's soul.” Fried's refusal to privilege wholeness here is an important maneuver both because it definitively defines Stella's output as modernist, and because of the role the concept of the coherent whole plays in Judd's criticism. Whatever the case, Fried is careful here to theorize a space within modernism for art that problematizes totally; coherence is not an essential component of modern painting.

“Shape as Form” also presents a more canonically modernist response to the problem of the frame in 1960s painting. Judd dismissed painting in 1965 on the grounds that the frame could not be overcome; Fried, the next year, lauded the work of recent painters, and Stella in particular, for its successful confrontation of the frame. In Fried's narrative—largely borrowed from Greenberg—the trajectory of modernist painting generally is concerned with the reduction of art's content to the essential elements. (Fried notably distinguishes himself from Greenberg by

⁴⁵ See also, for a concise example of Fried praising unified form, the discussion of Ellsworth Kelly in Michael Fried, “New York Letter: Kelly, Poons,” *Art and Objecthood*, 308–310. Reprinted from *Art International* 7 (Dec.–Jan. 1963–64): 54. It is also interesting to note, in passing, Fried's positive review of Judd's earlier show. “New York Letter: Judd,” same volume, 312–313. Reprinted from *Art International* 8 (Feb. 15, 1964): 26.

⁴⁶ See James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics*, 119–128.

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insisting that these essential elements depend on historical location.) Reduction progressively brings painting closer and closer to its literal support: the canvas and its framing edge. The path of successful modernist painting requires that this literalness be confronted. However, just as Greenberg would later chastise minimalists for too simple a relation to the far-out, Fried finds minimalist work (in particular the work of Judd and Larry Bell) wanting in the complexity of its relation to the literal. Advanced painting, as exemplified by Stella, is concerned with—in some sense is about—the “conflict between visual illusionism and literal shape.”⁴⁷

This [conflict] is worth stressing precisely because there are certain younger artists to whose sensibilities all conflict between the literal character of the support and illusion of any kind is intolerable and for whom, accordingly, the future of art lies in the creation of works that, more than anything else, are *wholly literal*—in that respect going “beyond” painting.... [L]iteralness isolated and hypostatized in the work of artists like Donald Judd and Larry Bell is by no means the *same* literalness as that acknowledged by advanced painting throughout the past century: it is not the literalness *of the support*. Moreover, hypostatization is not acknowledgment.... Their pieces cannot be said to acknowledge literalness; they simply *are literal*.... [T]he problem has been eliminated, not solved, by the artists in question.⁴⁸

We might simplify by saying that Judd and Bell, who stand in for minimalism here, fail to maintain a sufficiently dialectical relationship to the art of the recent past. In this respect, Fried’s critique—at least at this moment—is not wholly unlike Greenberg’s; the “far-out” plays much the same role in defining Greenberg’s modernism as the dialectic does for Fried, and in both cases minimalism fails to approach the question at hand with sufficient complexity. Fried’s epigraph, from Wittgenstein, is apt:

The craving for simplicity. People would like to say: “What really matters is only the colors.” You say this mostly because you wish it to be the case. If your explanation is

⁴⁷ Michael Fried, “Shape as Form, 88.

⁴⁸ Michael Fried, “Shape as Form, 88.

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complicated, it is disagreeable, especially if you don't have strong feelings about the thing itself.⁴⁹

Robert Morris's "Notes on Sculpture" (Parts I and II) distinguishes itself from "Specific Objects" and "A B C Art" largely by virtue of its comparatively narrow purview.⁵⁰ James Meyer explains the position of "Notes on Sculpture" relative to articles such as "A B C Art" and "Specific Objects": "Not only did the essay bring an unprecedented rigor to Morris's writing, it supplanted the short review or *Zeitgeist* piece of early minimal criticism, as well as Judd's rather piecemeal essays, with a literature of more definitive aspiration."⁵¹ These more definitive aspirations are specifically the delimitation of a history of sculpture separate from that of painting (Morris has in mind here the historical narrative established by Greenberg and Fried), and the theoretical elaboration of Morris's own sculptural practice at the time (and of course the former serves to reinforce the latter). As Meyer points out, in order to achieve the former goal Morris dedicates a portion of these essays to a critique of Fried and Greenberg on the one hand, and Judd on the other. Morris finds that Fried's and Greenberg's writings on sculpture—specifically on David Smith and Anthony Caro—fail to respect the division of artistic disciplines which Greenberg himself first defined in "Toward a Newer Laocoon." Their readings of Smith's and Caro's sculpture are grounded in the theory of opticality developed by Greenberg for

⁴⁹ Michael Fried, "Shape as Form," 77. John Perreault, presumably in reference to this article, later comments that "even the devil can quote scriptures." John Perreault, "Minimal Art Clearing the Air," *The Village Voice* (January 12, 1967), 11.

⁵⁰ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," in *Minimal Art*, 222–235. Part I originally published in *Artforum*, February 1966. Part II originally published in *Artforum*, October 1966.

⁵¹ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the 60s*, 153. James Meyer's quite thorough treatment of "Notes on Sculpture" is very useful for interested readers. Several of the conclusions reached in the present chapter appear also in Meyer with more detail, though on some few points my analysis will differ, either in content or in direction.

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modernist painting,⁵² recall above that Fried criticizes minimalism for “going ‘beyond’ painting.” Morris’s primary motive for developing post-cubist sculpture is a dissatisfaction with sculpture’s dependence *on* painting.

Morris, like Judd, understands the position of sculpture in the mid-1960s in relation to Cubism, tacitly taking his own simple, uncomposed objects as examples of new modern works. “Notes on Sculpture” suggests that simple, unified forms are an effective way to move art beyond its cubist heritage. In this way “Notes on Sculpture” is consonant with “Specific Objects”: both theorize post-cubist work, though Judd so identifies sculpture with cubism that he feels compelled to argue for the creation of a new artistic medium.⁵³ Morris defines two avenues in particular that lead to a new, post-cubist sculptural practice: through adherence to a gestalt (elaborated mostly in Part I); and through a rejection of intimacy, leading to a public mode of presentation, which involves rejecting details and their corresponding intimacy (as elaborated in Part II).

In Part I, Morris explains that simple polyhedrons, corresponding to pre-conceptualized shapes—gestalts—allow the viewer to apprehend the object without having to accommodate any formal dissonance. The better the correspondence between object and gestalt, the easier it is for a viewer to see the sculpture instantaneously as a whole. The gestalt itself, though—or the object’s correspondence thereto—does not itself constitute wholeness; rather, gestalts merely “offer a maximum resistance to perceptual separation,” even “if they do not negate the numerous relative

⁵² Fried’s advocacy for Caro helps to explain why he chose Morris and Judd specifically for “Art and Objecthood.” Both artists use Caro as a central counter-example to their own aesthetic.

⁵³ This is not to say that Judd and Morris endorse one another’s work. Meyer points out that Judd later took exception to Morris’s writing; although Morris does not specifically cite Judd or his work (there is even a picture of a Judd sculpture accompanying the original publication of Part I in *Artforum*), Judd felt that many of the remarks could only be interpreted as attacks against him.

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sensations of colour to texture, scale to mass, etc., [they] do not present clearly separated parts for these kinds of relations to be established in terms of shapes.”⁵⁴ Correspondence between a sculpture and a gestalt denies the gaze the opportunity to dissect the object itself, but since form can never be the only feature of an object, the gestalt can encourage objective wholeness, but it cannot ensure it. We can make much of this in terms of Morris looking to create objects that withstand the specular impulse of the masculine gaze. From this perspective, it is a coincidence neither that Morris’s sculpture (and much minimalism, as we’ll see below) can be read in phallic terms, nor that Morris is so concerned with controlling the terms of the encounter. Further, as will be seen below, the role of ornamentation and seduction will figure prominently in Morris’s further exploration of how best to achieve wholeness in his objects.

Part II of “Notes on Sculpture” explains the importance of size in Morris’s aesthetic. On the continuum of possible sizes there is a single fixed point, the size of the viewer’s body. At either extreme of this continuum lie the ornament and the monument. Ornamental, small objects are characterized by a sense of intimacy, while monumental objects are more public: “The quality of intimacy is attached to an object in a fairly direct proportion as its size diminishes in relation to oneself. The quality of publicness is attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself.”⁵⁵ For Morris, publicness is desirable, while intimacy is not. Intimate objects fail because they inhabit a mode that “is essentially closed, spaceless, compressed, and exclusive.”⁵⁶ The second of these terms—space—is thematic, as we shall see. Intimacy is undesirable because of its connection to detail; small scale transforms otherwise formal features,

⁵⁴ Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” 225–226.

⁵⁵ Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” 230.

⁵⁶ Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,” 231.

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such as color and shape, into details, which in turn disrupt the object's coherence. As Morris explains, "The term 'detail' is used here in a special and negative sense and should be understood to refer to all factors in a work that pull it toward intimacy by allowing specific elements to separate from the whole, thus setting up relationships within the work."⁵⁷

Morris's avoidance of detail and preference for objects as large as or larger than a man's body leads him away from an intimate mode and into a public one. Though publicness does not itself seem necessary for wholeness, the disrupting impulse of the intimate mode impels Morris to prefer the public as the dualistic opposite to intimacy. And while small, intimate sculptures—ornaments—are "spaceless," public monuments incorporate the space around them into the art situation itself. This resultant spatial publicness—a necessary result of preserving wholeness—also necessarily has temporal implications; the incorporation of the space around an object requires the viewer to take the time to circulate through this space.

Parts I and II of "Notes on Sculpture" then lead Morris into a vital contradiction. On the one hand, whole forms correspond to gestalts, which provide instantaneous views of the object as a whole. On the other hand, in order to retain its unity, an object must be large and free of detail, which creates a spatial situation in which one of the determining factors of the artistic experience is the in-time circulation through the space around the object. Thus the new work has two crucial characteristics: it is detail-poor sculpture, of a size with or larger than the typical male body; and it corresponds closely to a simple geometric shape. The former factor—publicness—lends the space around the object to the art-situation, which in turn requires that the experience of the sculpture occur in time, as the viewer circulates through the space. The latter—gestalt—involves

⁵⁷ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture," 232.

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an instantaneous apprehension of the shape as a whole. Morris acknowledges and attempts to retain this contradiction:

The constant shape of the cube held in the mind but which the viewer never literally experiences, is an actuality against which the literal changing, perspective views are related. There are two distinct terms: the known constant and the experienced variable. Such a division does not occur in the experience of the [Baroque figurative] bronze [statue].⁵⁸

In this sense, the contradiction is a positive, generative one (an inclusive disjunction), which serves to produce a new mode of viewing distinct from the one inherent in painting. But Fried, as we shall see, isolates the temporal mode from Part II and projects it on the entire minimalist field. For Morris, though, time is always both the prolonged time of spatial experience—what Fried will dub theatricality—and the instantaneous time of the gestalt. Morris's principal concern—that of wholeness—does not resurface as a central theme in minimalist criticism until much later, which is somewhat surprising since it is one of but a few direct connections between Morris's writing and Judd's.

In the service of wholeness, we have seen Morris pare down form to singular, rigid geometric objects, without even distinctive colors to draw attention away from the shape. Detail, too seductive and intimate to allow the viewer an orderly experience of the whole, has been reduced to non-existence. Anna Chave would later make much of minimalism's phallic economy; for now we might merely remark upon Morris's strategic use of feminizing tropes, misappropriating perhaps Luce Irigaray's work to characterize Morris's work as representative of or referential to a sex which *is* one. The earlier cubist-derived compositional sculptures of

⁵⁸ Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, 234.

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David Smith are, under Morris's analysis, unable to retain their form, seducing the gallery-goer into pulling them apart with his eyes.

The problematic deployment of gender in Morris's writings and art will be left aside, to be picked up again in Chapter 5. It is necessary here only to remark upon the deliberate modernist intentions expressed by both Morris and Judd. Both artists theorize positions for themselves deliberately linked to the art of the recent past, and both see their work as exploring new ground. For Judd, the history of art and the impossibility of both painting and sculpture lead to the necessity of a new art form, an in-between sort of work: the specific object. From an orthodox Greenbergian perspective, this is necessarily un- or post-modernist, so long as this new art form is conceived of as a rupture with the past, located between painting and sculpture. From the position outlined by Habermas, Judd's writing is less problematic, since there is no need to consider any given list of distinct artistic disciplines to be exhaustive. Indeed one might imagine, as Judd does, the need, brought about through artistic progress, for new disciplines, just as scientific progress has brought about new disciplines in the sciences. Morris, on the other hand, founds his theory of new sculpture on a critique of Greenberg: in accepting the influence of painting on sculpture, Greenberg unnecessarily contradicts his own modernist dictate that sculpture exist autonomously from painting. From Morris's perspective, his own post-cubist work is best solution to the modernist dilemma of new, autonomous sculpture. Greenberg and Fried, we will see, disagree.

Greenberg's and Fried's attacks against minimalism were both quite specific in terms of what they considered to be minimalist work. While Rose and Judd sought to expand their theories of new art to cover most of the new work done during the 1960s, Greenberg and Fried singled out specific artists as minimalist, contrasting their work with that of painters and

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sculptors whom they preferred (such as Anthony Caro, David Smith, Frank Stella, Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski). For Greenberg minimalism meant Judd, Morris, Steiner, and “some but not all” of the work of LeWitt and Smithson, and perhaps Ronald Bladen, though Greenberg seems unsure on this point.⁵⁹ For Fried, Judd and Morris are his principal adversaries, though Larry Bell and Tony Smith also receive some criticism.

Greenberg puts forward his most concise attack on minimalism in “Recentness of Sculpture.” This essay characterizes modernist artistic practice in relation to what he calls the “far-out,” a term chosen to express advance without invoking “novelty,” a concept which Greenberg found troubling due to its relation to the market and to middlebrow taste. For Greenberg, minimalism, like modernism, is involved in the pursuit of the “far-out,” and as such there is a minimally positive relation between Greenbergian modernism and minimalism. Minimalism is found wanting, however, because the means interfere with the ends—contrary to the permissible exceptions to modernist dictates outlined above. Minimalism fails in Greenberg’s eyes because it pursues the far-out in itself, through rational inquiry and planning. The far-out, Greenberg says, must be arrived at intuitively. Thus Greenberg is dismayed at minimalism first of all because of minimalism’s dogged and deliberate pursuit of the far-out, which does not succeed in overcoming minimalism’s implicit blending of disciplines: “In idea, mixing the mediums, straddling the line between painting and sculpture, seemed the far-out thing to do; in actual aesthetic experience it has proven just the opposite.”⁶⁰ But further, minimalism’s apparently deductive approach to artistic advancement is itself a source of failure. “Minimalism,”

⁵⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” in *Minimal Art*, ed. Gregory Battcock, 185–186. Reprinted from the exhibition catalog to *American Sculpture of the Sixties*, Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art, 1967.

⁶⁰ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 182–183.

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Greenberg says, “remains too much a feat of ideation, and not enough anything else. Its idea remains an idea, something deduced instead of felt and discovered.”⁶¹ In this moment, Greenberg’s critical system hinges on the role of the genius in production. Good art—modern art—is accomplished not by training or reason or planning, but by feeling and exploration. Greenberg uses this same system of value—intuition over reason—to explain the failure of later abstract expressionist painters, who were “talking about how you had to make it ugly, and [were] deliberately dirtying their color, only to render what they did still more stereotyped.”⁶² This line of production is doomed to failure: “Equations like these cannot be thought out in advance, they can only be felt and discovered.”⁶³

In short, we might say that Greenberg’s argument against the minimalists is that he finds them—or rather their work—to be dishonest. (In a later essay on Anne Truitt, Greenberg accuses minimalists of dissembling their “rather feminine sensibilities” behind the “far-out, non-art look.”)⁶⁴ Minimalists took shortcuts. For this reason the contradiction between Greenberg’s stance on minimalism and his earlier stances on permitting violations of his modernist orthodoxy so long as the ends justified the violation is only an apparent contradiction. Minimalism, for Greenberg, is guilty of treating the far-out as an end instead of a means. That is to say that art is meant to strive for the far-out, but not deliberately or in calculated fashion. Anthony Caro, Greenberg says, anticipates the minimal movement by catching sight of “the far-out as end in itself ... But it came to him as a matter of experience and inspiration, not of ratiocination, and he

⁶¹ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 183.

⁶² Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 184.

⁶³ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 185.

⁶⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Changer: Anne Truitt,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol 4*, 288–291. Originally printed in *Vogue*, 1968.

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converted it immediately from an end into a means.”⁶⁵ Minimalism, on the other hand, is arrived at by dint of deductive reasoning. Its artistic content is merely a façade decorating an otherwise inartistic endeavor. Truitt, too, “anticipated” the minimalists, but “more literally and therefore, as it seems to me, more embarrassingly than Caro did.”⁶⁶ This moment is of particular interest because in later accounts, Truitt is often categorized as a minimalist herself.

Greenberg’s comments on the relationship between Truitt and minimalism are interesting not only because they help reveal the diversity that is often concealed behind the blanket term “minimalism.” These comments also emphasize the deeper, non-formal concerns that often motivate Greenberg’s art criticism. Greenberg certainly took issue with minimalism’s apparent disregard for the importance of form—which we see, for example, in Judd’s criticism of composition—as well as with minimalism’s indifference to disciplinary boundaries. But the problem against which Greenberg sees himself defending modernist art is not the corruption of painting by sculpture, but the invasion of art generally by middlebrow taste. For Greenberg, as will become abundantly clear when we discuss his reaction to “postmodernism,” the real battle is between those who have dedicated themselves to the understanding of art on the one hand and the ignorant but moneyed masses on the other. Minimalism is merely the latest and most ridiculous manifestation of “novelty art,” as disposable as the Sunday paper and of as little aesthetic value.

Greenberg’s reaction to minimalism in “Recentness of Sculpture” can be fairly safely understood as conservative. Minimalism fails because it does not fit the standards of artistic achievement that Greenberg sees as essential. Instead of adhering to the model of the

⁶⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 185.

⁶⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Recentness of Sculpture,” 185.

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spontaneously inspired artistic genius, minimalism appears as an art of senseless, deductive, logical rigor. Michael Fried offers a more progressive—though no less scathing—critique. In “Art and Objecthood,” Fried continues several of the points made in “Shape as Form,” this time directly engaging the critical writings of some of the most prominent sculptors associated with minimalism.

With “Art and Objecthood” Fried launches a full-scale critique dedicated solely to minimalism.⁶⁷ Fried settles on the term literalism, not minimalism, to designate the work of Judd, Morris, and Tony Smith, and may have done so in part in order to distance his more limited object of criticism from the extremely broad conceptions of minimalism put forth by Rose and others. “Literalism” also helps to describe those ailments that Fried seeks to diagnose in minimalism, as we shall see. The conception of literalism put forth by Fried in “Art and Objecthood” arises from a synthetic rereading of “Specific Objects,” “Notes on Sculpture,” and comments made by Tony Smith. Fried explores a number of concepts that he weaves together into what becomes an early text on a generalized postmodern art, beginning his theory of postmodernity—and of course he does not call it that—with the position established by Judd in “Shape as Form.” We have remarked above on the importance of simple shapes in both Judd’s and Morris’s aesthetic of wholeness. Continuing in some respects his argument from “Shape as Form,” Fried contrasts this aesthetic with his reading of advanced modern painting; all good modern painting, Fried says, is occupied in some important way with confronting the question of shape and the relationship between painting and the literal support. Repeating his earlier

⁶⁷ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 148–172. Originally published in *Artforum* 5 (June 1967), 12–23.

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conclusion, Fried finds the literalist method of engaging shape too simplistic. By failing to take up a sufficiently serious dialectical position, minimalism slips into the category of non-art; minimalists produce not art objects, but merely objects:

The meaning in this context of “the condition of non-art” is what I have been calling objecthood. It is as though objecthood alone can, in the present circumstances, secure something’s identity, if not as nonart, at least as neither painting nor sculpture; or as though a work of art—more accurately, a work of modernist painting or sculpture—were in some essential respect *not an object*.⁶⁸

To address the perceived threat of objecthood, Fried asks and then answers a theoretical question:

What is it about objecthood as projected and hypostatized by the literalists that makes it, if only from the perspective of recent modernist painting, antithetical to art? ... The answer I want to propose is this: the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theater, and theater is now the negation of art.⁶⁹

Fried’s conclusion seems quite odd at first; there does not seem to be a salient connection between the production of non-art objects and theater. To arrive at theater—which is both the true core of the essay and a concept that reaches well beyond minimalism—recourse must be made to the temporal, that dimension which seems essentially excluded from both sculpture and painting. Morris, as we have seen above, supplies Fried with the needed connection. But by taking at face value Morris’s insistence that his work demands a certain spatial-temporal unfolding, Fried overlooks the opposite temporal mode—the instantaneous apprehension of the gestalt—that Morris insists must be kept in tension. For Morris the contradiction between the instantaneous gestalt and the flow of time demanded by the public domain is generative and

⁶⁸ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 152, emphasis Fried’s. Note here that Fried to some extent confirms Morris’s objection that the Greenberg’s modernist narrative subordinates sculpture to painting in a way that contradicts the axiomatic separation of the arts.

⁶⁹ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 153.

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positive; Fried, on the other hand, undervalued the instantaneous temporality of gestalt, fixating on theatrical temporality, as if the speed with which the viewer apprehends the gestalt renders it formally uninteresting.

And in the public temporal mode that dominates “Notes on Sculpture Part II” there is surely something of the theatrical; Morris the dancer and Morris the Fluxus performer can be found in evidence. It may be too strong a statement to say that Morris’s sculptures lead the viewer through their space the way a play leads an audience through a narrative, but this does not seem to be what Fried wants to claim (though it is perhaps too weak a statement to suppose that Fried means “theatrical” in the broad metaphorical sense of simply “attention-getting” or “showy,” even if the solicitation of attention is of some importance). Fried’s attention is focused instead quite specifically on an epistemological change in the terms of the encounter: “Notes on Sculpture” focuses, from Fried’s perspective, entirely too much on the viewer’s experience, and too little on the content of the art itself. (In his introduction to *Art and Objecthood*, Fried explains theatricality as a *mise-en-scène*, from which one could infer that minimalism’s fault is in creating an event or making too much of itself.)⁷⁰ Morris’s theory is a theory of the confrontation between shape and the viewer, and his area of exploration is concerned with how to control this encounter; content is not only extraneous, but distracting.

From this perspective, “Notes on Sculpture” is an elaborated example of the “cool” sensibility of “A B C Art” and Rainer’s “Quasi Survey.” The younger generation of artists in the 60s distrusted expressive content for a number of reasons (a number perhaps as large as the number of artists); Morris would fulfill this criterion of cool but extend it by attempting to elide

⁷⁰ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 40–47.

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content altogether (the degree of success—both for Morris and for minimalism generally—remains an open question). The connection between Morris’s theatrical temporality and “Specific Objects” seems thin, and it comes as little surprise that Judd’s essay makes only a few appearances in “Art and Objecthood” after Fried’s use of it to ground minimalism in objecthood. Instead, Fried elaborates his position by drawing on Greenberg and Tony Smith, whom he will synthesize into a theory of minimalism generally. The first step is to borrow Greenberg’s notion of “presence,” put forth in his “Recentness of Sculpture”:

[T]he presence of literalist art ... is basically a theatrical effect or quality—a kind of *stage* presence. It is a function not just of the obtrusiveness and, often, even aggressiveness of literalist work, but of the special complicity that that work extorts from the beholder.⁷¹

This complicity, which Fried links to the bodily scale of the work, asks, or forces, the viewer to participate in a scene that distances the viewer from the work itself: “It is, one might say, precisely this distancing that *makes* the beholder a subject and the piece in question ... an object.”⁷² The derivation, or at least explication, of this theory of theatricality is contingent upon a “latent ... anthropomorphism.”⁷³ Following Morris, Fried marshals Tony Smith’s comments on his *Die* as exemplary of minimalism’s relation to the body:

Q [Morris]: Why didn’t you make it larger so that it would loom over the observer?

A [Smith]: I was not making a monument.

Q: Then why didn’t you make it smaller so that the observer could see over the top?

A: I was not making an object.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 155, emphasis Fried’s. As Frances Colpitt notes, “presence” was a central term in art-critical debates during this time period, and Fried’s invocation of the term here, together with his approbation for what he calls “presentness” re-appropriates presence, transforming it into a sort of pejorative term. See Frances Colpitt, *Minimalism: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 67–73. Anthropomorphism, to be discussed below and in a subsequent chapter, is also discussed by Colpitt here, with similar results.

⁷² Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 154, ellipsis Fried’s.

⁷³ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 157.

⁷⁴ Both Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 156–157; and Robert Morris, “Notes on Sculpture,”

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Minimalist objects in Fried's view make use of their size in the interest of enforcing a theatrical spatiality/temporality, by providing a "surrogate person" to put on stage in an encounter that is increasingly situational.

But what of those minimalists whose work is not to scale with the human body? How do Andre's low brick sculptures and Flavin's fluorescents stack up? For Fried, this is not an important question; anthropomorphism—latent or otherwise—is not the trouble:

[W]hat is wrong with literalist work is not that it is anthropomorphic but that the meaning and, equally, the hiddenness of its anthropomorphism are incurably theatrical ... *The crucial distinction that I am proposing so far is between work that is fundamentally theatrical and work that is not.* It is theatricality that, whatever the differences between them, links artists like Bladen and Grosvenor, both of whom have allowed "gigantic scale [to become] the loaded term" (Morris), with other, more restrained figures like Judd, Morris, Andre, McCracken, LeWitt and—despite the *size* of some of his pieces—Tony Smith.⁷⁵

Thus while anthropomorphism is an important link between Fried's writing and Morris's, it is not a crucial component of Fried's prevailing argument. Indeed, Fried concludes, as indicated above, by opening up the condition of objecthood to the arts in general:

At this point I want to make a claim that I cannot hope to prove or substantiate but that I believe nevertheless to be true: *viz.*, that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such—and to the extent that the different arts can be described as modernist, with modernist sensibility as such.⁷⁶

Minimalism then is symptomatic of a broader struggle in the arts. Successful art seeks to defeat theater, while theater undermines the quality of artistic practice and dissolves the barriers between the arts. "This is perhaps nowhere more evident," says Fried, "than within theatre itself,

228–230. Clearly Fried and Smith mean quite different things when they say "object"; what Smith is talking about here is much closer to Morris's "ornament."

⁷⁵ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 157, emphasis and brackets Fried's.

⁷⁶ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 163.

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where the need to defeat what I have been calling theatre has chiefly made itself felt as the need to establish a drastically different relation to its audience.”⁷⁷ Theatre is a problem not just for artistic production, but for appreciation as well. Fried writes,

For example, a failure to register the enormous difference in quality between, say, the music of Carter and that of Cage or between the paintings of Louis and those of Rauschenberg means that the real distinctions—between music and theatre in the first instance and between painting and theatre in the second—are displaced by the illusion that the barriers between the arts are in the process of crumbling (Cage and Rauschenberg being seen, correctly, as similar) and that the arts themselves are at last sliding towards some kind of final, implosive, hugely desirable synthesis.⁷⁸

Fried’s theory of postmodernism—named theatre—is perhaps *the* crucial critical artifact of the discourse on minimalism from the 1960s, and will continue to influence American art criticism until the present day. His is a theory of minimalism as a part of a break with modernism, though too he acknowledges—in part by naming it literalism—its debt to modernism.

Fried’s concept of theatricality covers a broad body of work, and also carries a quite polemical tone. In light of Fried’s negative reference to Cage, minimalism seems to be almost a target of opportunity, simply the example of theatrical art that lies closest to—or perhaps is the most dangerous to—the modern art Fried admired most. Though he declines to comment on “postmodernism,” Fried, in his introduction to *Art and Objecthood*, confirms the suspicion that “theatricality” is understood as a threat to modernism:

⁷⁷ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 163.

⁷⁸ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 164. It is worth noting once again that this position is not consonant with “Notes on Sculpture.” Certainly some minimalists, most notably Judd, were interested in creating new art forms in between the old, but Morris grounds his theoretical writings precisely in the aversion to such synthesis, and indeed calls Greenberg to task for failing to observe it with relation to abstract painting and sculpture. Furthermore, Judd’s interest is not in a hybrid space combining painting and sculpture, but rather in a new space that presumably remains separate from other disciplines.

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As I said in a talk at the Dia Art Foundation in 1987, it was as though their installations infallibly offered their audience a kind of heightened perceptual experience, and I wanted to understand the nature of that surefire, and therefore to my mind essentially inartistic (I should have said unmodernist), effect.⁷⁹

The crucial points here are first, the clarification that by “inartistic” Fried meant “unmodernist,” an indication that in his view it is *only* through modernism—that is by addressing the challenges of form—that one can now produce successful art; and second, that universal, consistent accessibility is fundamentally inartistic. This second point we will return to shortly. Slightly further on in his introduction to *Art and Objecthood*, Fried indicates that what seemed at first like a corrosive aberration soon grew at a rate far outpacing the critic’s expectations:

[“Art and Objecthood”] is nowhere near as pessimistic as future events would warrant from my point of view; I don’t seem to have imagined the possibility that within a few years the art I admired would be all but submerged under an avalanche of more or less openly theatrical productions and practices, as proved to be the case.⁸⁰

From this it is clear that the phenomenon Fried is discussing under the heading of “theatricality” is postmodernism, and that “Art and Objecthood” was prescient; the art that came to dominate the 1970s—art now frequently dubbed “postmodern”—operates under the same conditions that Fried outlines for theatricality.

It should be clear that there are stakes here that go beyond the critical evaluation of art, stakes that are not rare in polemical writings. Fried is interested in arguing not only that minimalism is bad art, and not only that minimalists should stop producing such work, but that the production of minimalism undermines or threatens modernism. In fact, the common concern between Fried and Greenberg for the preservation of modernism leads Fried to break with Greenberg, precisely on the issue of minimalism. Both critics harshly disparaged the movement,

⁷⁹ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 40.

⁸⁰ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 43.

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and both saw it as a corruption of modernism, but Fried also saw in minimalism an allegiance to Greenberg (indeed Morris was quite explicit about this, as we have seen above):

What I don't quite say [in "Shape as Form"], however—though it's implicit in my definition of reductionism, which no one could have failed to recognize as a paraphrase of Greenberg—is that precisely with respect to his understanding of modernism Greenberg had no truer followers than the literalists.⁸¹

This observation prompts Fried to alter Greenberg's modernism to remove its essentialism. For Fried, the goals of modernism in art are constantly shifting, contingent upon the latest developments. As alluded to above, this is Fried's progressivism. Greenberg's modernism must be preserved so that artists can pursue the unchanging truth of the artistic medium, but in this formulation there is the risk of exhaustion, which for Fried is represented by minimalism. Fried's progressive modernism circumvents this eventual demise by positioning the projects of modernism in the flow of history. The formal concerns of Manet need no longer be the formal concerns of Newman or Stella. However, in spite of Fried's comparative progressivism, both he and Greenberg are troubled by the idea that art—*good* art—might be enjoyed by everyone equally. Fried's contempt for accessibility is what leads him to the infamous formulation, "Presentness is grace."⁸² Only the faithful acolyte of modernism is fit to receive the beauty of successful painting. Greenberg, as we shall see, seems to agree, although he does not incorporate the element of chance implicit in Fried's "grace."

Greenberg reacts to postmodernism by retrenching his own conservatism. In a talk presented in Sydney, Australia, in 1979, Greenberg returns to a theme that has been operative in his work since his early "Avant-Garde and Kitsch": modernism as conservation.⁸³ Because

⁸¹ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 36.

⁸² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 168.

⁸³ Clement Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern," 64–66.

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Greenberg is largely responsible for how we conceive of modernism in American painting and sculpture, this brief talk is a useful artifact. Greenberg, who positions himself as an outsider in the discourse on postmodern art, identifies the “post” in postmodern as indicating supersession. That is, postmodernism, as the term is used by critics in the 1970s (Greenberg points out that artists do not seem to use the word) does not indicate an art that merely comes after modern art, but one that replaces it, “the way the baroque succeeded mannerism and the rococo succeeded the baroque.”⁸⁴ The problem with postmodernism then, from Greenberg’s perspective, is that modernism is not really done with. In order to demonstrate this Greenberg undertakes, once again, to define modernism. Here Greenberg is at his most conservative, even going so far as to distance himself from his earlier claim that modernism is defined by self-criticism:

A friend and colleague had been to a symposium about “post-modern” last spring. I asked him how the term had gotten defined at that symposium. As art, he answered, that was no longer self-critical. I felt a pang. I myself had written twenty years ago that self-criticism was a distinguishing trait of Modernist art. My friend's answer made me realize as I hadn't before how inadequate that was as a conveying definition of Modernism or the modern.⁸⁵

Modernist art dedicated only to the project of self-criticism falls short of the more important task of fending off the onslaught of middlebrow art. Instead of merely self-critical, in light of postmodernism, Greenberg sees modernism in terms of the preservation of art and of good taste. “Modernism has to be understood as a holding operation, a continuing endeavor to maintain aesthetic standards in the face of threats.”⁸⁶ In its earliest years, modernism was threatened by what Greenberg simply calls philistinism; against the philistines, art establishes an autonomous logic: art for art’s sake. The cultural autonomy of art is doubled in the autonomy of the

⁸⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 64.

⁸⁵ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 66.

⁸⁶ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 65–66.

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individual arts, and leads to the formal exploration central to Greenberg's earlier writings. More recently, modernism finds itself challenged by foes more dangerous and difficult to identify—middlebrow foes.

What singles Modernism out and gives it its place and identity more than anything else is its response to a heightened sense of threats to aesthetic value: threats from the social and material ambience, from the temper of the times, all conveyed through the demands of a new and open cultural market, middlebrow demands.⁸⁷

What Greenberg finds insidious about middlebrow taste is not so much its lack of refinement, but its “yearning for relaxation.”⁸⁸ Beginning with Duchamp and Dada, critics and artists have worked from within the space of art to undermine the necessity of difficult art. The creation and appreciation of modernist art is, for Greenberg, a taxing endeavor, not meant for the lighthearted or casual. But while philistinism attacked modernism from without, making the assailant easy to identify, middlebrow taste attacks from within, in the form of art. Though Duchamp may be the origin, it is Pop, in the 1960s, that ushers in the flood of middlebrow art that Greenberg identifies with postmodernism. “The notion of the ‘post-modern’ has sprouted and spread in that same relaxing climate of taste and opinion in which pop art and its successors thrive.”⁸⁹

* * *

Greenberg and Fried offer explicitly modernist repudiations of postmodernism, but very soon the dominant current of American art criticism would change courses, rebuking not postmodernism but modernism. What is curious is that most of the structure of the arguments put forward by Greenberg and Fried will be retained, while the values will be reversed. Foster's “The Crux of Minimalism” will be the centerpiece to this portion of the discussion to follow, but

⁸⁷ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 65.

⁸⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 66.

⁸⁹ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 66.

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before proceeding to this landmark essay, a detour through two earlier texts is necessary.

Douglas Crimp's "Pictures" and Craig Owens's "The Allegorical Impulse" offer interesting and relevant positive theories of postmodern art, based in large part on Fried's "Art and Objecthood."⁹⁰

Douglas Crimp's "Pictures" offers an extrapolation of Fried's theory of theatricality, written with the intent of defending and analyzing recent "theatrical" trends in art. Though he overstates Fried's pessimism—suggesting that "Art and Objecthood" foretells the end of art—Crimp's attention to Fried's diagnosis of a new interdisciplinarity establishes a sound foundation for discussing much of the pictorial art of the 1970s. "Pictures" is an advised title for this essay, since the works scrutinized, though representational, are, from a formal perspective, neither paintings nor photographs. Instead, though they share the common feature of a "picture," they straddle two or more art forms, making productive use of the instability this entails. Like minimalist sculpture, the work of Cindy Sherman, Jack Goldstein, and others constantly indexes multiple media, thwarting any strict modernist formal reading. Further, and of even greater importance to Crimp, this new work refuses to sit still in time. Cindy Sherman's work is exemplary: as Crimp points out, the stasis of photography is challenged by the clearly cinematic setting; the dramatic narrative places the work in time. But, simultaneously, the refusal of the narrative to advance fractures the totality of the work. In this analysis, Crimp comes upon an element of postmodern theatricality that Fried overlooked, and which gives much of so-called

⁹⁰ Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 175–188. Originally published in *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 75–88. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," in *Art After Modernism*, 203–236. Originally published in *October* 12 (Spring 1980), 67–86, and *October* 13 (Summer 1980), 59–80.

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postmodern art its vitality: fragmentation. While discussing Sherman's work, Crimp notes that "Like ordinary snapshots, they appear to be fragments; unlike those snapshots, their fragmentation is not that of the natural continuum, but of a syntagmatic sequence, that is, of a conventional, segmented temporality."⁹¹ Similarly, the theatricality Fried identifies in minimalism must be understood as fragmentary, since the "stage presence[s]" certainly do not move about or serve any syntagmatic narrative function. However, reading the sculptures of Judd or Morris as fragmentary must to some extent contradict the vision these artists had of their own work, since both artists were concerned (Judd obsessed) with unbroken totality. Which side of this contradiction one falls upon hangs largely on whether one accepts, as Crimp seems to, Fried's charge of theatricality. After all, Crimp's posited fracture of minimalism and postmodernism lies in its theatrical dimension: unlike actual theater, minimalism (and other postmodern arts) insists upon splitting its identity between sculpture or painting on the one hand and theater on the other.

The reader may, at this point, wonder why the "theatrical" mixing of disciplines and fragmentation of time and totality deserves the title "postmodern." Are there not, as Fried himself suggests, numerous precedents for this sort of artistic output well predating the 1970s? Fried suggests Cage, for example, and while Cage's interdisciplinarity—to my mind better considered as anti-disciplinarity—may lack the formal precision of Sherman work, there are surely other examples: Satie, Duchamp, perhaps Ives, in a strange way. To this Crimp responds that Fried's idea of modernism is but one amongst several, and that perhaps it is useful to consider the works discussed in "Pictures" as descendent from the modernism of Mallarmé.

⁹¹ Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," 181.

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(This recalls Rose's Duchamp/Malevich lineage for ABC art.) They remain, nevertheless, in a more or less direct relation to American—that is to say Greenbergian and Friedian—modernism, and the aesthetic and formal break elaborated through the term “theatricality” suggests succession, and validates the “post.” However, while Fried and Greenberg were to a lesser and greater extent afraid that the influx of postmodern art would lead to an insipid pluralism of bad taste, Crimp insists this is not the case. Crimp's postmodernism is not an aesthetic of “anything goes,” but only of “modernism must go.”

Although the pervasive indifference to quality feared by Greenberg may never have come to pass, it is certainly true that postmodernism—like modernism before it—entails a broad range of styles and techniques. Unlike architectural modernism, modernism in the other arts is tremendously diverse, and postmodernism is even more so. In spite of this, Craig Owens suggests a unifying characteristic for postmodern art. The “diverse strategies” which Owens argues characterize postmodern art and distinguish it from modernism, suggest “that postmodernist art may in fact be identified by a single, coherent impulse,” the impulse toward allegory.⁹² From this alone one can deduce both that Owens does not advocate for the separation of the individual arts—since allegory is typically a literary endeavor—and that Owens has altered the definition of allegory somewhat—since minimalism, which Owens includes in this definition, is not literary.

Though he avoids an explicit definition, Owens provides a few characteristics common in allegory. The first recalls Fried and Greenberg to some extent, and appears in Crimp as well: “Let us say for the moment that allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another.”⁹³

⁹² Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 209.

⁹³ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 204.

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Some of the examples proffered—the relationship between the New and Old Testaments, and Jorge Louis Borges’s “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*”—adhere, more or less, to the taboo against interdisciplinarity laid out by Greenberg, but most do not, and it is precisely in what Owens considers their allegorical moments that they break this taboo. This is to say that what Owens indicates when he says that “one text is doubled by another” is works of art that reach over the disciplinary boundary and interact with other media.

The allegorical work Owens is interested in “occurs when the relationship [between texts] takes place *within* works of art.”⁹⁴ Owens goes on to enumerate several way that contemporary works of art exhibit this sort of allegoric mode. These include: appropriation, as in Troy Brauntuch’s use of Hitler’s drawings; site-specificity, found in the work of Robert Smithson, for example; which is related to impermanence, exemplified again by Smithson, and also Eva Hesse, both of whose work has decayed over time; accumulation, for which Owens cites Andre’s *Lever*; discursivity; and hybridization.⁹⁵ (These last two seem to overlap somewhat, particularly since “In allegory, the image is a hieroglyph; and allegory is a rebus—writing composed of concrete images.”)⁹⁶ The place of minimalist sculpture—excepting Andre and LeWitt—is left for the reader to decipher, and reasonably so, since Owens’s concern is the work of the 1970s, not the 1960s. To the extent that Fried’s charge of theatricality holds, all theatrical minimalist sculpture must be allegorical, since it engages in hybridization. Accumulation is also common, not only in Andre but in Judd, Morris, Flavin, and many others. Accumulation also entails, Owens argues, a

⁹⁴ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 205.

⁹⁵ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 205–209.

⁹⁶ Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse,” 209.

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preference for logic over reason, an epistemological shift that James Meyer finds quite important to minimalism in the visual arts.⁹⁷

It must strike the reader as odd that nowhere in this formulation does the question of moralism appear. Indeed, Owens largely limits his comments on moralism—that quality that is often considered central to allegory—to his history of the common modernist proscription of allegory.⁹⁸ Although artists from Poe to Manet derided their contemporaries as allegorical explicitly because of allegory's propensity to moralize, Owens does not explicitly conclude that the new, postmodern art must be moralistic. He does, however, argue, particularly in Rauschenberg's case, that allegory often carries with it some necessary complicity (Rauschenberg's work, in order to critique the museum, must be hung in the museum).⁹⁹ The quality of complicity implies some moral stance, and we might infer from this that Rauschenberg's work (as well as Cindy Sherman's, Laurie Anderson's, and Robert Longo's, who are also discussed in similar fashion) entails some sort of moral. So why is Owens explicit about Manet's dismissal of Courbet's allegorism on moralistic grounds, but unwilling to discuss moralism in postmodernity?

The answer I would like to propose is that for Owens, the allegory in modernity may have been attacked because of its perceived moralism, but the root of this modernist dislike was because it was considered supplemental. Allegory brings into the work of art an element that is, from the modernist perspective, meant to remain without. From the Greenbergian perspective this makes quite a bit of sense: if allegory necessitates the doubling of one text in another, it

⁹⁷ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 251 and elsewhere.

⁹⁸ Owens's inclusion of Jorge Luis Borges in his discussion of allegory makes it clear that the proscription against allegory was by no means successful.

⁹⁹ Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse," 223–229.

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likely involves the blurring of artistic media, and the presence of these other media can only be seen as excessive of the purely immanent concerns of Greenbergian modernism. Owens's reading of Friedland and Greenbergian modernism suggests a reversal of the above reading of Wollheim. From a pre-modern perspective, the work of deciding when to end an abstract work of art appears as supplemental to the traditional work of accumulating brush strokes on a canvas. From a modern perspective, however, with an eye toward the privileged space of the proper artistic medium, it is representation—or any allusion to literature or other disciplines—that becomes supplemental.

Of all the critics discussed thus far, Owens is surely the one who most closely resembles a cultural postmodernist, even though he does not discuss culture itself. Though he is a theorist of postmodern art, his work draws heavily on what increasingly became known as postmodern philosophy. Derrida's influence is particularly in evidence here, and when Owens discusses the supplement, we should understand it in the context of Derrida's work. "Complicity" too derives from the Derridian lexicon, and the ease with which Owens argues for complicity *tout court* in postmodernism derives from the general deconstructive stance that complicity is unavoidable. Indeed, both complicity and supplementality are the sort of imperfections that, from a deconstructive point of view, dwell everywhere; their ubiquity is such that they cannot, in any useful sense, really be seen as imperfections. From this perspective, if one argues, as Owens would seem to, that postmodernism distinguishes itself from modernism through its complicity and embrace of the supplemental, then one is left to wonder about the role of complicity and the supplemental in modernism itself. Though Owens does not directly address this problem, his argumentation inexplicitly supports a claim that postmodern art—beginning with minimalism and its contemporaries—engages in a critical relationship with complicity and the supplemental

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in a way that proper modernism does not. This is in direct contradiction to the observation of Greenberg's anonymous friend, who declared postmodernism to be distinctively *uncritical*.

To a certain extent, all of our commentators on modernism and postmodernism have been concerned with culture at large in addition to art specifically. Owens makes this interest explicit by discussing questions of complicity, suggesting that the new role of artists in a postmodern society is to interact with the world around them. Greenberg, who stood firm against this vision of art, was also motivated by cultural concerns, but while Owens establishes a theory of ethical art, Greenberg argued that art could only be non-ethical. Ethical concerns were supplemental to form and can only be jettisoned. In the 1980s, the question of the ethical in art became unavoidable, with the influx of neoconservatism. Habermas identified this struggle in architecture, and we have seen how German critics reacted to neoromanticism. (From a strict Greenbergian perspective, Habermas's argument against postmodern architecture on the grounds that it is politically dangerous does not go far enough. For Greenberg it is not a question of good politics versus bad politics: all politics in art is bad.) Speaking broadly, one can discern two trends in the 1970s and 1980s, both of which are termed postmodern. Habermas and the German critics see an uncritical return to traditional techniques, while Owens, Crimp, and others see a new sort of immanent criticism, an art that occupies its place in dialogue with the external world.

Hal Foster addresses these two postmodernisms through recourse to culture. The regressive postmodernism Habermas contends with is a postmodernism of reaction, which seeks to return art (and culture generally) to a mythological ideal past. Owens's postmodernism Foster terms a postmodernism of resistance, specifically resistance against the status quo.¹⁰⁰ Greenberg

¹⁰⁰ Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ix–xvi, especially xi–xii.

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was unable or unwilling to accept any postmodern art as resistant, characterizing all of it instead by the reactionary middle-brow desire for relaxation and ease of comprehension. The resistant mode, on the other hand, is involved in a battle not unlike the one which occupied Greenberg for so long. Nevertheless, resistant postmodernism remains stubbornly anti-Greenbergian—and in this sense anti-modern—in its insistence both on the collusion of media and on the participation with culture at large. Resistant postmodernism is not pure, and indeed surely critiques purity through its insistence on complicity.

Indeed, just as minimalism served Greenberg and Fried as a ripe battleground for staking out the claims of modernism, Hal Foster returns to minimalism to argue for the merits and historical gravity of early postmodernism. In “Art and Objecthood” Fried argued for minimalism as exemplary of what we now call a postmodern (and what he called a “theatrical”) trend in the art of his time; in “The Crux of Minimalism,” Foster argues that this scene is not merely exemplary, but originary.¹⁰¹ Minimalism, for Foster, occupies the privileged position of both the logical conclusion of modernism *and* the beginning of postmodernism. The first claim is fairly uncontroversial, especially in relation to Greenbergian modernism, and is confirmed by Fried and others. Minimalism’s commitment to reduction presents and problematizes the logical conclusion of a modern art dedicated to discovering its own pure essence. By placing minimalism where he does, Foster implicitly legitimizes a narrative, critical model of history, both in the specific instance of Greenbergian modernism leading up to and concluded by

¹⁰¹ Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism,” in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 1996), 35–68. Revised from an earlier article by the same title, in *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art, 1945–1986* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986), 162–183.

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minimalism, and—perhaps more problematic for his ensuing claims for postmodernism—a post-minimal narrative of the progression of art since the 1960s.

The second half of Foster’s “crux” places minimalism at the opening of the new postmodern field for art described by Owens and others. As mentioned above, Fried’s “Art and Objecthood” has done much of the groundwork in theorizing a postmodern turn in the arts, and as such it is strategically sensible for Foster to build his argument on this foundation. Transitivity, Foster also necessarily relies on Morris, who enjoys, at least within this framework, a paternal position. Fried reiterates Morris’s emphasis on the space of the encounter, particularly including the subordination of the work of art to merely one factor amongst many, amounting to a fundamental change in the “subject/object terms” from the traditional encounter of the plastic arts to a corrupted, theatrical encounter. Thus for Foster, via Morris and Fried, minimalism fundamentally changed the spatiality of sculpture, from an anthropomorphic gesturism (what Morris read as sculpture’s latent dependence on cubism) to a contingent, site-specific encounter (which Fried called theater).

Foster, though, has an interest in recuperating minimalism, both from Fried and from the neoconservatives and neo-expressionists of the 1980s. In recuperating, Foster brushes aside both Morris’s devaluation of cubism and Fried’s devaluation of minimalism in favor of focusing on the position of the subject in minimalism. Foster centers the question of the subject by arguing that minimalism is the story of the “death of the author”:

[I]n 1966, a new space of “object/subject terms” is acknowledged. The minimalist suppression of anthropomorphic images and gestures is more than a reaction against the abstract-expressionist model of art; it is a “death of the author” (as Roland Barthes would call it in 1968) that is at the same time a birth of the viewer.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Hal Foster, “The Crux of Minimalism,” 50. It goes without saying that Barthes’s famous 1968

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With this claim Foster moves the debate about postmodernism into the realm of subjectivity. Signs of a displaced or disturbed subject position can be inferred from Morris's blank style or more generally in the anti-expressivity Rose theorized in "A B C Art," and it follows that Morris's minimalism—and perhaps all minimalism—entails a *different*, less expressive role for the artist than did much of the work that preceded him. Too, Fried's charge of theatricality suggests a sort of concealed authorship. We've discussed above how Fried's concept of theater is something other than dramatic narrative. Fried's theatricality, with regard to minimalism, is more architectural than narrative; Fried finds in minimalism the site of theater, as if the gallery had become a sort of stage.

Jean-François Lyotard puts this traditional mode of theater in terms useful for reading Foster: "Theater is the pure case of mimetic poetics: the author does not appear on stage, he remains hidden, apocryphal. The dithyramb, on the contrary, is a direct writing, which conserves the traces of the 'authentic' addressor."¹⁰³ Lyotard's reading of classical theater is analogous to Fried's reading of minimalism: in both cases, the creation of a scene and the emphasis on the relation between the scene and the audience obscure the role played by the author.¹⁰⁴ In the contrasting case—the case of modernist painting for Fried—the agonistic struggle of the author is directly present in the work (this manifests in "Shape as Form" through Fried's theory of an

essay did not influence this turn of events, but rather that both Barthes and minimalists more generally were responding to the same cultural changes. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–148.

¹⁰³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. George Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 22.

¹⁰⁴ "But its ['Art and Objecthood'] chief motivation in the first place had to do with my experience of literalist works and exhibitions during the previous several years, in particular my recurrent sense, especially in gallery shows devoted to one or another artist, of literalism's singular effectiveness as *mise-en-scène*." Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 40.

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agonistic wrestling with form and material). For Lyotard it is clear that there is still an author of sorts for theater, although the structure of the genre necessitates or effects his or her obscurity. (Here one might recall Greenberg's insinuation that minimalism hides behind its "presence.")¹⁰⁵ However, we ought to keep in mind that the classical allusion is perfectly consonant with Barthes, who too alludes directly to Greek drama as a precedent for scriptorial rather than authorial literature; for Barthes the death of the author is not a literal lack of an author, but a displacement of this last and a refutation of its claims to both origin and originality.

Foster, though, pursues the death of the author in terms different to those put forth by Barthes. To understand how Foster takes minimalism as the crux of postmodernism, it will be necessary to explore how Barthes's theory of the death of the author was altered as it was appropriated; Barthes's "death of the author" is different from Frederic Jameson's decentered subject, and Jameson is much more in play in Foster's work than is Barthes.¹⁰⁶ Put simply, Barthes argues for a critical epistemological change, largely on the part of scholars, but involving writers as well, that is relevant to *all* periods of artistic production. Of course, scholarly and critical work does not take place in a world separate from writing (or in our case, painting and sculpture). Barthes puts forward several examples of writers who he claims have forced a distance between the author and the work, and have done so in their work itself: Mallarmé, Valéry, and Proust. It is in this fashion that it is too simple to say that Barthes's notion is purely critical. Barthes's death of the author is an epistemological slide, which has to do with the problem of the transmission of meaning, and it affects both criticism and writing. "The Death of

¹⁰⁵ Clement Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," 185.

¹⁰⁶ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 14–15.

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the Author” is perhaps too dramatic a title, since what Barthes describes is more a gradual slide into a more polysemous approach to reading and writing. Elsewhere Barthes describes the conditions of his time:

The break, as is frequently stressed, is seen to have taken place in the last century with the appearance of Marxism and Freudianism; since then there has been no further break, so that in a way it can be said that for the last hundred years we have been living in repetition. What History, our History, allows us today is merely to slide, to vary, to exceed, to repudiate.¹⁰⁷

With this in mind, one is tempted to declare that, far from being a theory of the postmodern, Barthes’s work is a theory of modernity, but a mobile modernity in transition.

Jameson, in contrast to Barthes, is arguing for an *ontological* change, in which the cultural mechanics of late capitalism undermine and decenter the modern subject, altering its constitution:

(Of the two possible formulations of this notion [the death of the subject]—the historicist one, that a once-existing centered subject, in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family, has today in the world of organizational bureaucracy dissolved; and the more radical poststructuralist position, for which such a subject never existed in the first place but constituted something like an ideological mirage—I obviously incline toward the former; the latter must in any case take into account something like a “reality of the appearance.”)¹⁰⁸

For Barthes, post-structural theory reveals that the subject has been dead all along; for Jameson, postmodern theory reveals that late capitalism has torn the subject apart. How these two different theories come to bear on minimalism—and on Morris in particular, who is Foster’s representative for the field at large—will be better understood by interrogating several key dualisms in Foster’s theory.

¹⁰⁷ Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Image-Music-Text*, 155–156.

¹⁰⁸ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 15.

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Foster's argument gains much of its force by blurring the distinction between postmodern art and postmodern culture. The founding moment is postmodern art, and the work done by Foster's use of dualities bridges what gap there is between art and the larger category of culture. The journey from aesthetic to metaphysical concerns begins in Foster's close reading of Morris's "Notes on Sculpture Parts I and II," and is built upon enforcing the separation of autonomy and literalness. Foster believes that he has caught Morris in a contradiction, and that that contradiction reflects the dual status of minimalism with relation to modernism and postmodernism:

[M]inimalism realizes [according to Morris] "the autonomous and literal nature of sculpture ... that it have its own, equally literal space." At first glance this statement seems contradictory, for its two adjectives conflate the positions held by Greenberg and Judd respectively: the demand for autonomy and the demand for literalism. Yet this is precisely how Morris sees minimalism, as a provisional resolution of this contradiction, for he defines its unitary forms as *both* autonomous and literal.¹⁰⁹

Foster's analysis is compelling if we understand "autonomous" in terms of the relationship between sculpture and its materiality.¹¹⁰ Painting, for Fried and Greenberg, is autonomous in this sense because it is optical.¹¹¹ But it is exactly this kind of autonomy—autonomy from materiality—that Morris argues is inappropriate for sculpture, precisely because it prevents what is for him a more important autonomy: sculpture's autonomy from painting. Anthony Caro, David Smith, and other sculptors who relied on cubism's advances created an art that is too close

¹⁰⁹ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 46–47. Quotation from Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture Parts I and II," emphasis Foster's.

¹¹⁰ When Foster says "at first glance," he indicates not that the contradiction is merely apparent, but that it (the contradiction) inhabits the minimalism itself, not simply Morris's prose.

¹¹¹ "Shape as Form" makes much of the increasingly problematic relationship between the ideal autonomy and opticality of painting and its very definite materiality—in this case, its framing edge. Successful painting, Fried says, will overcome this material necessity; minimalism has presence because it cannot engage its materiality, while successful art has presentness because it can.

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to, too corrupted by painting, and is therefore not an autonomous art form; as discussed above, Morris takes Greenberg and Fried to task for supporting this blurring of media boundaries. Indeed, since Morris is arguing for a new form of sculpture that is distinct—autonomous—from the illusionistic and optical exigencies of painting, literalism and autonomy are not only non-contradictory, they are concomitant.

But Foster's misreading of Morris has important consequences for his broader argument because it extracts "Notes on Sculpture" from its immediate context—as a theory of sculpture separate from painting—and applies it not only to art at large, but to late-capitalist culture. This transition is supported by a related pair of terms: transcendent/idealist and contingent. The autonomy Foster understands Morris to claim for minimalism is the autonomy of the artwork from its own materiality, which is in turn an element of art's transcendence from its literal situation. For Foster, minimalism fundamentally changed the spatiality of sculpture from an anthropomorphic gesturism to a contingent, site-specific encounter. In this dualistic model, there is either "the transcendental space of modernist art"¹¹² or minimalism's radical contingency: "Thus, far from idealist, minimalist work complicates the purity of conception with the contingency of perception."¹¹³ But this raises two problems: first, Foster grants too much to modernism's claims to transcendence; and second, he downplays minimalism as critique (that is, Foster overlooks the possibility that minimalism claims that *all* art is contingent). These finessing gestures work in favor of a model of minimalism as a transformation. "In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the

¹¹² Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 36.

¹¹³ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 40.

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here and now ...”¹¹⁴ But we might instead claim that minimalism forces the acknowledgement that the perceived safety and sovereignty of art is false; the achievement of the illusion of autonomy is contingent upon the institution of the art gallery and the museum. If minimalism can function as a critique of art’s pretensions to transcendence, it problematizes the very distinction between transcendence and contingency; dismissing this problematic implicitly endorses Greenbergian modernism (while keeping it in its historical place) and puts to one side the historic context in which Barthes places his theory of the scriptor.

Aligning himself with the notion of minimalism as a new sort of encounter rather than a critique of the already existing paradigm, Foster implicitly adopts a Jamesonian conception of postmodernism. Not merely an epistemological critique, or even an alternative epistemology, minimalism for Foster—like postmodernism for Jameson—ushers in an *ontological* change in the structure of the subject. (When Foster states that “minimalism is as self-critical as any late-modernist art, but its analysis tends toward the epistemological more than the ontological,” he is referring to the ontology and epistemology of the artwork, not the subject.¹¹⁵ We might paraphrase Foster’s claim by saying that minimalism’s epistemological critique of the artwork brought about an ontological change in subjectivity.) Foster’s Jamesonian leaning comes to the forefront when discussing the role of the subject and what changes minimalism ushered for that role. While an orthodox application of Barthes would limit minimalism to the critique of subjectivity and art offered above, Jameson’s revision enables minimalism to signal an ontological change in the subjective situation.

¹¹⁴ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 40.

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Foster argues that “the stake of minimalism is the nature of meaning and the status of the subject, both of which are held to be public, not private, produced in a physical interface with the actual world, not in a mental space of idealist conception.”¹¹⁶ That minimalism distances itself from abstract expressionism’s privileging of the determinacy of meaning was made clear early on by Barbara Rose, and is most readily visible in the nearly uniform absence of emotional expression in minimalist work (Truitt’s work complicates the situation, and Anna Chave’s criticism of minimalism, to be discussed below, offers a useful, larger scale critique of this presumption). Further, Morris’s focus on the role of the viewer, and specifically his failure to mention interpretation, indicate some discomfort with determinate meaning. However, it is going too far with Morris’s writings to interpret his latent critique of logocentrism as containing or furthering a critique of phallogentrism, or the privileging of the engendered subject. In terms native to Foster’s essay, “Notes on Sculpture” does more to preserve Morris’s status as author than to deny it. As discussed above, Morris’s interest is not in disconnecting the artist from the work of art, but from removing the viewer from a position of interpretive authority. The focus here ought to be (but for Foster is not) on the public/private distinction, not the meaning/subject problem.¹¹⁷ Modernist art is fertilized by the problems of subjectivity and meaning (by phallogocentrism, respectively), and minimalism’s engagement in this problematic does little to distinguish it from its modernist antecedents. Further, because minimalism relies on the experience of an object by a viewer—and not just any viewer, but a coherent and rational one—it cannot convincingly question the validity of a subject, though the distrust of expression may

¹¹⁶ Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 40.

¹¹⁷ Foster sweeping past the crucial public/private duality in favor of the problems of meaning and the subject is perhaps the most conspicuous point of erasure of Morris’s enabling and effeminizing tropes.

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plausibly be read as a critique of the possibility of meaning. Foster goes on to contrast minimalism with “a mental space of idealist conception,” which presumably belongs to modernism. But a good reading of Fried reveals that modernism—or at least Fried’s understanding of it—is far from idealist, and only essentialist in strategic terms (the essential requirement for art are seen as historically contingent and mutable). So surely minimalism is not purely idealist, but neither is most modernism.

Whatever the enabling gestures, Foster’s work must ultimately be read as an *ex post facto* retelling of “Art and Objecthood.” Like Fried, Foster lets Morris stand in for much, but not all, of minimalism, and, also like Fried, Foster sees minimalism as exemplary of widespread and sweeping changes in the arts. Ultimately each of Foster’s dichotomies (autonomous/literalist, transcendent/contingent, private/public, and even dualistic/non-dualistic) maps cleanly—perhaps too cleanly—onto an overarching pair: modernist/postmodernist. While Foster is inclined to isolate minimalism, perhaps due to its lasting prestige, as the proper beginning of postmodern artistic practice, it is useful to recall that for Fried the problem presented by minimalism is found earlier in Cage, and that for the Greenberg of “Modern and Postmodern” the memorable disruption of modernism in the 1960s is Pop rather than minimalism.¹¹⁸ Jameson, for his part, is inclined to see Cage as the original postmodernist, and Foster himself, though he insists on minimalism as the proper origin, suggests Duchamp as the historical precedent.

Ultimately by weaving postmodernism and minimalism into one another, and by placing minimalism in a generative position in relation to later postmodern practices, Foster makes out of minimalism a new classical period. Habermas explains that modernism marks a fundamental

¹¹⁸ Clement Greenberg, “Modern and Postmodern,” 66.

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change in our relationship to the past. The work done by Foster to initiate minimalism as the first postmodern movement, the one to which subsequent art owes its ability to innovate, effectively replicates Habermas's model of modernism, opening a gap between contemporary practices and the now more distant minimalism. In part because this does nothing to address the claims made in respect to authorship and subjectivity, and in part because it doesn't directly address the question of artist-as-critic, Foster's modernizing of the postmodern cannot, at least at this juncture, be considered a de-postmodernizing. That is to say, while Foster's analysis implicitly retains a structure central to Habermasian modernism, it also incorporates claims central to other theories of artistic, cultural, and subject-oriented postmodernism. In effect Foster unwittingly demonstrates the diversity of postmodern theory, since his vision of minimalism manages both to confirm Habermasian modernism *and* Jamesonian and Friedian postmodernism.

* * *

Whatever our understanding of Foster's "The Crux of Minimalism," it must be clear that minimalism in the plastic arts plays an important role with respect to the development of our understanding of American abstract art in the twentieth century. With the possible exception of Pop Art, no other development in the visual arts seems to have posed a greater challenge or threat to an increasingly institutionalized practice of modern art. As we have seen, part of the perceived threat minimalism poses to modernism is formal. If modernism in the plastic arts is a project of the elimination of components that are supplemental or foreign to the medium, then the works presented by minimalist sculptors (for it was, as we have seen, the sculptors and not the painters who gave Fried and Greenberg the greatest consternation) were arguably the most logical and relevant of new modernist works, as many critics of the time, including Fried himself, saw. Nevertheless, the leading supporters of the American modernist tradition rejected

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minimalism heartily, and while their disdain was likely motivated initially by taste, their arguments against minimalism revolve around other factors.

One of these factors, which returns in slightly altered form in Owens's article, can be gleaned from Rose's "A B C Art." Minimalism rejected what is commonly thought of as expression. We will explore in a later chapter whether or not this is the perfect word for this phenomenon, but for now it is efficacious to suggest that what Rose called an avoidance of expression could just as easily be termed the disappearance of the artist's hand. Of course most new work in the 1960s exhibits this characteristic, a fact acknowledged by Rose and Greenberg alike,¹¹⁹ but minimalist sculpture carries this to an extreme, in many cases employing factory made objects, either of the custom-made (Judd) or store-bought (Andre, Flavin) varieties. Minimalism, more than any of its well-known contemporaries, is an industrial art, and the expressive presence of the artist is almost completely absent.

Greenberg disliked minimalism in part because it relied, he said, too much on rational thought, too much on deduction, and not enough on feeling or intuition. Minimalism gives the viewer the impression that the artist is not emotionally involved in the creative process, but that he or she is merely manipulating (or worse, arranging) materials. What might strike the reader as odd about this is that here too, on a material rather than a formal level, minimalism adheres to Greenberg's modernist narrative. Minimalism—if one reads minimalism as modernist—understands artistic expression to be foreign to the medium of sculpture, while Greenberg implicitly considered expression to be a proper part of any artistic medium. Thus from the minimalism-modernist perspective Greenbergian modernism has retained too strong an

¹¹⁹ Clement Greenberg, "Post-Painterly Abstraction."

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attachment to Romantic conventions. This is not to say that the role of the artist is supplemental to the production of art, but that the presentation of artistic expression, through the depiction of the artist's unique touch, is.

A further peculiarity arises then when we consider Craig Owens's argument that postmodernist practice is a return to the supplement. Including minimalism under Owens's definition of postmodernism would suggest that while minimalist sculpture was diligently eradicating every feature excessive of its medium, it was also embracing postmodernism's new impulse toward allegory, and therefore toward supplementality. The purging of supplements reveals the inevitability of the supplement.¹²⁰ The solution to this dilemma is suggested above: that the sorts of characteristics enumerated by Owens as being indicative of allegory—at its simplest, complicity and supplementality—are not unique to postmodern art, but are not obscured by it either. In many cases this may be, to risk the intentional fallacy, because the allegorical qualities of the art are meant to be seen. In the case of minimalism, especially as described by Fried in "Art and Objecthood," the supplemental qualities of art brought to the surface depend upon, as Morris puts it, the lack of domestic detail. In minimalist sculpture the supplemental, theatrical critique or disruption (depending upon which critics one prefers) of the relationship between the work of art and the gallery-goer arises in large part due to the conspicuous absence of the expressive signals lamented by Greenberg. When we adopt this more or less deconstructive line of thought, minimalism in particular and postmodernism more

¹²⁰ This reading would also agree with Owens's generally Derridian perspective. Derrida frequently stresses the unavoidability of the supplement. See especially Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

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generally reveal that the logical result of “art for art’s sake” is an empty gallery, since the artistic encounter, foregrounded in minimalist sculpture, is supplemental to the medium.

Another important concern made explicit in Greenberg’s comments on both minimalism and postmodernism (and a possible explanation for why Greenberg focused on Pop and not minimalism when discussing postmodern art) is its popularity. Many of the critics discussed above exhibit some level of anxiety about the quality of the art they review, but few ever match Greenberg’s explicit worries about the middlebrow corruption of artistic taste. Minimalism is perhaps but the best known of the string of popular “novelty” styles that captured more attention than Greenberg thought they deserved. As Greenberg himself notes, however, novelty did not begin with minimalism; these perceived assaults against good taste occur throughout modern history. Perhaps the most notable such incident in music history is the dramatically mixed reception of neoclassicism, seen at its most negative in polemics penned by Schoenberg and Adorno. The musicologist Makis Solomos has discussed the similarities between the receptions of postmodernism and neoclassicism in music, noting in both instances strong evidence for what he calls antimodernism or premodernism—a regressive reaction against the advances of modernity in the arts.¹²¹ In the case of postmodernism, Solomos argues that this reaction takes a variety of forms, from Berio’s 1968 *Sinfonia*, which Solomos considers modern postmodernism, indicating a closer, generative relationship to modernism (analogous to Foster’s “postmodernism of resistance”), to John Adams’s postminimalism, which Solomos finds incurably regressive, calling it “the strict equivalent of the *conservative revolution* that marked the US during the

¹²¹ Makis Solomos, “Néoclassisme et postmodernisme: deux antimodernismes,” *Musurgia* 5, no. 3/4 (1998), 91–107.

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Reagan years.”¹²² (Adams, under Solomos’s reading, belongs to Foster’s reactionary postmodernism.) Early minimalism, here termed “classic,” Solomos places closer to Berio in this spectrum from approbation to contempt. Solomos, to some extent, establishes a position for musical minimalism analogous to the place Foster establishes for plastic minimalism, though Solomos denies minimalism as an origin for postmodernism. Determining whether either Foster or Solomos is correct (or indeed whether or not this is even an answerable question) depends heavily—entirely—on a clear definition of postmodernism, and as such this question lies outside the scope of this dissertation. However, with an interest in putting minimalist music beside minimalist sculpture, it is useful to explore whether or not Solomos’s claim resonates with the understandings of postmodernism that develop out of the criticism of minimalist sculpture and painting.

In order to evaluate the relationship between postmodernism as it has been theorized relative to plastic minimalism and musical minimalism, it will be worth our time to recapitulate succinctly the claims made for (and against) postmodernism. The first is Greenberg’s definition of postmodernism as supplanting modernism, including the counter-claim, present in different ways in Morris’s writings and central to Foster’s theory of the “crux,” that minimalism belongs to modernism. The second is Fried’s definition of theatre as that which lies between the arts (a definition that has been appropriated by postmodernism, and relates directly to American theories of modernism). The third is the use of allegory, as elaborated by Craig Owens. Allegory overlaps to some extent with theater, in that they both allege a crossing of disciplines; for the

¹²² Makis Solomos, “Néoclassisme et postmodernisme,” 102. “[L]e postmodernism d’Adams est le strict équivalent de la *révolution conservatrice* qui marqué les Etats-Unis des années Reagan.” Reagan-era neoconservatism is precisely the enemy Foster identifies lurking behind neo-expressionism in painting. See Hal Foster, *Return of the Real*, 35.

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purposes of the discussion below, we will focus on the question of complicity and supplementality that Owens includes in allegory. The question of middlebrow tastes will be left aside, entailing as it does the act of criticism, not of theory. It may suffice here to remark that if middlebrow taste has anything to do with middle-class reception then this would not seem to be a fruitful area of exploration for minimalist music. Donald Judd received a photo shoot in *Harper's Bazaar*, and Greenberg published an article on Truitt in *Vogue*; minimalist music, before the 1970s, did not receive any such public exposure.¹²³

As Greenberg remarked, whether or not something can be understood as supplanting modernism depends first on what modernism is. In architecture this is fairly simple, since “modernist architecture” designates a fairly well defined style. In painting and sculpture, identifying modernism is more difficult, but Greenberg’s writings, as well as the tremendous influence they have had on American art criticism, simplify the matter. In music, for better or for worse, one finds neither the benefit of a coherent modernist movement nor of a central, authoritative critic. Nevertheless, scholars, critics, and composers have set forth proposals of definitions of the modernism that postmodernism in music (itself defined various ways) is considered to have supplanted.

As briefly alluded to above, a significant number of authors consider musical modernism to be a rigid, autarchic edifice, forcing composers to recapitulate Webern or not compose at all. Robert Carl, for example, welcomes the new liberty of postmodernism after the dreary, restrictive period of modernism. “The previous postwar orthodoxy,” Carl writes, “*modernism*, was often hermetic and dictatorial, and after a long claustrophobic period the new absence of

¹²³ See James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 20; and Clement Greenberg, “Changer: Anne Truitt.”

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aesthetic constraints on artists has been tonic. [Under modernism] there was an almost puritanical emphasis on serious, utopian, self-consciously abstract art.”¹²⁴ Carl’s tone is polemical, writing in support of new music that the academy may have been slow to sanction. But is this characterization of modernism accurate?

It certainly resonates well with some of the early biographical information from Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass. Each of these four received a university education in music, and most of them found that education to be in conflict with their own compositional interests in music. Young in particular encountered resistance from the academy when he arrived in Berkeley; according to Keith Potter, Young has suggested that he was awarded a travel fellowship with the idea in mind of preventing him from influencing the other students.¹²⁵ Young’s work at the time—particularly the *Trio for Strings*—was received by Seymour Shifrin and the rest of the composition faculty with a mixture of resistance and condescension.¹²⁶ However, Young’s teachers in Los Angeles (prior to his enrollment at UC Berkeley), including Leonard Stein and Lukas Foss, thought Young showed promise,¹²⁷ and when he traveled to Darmstadt, he received encouragement. Potter suggests that Stockhausen was impressed by Young, and the younger composer considers Stockhausen to be an important influence.¹²⁸ The question, then, is: which of these two composers stands for modernism, Shifrin or Stockhausen? From a strict Greenbergian perspective, one is tempted to say the latter. Shifrin insisted that Young’s music lacked narrative

¹²⁴ Robert Carl, “The Politics of Definition in New Music,” *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989), 102. Emphasis Carl’s.

¹²⁵ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 49.

¹²⁶ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 121. Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 42.

¹²⁷ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 24 and 41–42.

¹²⁸ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 43. La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings*, 27.

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form; it did not climax. Recalling “Toward a Newer Laocoon,” we might suggest here that narrative carries with it the influence of literature, and that Young, like many of the composers associated with Darmstadt, found narrative to be supplemental to the medium of music.

Greenberg himself identifies this common link between music and literature, but rather than seeing corruption claims that the proper listener or reader does not care for the narrative:

Music tends from a beginning through a middle toward an ending. We wait to see how it “comes out”—which is what we also do with literature. Of course, the *total* experience of literature and music is completely disinterested, but it becomes that only at a further remove.¹²⁹

Greenberg’s Kantian bias forces him to ignore the fact that narrative, particularly in music, is a formal concern. For his part, Young has expressed a debt to Anton Webern, Stockhausen, and others. Indeed, Young and others have argued for the sort of backward-looking critical relationship between Young’s music and high-profile modernist works that characterizes Greenbergian modernism. Carl’s characterization better suits mannerism and academicism than modernism. The question then arises: is the bare-bones serialism of *Trio for Strings* so reductive that it has become theatrical? Young’s professor would seem to have thought so, and there is surely a way of listening to this piece that would foreground the drama of the concert at the expense of the music’s formal characteristics. However, the piece does bear a clear formal debt to Webern, and it is important to recall that most of what is considered modern was initially received with the same mixture of bewilderment and contempt expressed by Young’s professor. Indeed the lesson of the *Trio* seems to be the same as the later lesson of sculptural minimalism: the absence of the expected degree of formal complexity (or perceived compositional work, to recall Wollheim) may lead, for the right (or wrong) audience, to a theatrical situation.

¹²⁹ Clement Greenberg, “The Case for Abstract Art,” in *Clement Greenberg Volume 4*, 77.

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The early long-tone serial pieces Young wrote as a student are not representative of his later output. Near the end of his education at Berkeley, Young began writing and performing Fluxus events and music for Anna Halprin's dance troupe. Here the argument for why the *Trio for Strings* might be modernist cannot apply, since much of this music eliminates not only the literary component of narrativity, but often every other identifiable component of music as well, excepting (usually) duration. *Composition 1960 #7* (a perfect fifth, "to be held for a long time") retains pitch and a rudimentary sort of harmony. Most interpretations of *Composition 1960 #10*, which consists only of the words "Draw a straight line and follow it," are likely to involve a temporal element, but not necessarily one that is quintessentially musical. Sound is likely to be produced, but is not necessary; if this piece is modernist in the Greenbergian sense of exploring the essence of the medium of music, then the result is that only time is essential (and under this reading, what is the difference between music, dance, and theater?). *Piano Piece for David Tudor #3*, which has no instructions, but only the text "Most of them were very old grasshoppers," disrupts even this problematic reading, unless it must be performed. Diane Wakoski, Young's partner at the time, recalls that "for La Monte, words, including poetic language, were sound events," suggesting some sort of temporal component (events take place in time), even if performance were unnecessary.¹³⁰ If a performance is necessary for this piece to be music—that is, if the score is only a score, and not the work itself—then time must remain essential, since the performance will occur in time. What is implied to be inessential is any sort of denotative instruction or predetermined action. Music, in this reading, is essentially something—anything or nothing—performed in time. Sound, as Cage knew, will be perceived

¹³⁰ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 51.

whether it is emitted or not (in the sounds of our circulatory and nervous systems). Young anticipates sculptural minimalism by a number of years, demonstrating the absurdity of reductive modernism by quickly following it into nothingness.

La Monte Young's work from the later 1960s returns from the precipice of soundlessness, renewing in some respects one of the concerns of *Trio for Strings*: what is often thought of as stasis. Many of Young's pieces from this period, including the *Drift Studies* begun in 1964, are made up of a small number of tones that are sustained for very long periods of time. But even here, where it would seem that nothing is happening, the performance of the music in time is crucial. Young and Zazeela stress in the *Dream House* installations the importance of the position of the listener in the room, and how the listener's movement in space and time changes how the pitches are perceived.¹³¹ Further, it is the preoccupation with time that partially informs Young's attraction to pure interval ratios. Discussing "Map of 49's Dream the Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery," a section of *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, Young argues in favor of using pure interval ratios:

Consider the premise that in determining the relationship of two or more frequencies the brain can best analyze information of a periodic nature. Since chords in which any pair of frequency components must be represented by some irrational fraction (such as those required for any system of equal temperament) produce composite sound waveforms that are infinitely non-repeating, only an infinite number of lifetimes of listening could possibly yield the precise analysis of the intervallic relationship. Consequently the human auditory mechanism could be best expected to analyse the intervallic relationships between the frequency components of chords in which every pair of components can be represented by some rational fraction, since only these harmonically related frequencies produce periodic composite sound waveforms.¹³²

¹³¹ La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, "Dream House," in *Selected Writings*, (Ubuclassics, 2004), 11–12. Originally printed as program notes, 1964.

¹³² La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, "Notes on the Continuous Periodic Composite Sound Waveform Environment Realizations of 'Map of 49's Dream the Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery,'" in *Selected Writings*, 6. Originally

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Young argues, in effect, that the relationship between two pitches is incomprehensible if taken instantaneously; instead, great spans of time are needed in order to assess the precise distance between two pitches, in particular if their relationship is defined by relatively high co-prime integers, or is irrational (in which case precise assessment is impossible).

However, it is overly reductive to say that Young's music in the 1960s was simply about time. Certainly from one point of view his music enacts an exploration of the temporal limits of music, but Young's interests were also spiritual. Amongst the three principles Young sets aside in his notes the "Map of 49's Dream" for further exploration is the possibility that the use of continuous, specific harmonic ratios "could more definitely produce (or stimulate) a psychological state."¹³³ To some degree this indicates a change in Young's compositional interests. During the composition of the *Composition 1960* pieces, Young's interests seem to have aligned much better with Cage, exploring anthropocentrism and the limits of music. Much like Robert Morris's sculpture, Young's Fluxus pieces suggest a perverse sort of modernist reductivity, but perhaps a reductivity so perverse that it pushes, as Fried suggested, beyond modernism. Young's later interest in creating and controlling the psychological response of the audience differs in tone and intent. This is the work of a composer whose interests have turned not only to the musical encounter, but to the controlled, determinate effect of the music on the listener. This new power relationship, which will be explored further in Chapter 4, suggests a project more premodern than modern.

published in *Aspen* (September, 1969). Although *Selected Writings* is attributed to both Young and Zazeela, "Notes" is written in the first person singular, mentioning Zazeela in the third person. These facts indicate that this brief essay can be presumed to be the work of Young alone.

¹³³ La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, "Notes," 9.

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If Riley did not make such a stir as Young at Berkeley, he nevertheless seems to have shared Young's lack of interest in academic music. Riley's relationship to the history of music seems to have been more personal than formal, though the former must to some extent implicate the latter. In an interview with Keith Potter, Riley recounts his relationship with history: "I went through the history of Western music pretty much, and Fluxus was the last stop on the road.... After that, I decided I had to do something. I'd gone through the whole thing, and I didn't know who I was."¹³⁴ Placing Fluxus as the most recent important movement in Western music surely puts Riley at odds with Greenberg and Fried, especially given Fluxus's deliberate theatricality and disregard for the purity of medium.¹³⁵ Also, unlike Greenberg's ideal modernist, Riley does not seem to have been interested in a project that extended beyond himself.

From the early 1960s to the early 1970s, Riley's has consistently avoided overt systematicity, opting instead for the appearance of intuitive formal decisions. In 1963, he produced musical accompaniment for Ken Dewey's "The Gift," referred to now as *Music for "The Gift"*, a tape piece which accumulates layers of pre-recorded music, ebbing and flowing between comprehensibility and chaos. The source material, however, is not by Riley, but consists instead of a number of found materials, including a performance by jazz trumpet player Chet Baker. This piece, and others like it, challenge authorship through the use of found material, but at the same time retain the intuitive role of the composer. According to Potter, Riley's lack of logical rigor (in contrast especially to Reich's tape pieces) even occasionally involved the composer cutting and splicing tape at random, without knowing what was on a particular

¹³⁴ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 100. Ellipsis Potter's.

¹³⁵ Michael Nyman's narrative of experimental music argues convincingly for minimalism as the direct successor to Fluxus. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139 and passim.

segment of tape.¹³⁶ However, Riley's use of chance seems to have more in common with Xenakis than Cage, since unlike Cage he did not vouch for the results before hearing them. While chance may have played a role in composition, judgment ultimately held sway over the final result. Riley's early tape pieces, which, in their lack of logical rigor, bear a stronger resemblance to assemblage than to minimalist sculpture, manage to be both modern and not (so long as we consider modernity from the perspective of authorship) by denying the importance of the author's creation of individual sounds but retaining (or even reinforcing) the role of the author as the intuitive producer of large-scale form.

In C, composed in 1964, is a rare instance of score writing for Riley, but while this piece constitutes a return to a more traditional use of pitch and rhythm, and in this respect a traditional role for the composer, it is also well known as an example of a new kind of authorial abdication. *In C*, through Riley's innovative planning, manages both to be open to extremely diverse interpretations and to be easily recognizable. The evolutionary history of performances of *In C* has prompted Potter to characterize the piece as "urban folk music rather than a 'composition' in a more conventional sense."¹³⁷ The piece's controlled aleatory, which includes open instrumentation, disrupts the determinacy of composition without interfering with the piece's identifiability.¹³⁸

In C is considered by many scholars to be a watershed of minimalist composition, initiating, or at least bringing to broader attention, repetitive minimalism.¹³⁹ Robert Fink has

¹³⁶ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 117. It is not clear whether or not any of the purely stochastic pieces were retained.

¹³⁷ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 109.

¹³⁸ Even the signature Cs have on occasion been left out of performance without destabilizing the piece's identity. See Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 111–112.

¹³⁹ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 10. K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 44. Edward

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argued that *In C* not only represents an important development in repetitive minimalism, but that it represents a macroscopic change in culture and identity politics as well. Synthesizing such diverse authors as Jean Baudrillard, Christopher Lasch, William Whyte, Herbert Marcuse, David Riesman, and Thomas Frank, Fink argues that minimalism in general and *In C* in particular are implicated in and contribute to a new form of subjectivity that develops out of late capitalism.¹⁴⁰ Fink's story is one of the destruction of the autonomous subject at the hands of a newly emerging form of capitalism—what we have been calling postmodernism of the subject. Borrowing from David Riesman, Fink presents three phases of human subjectivity: tradition-directed, which derives from “the stable consensus of a static culture”; inner-directed, which characterizes the ego-centric, familial subject that predominates during a period of cultural or economic expansion; and the other-directed, which arrives after a period of growth, and indicates a person who “lacked strongly internalized goals and feelings.” *In C*, and minimalism generally, was composed in a period dominated by other-directed personalities, whose ostensibly natural, human desires and sources of authority have been obliterated by an increasingly ubiquitous system of advertisement and consumption. For Fink, as for many postmodern theorists of subjectivity, in the postmodern period we must face “the painful fact that affluence – economic success itself – seemed to have eaten away at individual subjectivity.”

Leaving aside for the moment the question of subjective ontology, Fink's suggestion that repetitive minimalism replicates the coercive force of postmodern advertising shares some aspects with Greenberg's polemics against what he saw as bad art. Greenberg, we have seen, considers it the sacred duty of modernism to hold the ramparts against the ever-increasing waves

Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 178.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 85–91. The following discussion centers on these pages.

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of middlebrow kitsch. Fink and Greenberg would seem to be in agreement that the market poses a dire threat to art-for-art's-sake. Fink's quotation of Marcuse in most respects might just as well have come from Greenberg:

If mass communications blend together harmoniously, and often unnoticeably, art, politics, religion, and philosophy with commercials, they bring these realms of culture to their common denominator – the commodity form. The music of the soul is also the music of salesmanship.¹⁴¹

Fink's position is much more ambivalent; he does not condemn minimalism for its alleged participation in the cult of advertisement but he also insists on exploring elements of minimal music that a fan is likely to find uncomfortable. For Greenberg on the other hand, minimalism, and the general category of novelty art which it represents, must be condemned. Nevertheless, there is some indication here that *In C* has something to do with Greenberg's postmodernism. In Chapter 5 we will argue that Fink's diagnosis of the "other-directed" personality does not extend well to the rest of early minimalist music.

Of course there is a difference between Marcuse's position as elaborated by Fink and Greenberg's. Greenberg the conservative wants to preserve the ideal form of art, and in his later years at least took little interest in political economy. Marcuse, whose target is not kitsch but capitalism, suggests that the impingement of commercialism and advertisement on every aspect of life is altering the content of the "soul." It is this, and not Greenberg's modernist holding pattern, that Fink focuses on in his discussion of *In C*. Understanding *In C* as other-directed makes some intuitive sense; performers have a set of instructions, but their task hinges on their ability to listen to their fellow performers and develop a piece of music through unspoken

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 88.

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consensus.¹⁴² The musicians look to one another for mutual authority. Fink contrasts this to the more traditional Western ensemble situation, in which performers defer to the conductor at every moment. (Fink names this situation “tradition-directed,” though from his description of the categories, “inner-directed” would make more sense: the source of authority, in the form of both the conductor and composer, is external and discrete, and, prior to the second half of the twentieth century at least, orchestras were not the pillars of tradition but the performers of new music.) However, the characterization of performers of *In C* as preferring social harmony within the ensemble to the achievement of any sort of goal seems to push this paradigm too far. On the contrary, one must presume that these performers generally prefer to achieve a pleasing musical result rather than simply to get along with their fellow musicians. Furthermore, as Potter points out, the freedom of *In C* is only partial; there are numerous instructions regarding performance that are a part of the score, and several performances have taken place under Riley’s direction.¹⁴³ In spite of the need for the performers to direct their attention outward to their ensemble-mates, each performer acts with a clear external authority and goal in mind. *In C* may mirror some of Greenberg’s fears about a relaxation of modernist formalism, but it does not seem to upset the subject position so strongly as Fink suggests.

After *In C* Riley occasionally returned to working with Ken Dewey,¹⁴⁴ but his best-known minimalist works were solo compositions. Composition, though, becomes a more difficult term in these cases, since it is clear only to Riley how much of each of these pieces is

¹⁴² It should be noted that this is a feature held in common with most improvised ensemble music. Fink does not argue that other-directedness is unique to minimalist music.

¹⁴³ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 111–115.

¹⁴⁴ For an interesting review of a Dewey and Riley production, see David Bourdon, “Friends with Bail Money Should be Watching,” *The Village Voice* (December 30, 1965), 9.

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improvised and how much is pre-composed. If one adheres to an idealist conception of the musical work, these pieces—*A Rainbow in Curved Air*, *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band*, *Keyboard Studies No. 1 and 2*—miss the mark. Like *In C*, significant formal elements of the piece are indeterminate. However, while *In C* distributed formal control (to some extent) amongst the performers, in these later pieces all choices are retained by the composer. This sort of indeterminacy, while not unique, is unusual in concert music. Most other examples of indeterminacy, from Boulez to Lutosławski, involve the composer providing some guidelines for the performer, who is to decide the realized form. Riley, however, serves as his own performer, rendering authorship unambiguous. Indeed, from a Greenbergian perspective one could even conceive of this portion of Riley's output as modernist *because* of the role of improvisation. Here form is not a question of “ratiocination,” but of intuition and feeling.

When Steve Reich reflects on his experience of studying music at Mills College, he expresses some ambivalence. On the one hand, studying relatively recent modern music with Berio was a fulfilling experience: “Studying with Berio at that time was extremely exciting. Serialism was just then becoming known in this country, and he was a primary member of the team. So being able to analyze Webern with him was very appropriate.”¹⁴⁵ Studying Webern under Berio may have been exciting, but Reich soon showed little inclination to compose serial or post-serial music. Retrospectively, Reich has argued that the music he composed for Berio invoked Webern: “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.”¹⁴⁶ From the beginning

¹⁴⁵ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music: 1965–2000*, 9.

¹⁴⁶ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 157.

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Reich has distanced himself from what is usually considered high modernist compositional practice (“for composers today to recreate the angst of ‘Pierrot Lunaire’ in Ohio ... is simply a joke”)¹⁴⁷ but not through any disgust with the actual music. He also disclaims any influence from the common practice canon: “My connections to Western classical music have little or nothing to do with music from Haydn to Wagner. The influences I *would* mention include Debussy, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky, Bartók, and Weill in the twentieth century, as well as Perotin, and much other music from before 1750.”¹⁴⁸

Reich’s first mature minimalist piece, *It’s Gonna Rain*, is similar in some respects to Riley’s tape pieces—similar enough to evoke some displeasure from the senior composer¹⁴⁹—but there are also some clear and important formal differences. Both *It’s Gonna Rain* and *Music of “The Gift”* repeat taped found material, but while Riley’s piece changes texture and content relatively quickly, making use of a considerable amount of material from multiple (though few) sources, *It’s Gonna Rain* obsessively repeats only a small portion of a single source. (In part one, the clip used is continuous; in part two, it is not.) Further, the use of repetition in *It’s Gonna Rain*, as has commonly been noted, is rigorously formulaic, contrasting to Riley’s more intuitive approach. This difference, between Reich’s rigor and Riley’s intuition, remains active throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, although each of Reich’s pieces, excepting *Clapping Music*, always has some component of compositional intervention. As we saw in Chapter 1, Reich has argued that there is always an intuitive element to his composition, even when he is at his most rigorous:

Well, my decisions weren’t all made beforehand. The only times that I composed a phase piece that goes from unison to unison was in the first section of *It’s Gonna Rain* and the individual sections of *Piano Phase*. Every other piece of mine has some aesthetic decision

¹⁴⁷ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 10.

¹⁴⁸ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 160.

¹⁴⁹ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 117.

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in it as to exactly how many beats out of phase a patten will shift against itself and when the two voices will become four voices, and when the four voices will become eight voices, and when the melodic resulting pattern will be doubled. Even in *It's Gonna Rain*, where you have the 'pure' process, yes there's a pure process, but how long does it take? That's an aesthetic decision.¹⁵⁰

Reich might also have mentioned the selection of source material. Though Reich's position here is surely informed by the marked difference between his compositional aesthetic in 1976 versus 1965, an aesthetic which had shifted away from the rigorous process, his point is important to keep in mind when discussing process music and the role of "ratiocination." Reich reminds us that even in the most rigid and ascetic of practices, the status of a work of art *as* art necessarily entails an aesthetic judgment.

Nevertheless, while music devoid of intuitive decision may be a logical impossibility, there is clearly a difference of degree between Reich and Riley, which indicates, from the perspective of Greenbergian modernism, an unorthodox approach on Reich's part to artistic production. Here Reich exhibits a kinship to Morris, Andre, and others by pursuing a logical approach to composition, which, as Jonathan Bernard has pointed out, is allied more with the notion of arrangement than composition, as painters and sculptors use the terms.¹⁵¹ From Greenberg's perspective, this constitutes a circumvention of the task of artistic production; instead of creating a work artistically, Reich and the sculptural minimalists devise novelties through deduction. Reich's minimalism, from the perspective of Greenbergian modernism, is not modern, but rather belongs to the new strain of novelty styles Greenberg identifies with bad, middlebrow taste. Also like his colleagues in the plastic arts, Reich demonstrates an interest in

¹⁵⁰ Michael Nyman, "Steve Reich: Interview by Michael Nyman," *Studio International* 192, no. 984 (November/December 1976), 301.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic," 95–96.

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severe reduction, reducing all of both *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* almost entirely to a single musical process. Other pieces, such as *Pendulum Music*, and the never-realized *Slow Motion Sound*, show a similar reductive rigor. Reich, like Stella nearly a decade earlier, soon showed a predisposition toward development. *Piano Phase* complicates the simple phasing motive by following it with two shorter but similar motives, subjected to the same treatment. *Violin Phase* includes the superpositioning of melodic fragments based on “resulting patterns.” And from *Drumming* on it becomes clear that Reich has used extreme reduction to create a personal *tabula rasa* upon which to develop a personal and complicated musical language. From this perspective, though judgments of taste would of course need to be made, there is room in Reich’s output, when viewed as a developing trajectory, for a kind of formalist modernism, one which makes backward-looking decisions and relies on intuition to guide form.

Glass’s encounter with academic composition seems at first to have been quite positive. After studying at Juilliard, Glass became a composer-in-residence, working for the public school system in Pittsburgh, where he composed a great number of works in a neoclassical style.¹⁵² At least in retrospect, Glass seems to have found the work he did both at Juilliard and in Pittsburgh unsatisfying: “I learned composition at that time by imitating my teachers ... At that point in my life, I had no music of my own.”¹⁵³ Dissatisfied with his work in Pittsburgh, he decided to travel to Paris to study with Nadia Boulanger. There he also began composing for a theater company that would later become the Mabou Mines. The music he composed for theater, however, bore little relation to either his earlier neoclassicism (in spite of Boulanger’s tuition) or to the

¹⁵² Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 253.

¹⁵³ Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), 210.

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activities current in advanced French musical society. Indeed Glass's reaction to the activities of Boulez and his group was one of revulsion, describing the Paris new music scene as "a wasteland as far as I could see, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy creepy music."¹⁵⁴ Opting out of both American academic neoclassicism and French post-serialism, Glass turned to severe reduction.

Glass's early compositional clarity, diatonicism, and use of determinacy suggest a stronger kinship with Reich than with either Young or Riley. The latter composers frequently use some form of improvisation, and on occasion Young's music—particularly in the *Drift Studies* and in some of his Fluxus pieces—is so pared down as to render the question of determinacy versus indeterminacy irrelevant. Reich and Glass during this period both produced works that come closer to the factory-ordered aesthetic found in Donald Judd's work. Not only is there no improvisation in pieces like *Music in Fifths* and *Piano Phase* (aside from deciding on the number of repetitions for each unit), there is also the appearance of no improvisation. The performers conspicuously have no room even for the perceived expressive freedom of traditional orchestral performers.¹⁵⁵ Though perhaps the most obvious minimalist divide lies between Glass and Reich on the one hand and Young and Riley on the other, there are of course important differences

¹⁵⁴ Robert Ashley, *Music with Roots in the Aether* (Köln: MusikTexte, 2000), 64. *Music with Roots in the Aether* is a book version of what Ashley calls "an opera for television" which he made in 1975. The interviews from *Music with Roots in the Aether* are transcriptions of these original television interviews. Though VHS copies of the opera are rare and expensive, the interviews and performances are available online through ubu.com: <http://www.ubu.com/film/aether.html> (last accessed 4/26/2013).

¹⁵⁵ The German critic Clytus Gottwald would make much of this aspect of Reich's music, going so far as to accuse him of fascism. Chapter 4 will explore this article more closely. See Clytus Gottwald, "Signale zwischen Exotik und Industrie: Steve Reich auf der Suche nach einer neuen Identität von Klang und Struktur," *Melos/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (January–February 1975), 3–6.

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within these pairings as well. Between Young and Riley this difference might well be summed up with Young's fanaticism against Riley's mysticism. Between Reich and Glass, particularly in the second half of the 1960s, the word is theater.

Glass is now well known as a composer both for theater and for film, and while he also started his post-academic career composing for an avant-garde theater troupe, his best-known works from his minimalist phase were not dramatic. Like Reich, Glass wrote pieces for small ensembles that were typically performed in art galleries, museums, and private lofts. To some extent, the mere fact of the performance space will inspire a theatrical reading of Glass's and Reich's minimalism. David Chapman has demonstrated how the space of the Park Place Gallery affects Reich's music, allowing the listener to draw connections between Reich's music and the painting and sculpture in the room.¹⁵⁶ And indeed any formal performance outside the concert hall will bring with it the theatrical, since from a traditional perspective the performance space is exogenous or supplemental to the performance itself. Peter Kivy has argued that the change in performance space inaugurated by minimalism is a fundamental challenge to the prescriptive code of listening popular in post-Kantian European society.¹⁵⁷ Though Kivy's analysis is woefully unspecific, his presentation of a nineteenth-century approach to music appreciation centered on disinterest and discipline resonates quite well with Greenberg's own Kantian bias. For Kivy, the relaxed gallery and loft spaces of early minimalist concerts defy the European tradition of rowed seating and fancy dress. (Kivy never explains exactly what "minimalism" refers to, but one may assume that Reich and Glass are included.) Those tradition-minded critics

¹⁵⁶ David Chapman, "Space, Collaboration, and Cultural Practice at Park Place Gallery and Filmmakers Cinematheque, 1967–1968," conference paper presented at the Third International Conference on Music and Minimalism, Leuven, October 12–15, 2011.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Kivy, *New Essays on Musical Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 44–70.

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and concert-goers might reasonably be expected to walk into a Glass concert in the late 1960s and find, as Greenberg found in the art galleries, too much relaxation; or find, more in line with Fried, an affected theatrical staging of music rather than music itself.

Some of Glass's early minimalism might be assessed as theatrical even without the biases of a Greenberg or a Fried. Though they were not written for the stage, several early Glass works incorporate theatrical elements that persist regardless of performance venue (although they are absent in audio recording). These pieces include extra-musical performance instructions which required the performer(s) to move about the stage while playing. *Strung Out* and *Music in the Shape of a Square*, are, from a modernist perspective, not only music, but a theatrical production as well. Glass's later minimalism, with pieces like *Music in Fifths* and *Music with Changing Parts*, moves away from this overtly theatrical element, toward a performance style that unambiguously emphasizes the music over the mode of performance.

* * *

Determining modernism or postmodernism as a function of a relation to the past and future is a task fraught with dangers. How does one differentiate, for example, between a reaction against the past and a development out of the past? Young's music sounds to most ears like an extreme departure from the Western canon, yet he professes an active debt to Webern and others. Reich too, especially in his early minimalist years, produced a sound unlike anything found in the modern tradition, yet he expresses an excitement about Stravinsky. Each of these composers does ignore wide swaths of the canon (none of them expresses much interest in the nineteenth century, for example) but this is likely to be true of any composer. In sculpture as well, minimalists avow a debt to some predecessors (Andre to Brancusi, for example) and not to others. Indeed, the question of a break versus an appropriation would seem to be as much a

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matter of taste as of form. It is surely useful for the music or art scholar to contemplate any given moment in time and compare its products to the past, but one ought to remain sensible to the fact that connections and ruptures alike are likely. The modernity or postmodernity of minimalism would then hinge on whether or not music theorists and musicologists as a community are willing to set a definite limit to the boundaries of modernism. This too seems a dubious task, however, particularly as once novel ventures such as minimalism begin to make more sense in relation to their immediate past. John Perreault commented in 1967, after the opening of the Primary Structures exhibition, that “We are just now at this late moment beginning to be a little discriminating about Abstract Expressionism and have learned at long last that there is a real and perhaps essential difference between the works of DeKooning [*sic*] and Pollock that far exceeds the superficial resemblances.”¹⁵⁸ Minimalist music is surely by now at enough of a remove that one can distinguish between Riley and Young, between Reich and Glass. But in doing so there is no need to obliterate or overstate the similarities and differences between each of these four and their own predecessors.

As for postmodernism more broadly, it should be clear that its relationship to minimalism in music is at best ambivalent, as was the case with sculpture. Just as Morris and Judd, with their blank aesthetic, claimed to be taking the logical next step in modern art, so Young, Riley, Reich, and Glass listen to the music of their recent past and find it inappropriate for their new historical context. The claims of postmodernists go beyond Greenberg’s suggestion of a break, however. Each of these composers has demonstrated some modernist reductionism, but each has disrupted the boundaries of the modern musical discipline as well, either by challenging the essential

¹⁵⁸ John Perreault, “Minimal Art Clearing the Air,” *Village Voice* (January 12, 1967), 11.

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constitutive elements of music, as Young does; by disrupting the relationship between the composer and the ensemble, as in Riley's case; or by seemingly transforming the composition into a set of algorithms. The question of whether musical minimalism is postmodern shall remain unanswered, owing to the lack of a clear definition of postmodernism, but considering how art criticism of postmodern work could apply to musical minimalism does something to refine our understanding of the latter.

CHAPTER 3: THE TIME OF MINIMALISM

In Chapter 2 we saw that the concept of duration held particular importance for Robert Morris. In Part II of his “Notes on Sculpture,” Morris theorized an approach to sculpture that would confront the viewer with a temporal contradiction: on the one hand, the simplicity of the gestalt forms would allow instantaneous apprehension of the sculptural form, but on the other hand the size of the piece, as well as its relationship to the gallery space, would require spatial navigation, which takes time. For Morris this tension is part of the success of the sculptural object. Fried, again as discussed above, shows an interest only in the latter half of this theory of time. For Fried’s purposes, Morris’s comments on the instantaneous apprehension of the gestalt only reinforce the object’s temporal inexhaustibility. Because the piece lacks formal complexity, there is no dynamic interaction, and therefore the time of the object is endless:

Endlessness, being able to go on and on, even having to go on and on, is central both to the concept of interest [on which more in the next chapter] and to that of objecthood. In fact, it seems to be the experience that most deeply excites literalist sensibility, and that literalist artists seek to objectify in their work—for example, by the repetition of identical units (Judd’s “one thing after another”), which carries the implication that the units in question could be multiplied ad infinitum.... Morris’s claim that in the best new work the beholder is made aware that “he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context” amounts to the claim that the beholder is made aware of the endlessness and the inexhaustibility if not of the object itself at any rate of his experience of it.¹

The effectively endless duration of the minimalist encounter is a major connection for Fried between minimalism and theater, since theater too persists in time. The endless and undifferentiated treatment of time that Fried locates in minimalist sculpture contrasts—as expected—with his view of how time functions in modernist painting and sculpture. The endless

¹ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 166.

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time of minimalism accompanies minimalism's quality of "presence"; modernist art, on the other hand, possesses "presentness," a concept which entails an appropriate degree of formal complexity. While minimalism persists in time by virtue of its formal simplicity, the presentness of modernist art is dynamic, requiring time to apprehend, but only because of the inadequacies of the human faculties.

It is this continuous and entire *presentness*, amounting, as it were, to the perpetual creation of itself, that one experiences as a kind of *instantaneousness*, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.²

Thus for Fried there are two acknowledged temporal experiences of art to match the two acknowledged manifestations of art in the 1960s. On the one hand there is the time of modernist art, which derives from the form of the piece. The formal qualities of the piece present a finite set of elements; proper aesthetic appreciation requires the understanding of these elements in relation to one another. Because the formal qualities of the piece are intrinsic, their relationship, and therefore the aesthetic quality of the work, exists out of time. However, due to the imperfections of human faculties, the actual appreciation of modernist art occurs in time, but since this time is necessary only to apprehend formal relationships, and since these relationships are finite, the time required to view modernist art is also finite. Thus the ideal modernist art experience would be instantaneous; it is only the regrettable necessity of a human observer that renders this experience temporal. On the other side of Fried's duality we find theatrical work, represented here by minimalism. In the case of minimalism, the art object lacks a sense of formal composition; there is no process of understanding for the viewer to experience, since it is

² Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 167. Emphasis in original.

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immediately apparent that the formal arrangement of the work is irrelevant. Consequently, the aesthetic encounter is not bounded by the process of aesthetic apprehension.

The role of time that Fried ascribes to these two forms of art would at first seem paradoxical. While the experience of modernism is ideally instantaneous but practically finite, the experience of theatrical art is practically instantaneous but theoretically endless. To make this claim Fried relies like Morris on the formal simplicity of minimalism. Whether because it relies on a correspondence to a gestalt or on readily familiar qualities, Fried contends that minimalism is so easily understood by the eye that its apprehension effectively takes no time at all. This circumstance, the lack of sufficient formal relations, eliminates the possibility of a feeling of conviction, which for Fried is the hallmark of good art: once the viewer has assimilated the formal components of the work, she or he can arrive at, to use Fried's term, a *conviction* of the work's quality. Without the possibility of formal evaluation, there are no cues that signal the end of aesthetic appreciation. The encounter is therefore theoretically infinite in duration. (Recall that for Morris the instantaneous apprehension of the sculpture's form provides a constant counterpoint to the temporal experience of the art, a counterpoint that Fried does not find valuable.)

It is important to note that while the direct subject of this line of criticism is time, the positions Fried arrives at require a particular view of the body. First, it is the imperfection of human corporeality that prevents the viewer from ever achieving the ideal instantaneous modernist encounter. In this respect, there is a sense in which the presence of a human viewer somehow defiles the purity of the work of art. Second, while the ideal instantaneousness of modernist art is a result of the art's own intrinsic qualities, the endlessness of minimalism is a result of "experience":

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Here finally I want to emphasize something that may already have become clear: the experience in question *persists in time*, and the presentment of endlessness that, I have been claiming, is central to literalist art and theory is essentially a presentment of endless or indefinite *duration*.... The literalist preoccupation with time—more precisely, with the *duration of the experience*—is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical, as though theater confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but of *time*; or as though the sense which, at bottom, theater addresses is a sense of temporality, of time both passing and to come, *simultaneously approaching and receding*, as if apprehended in an infinite perspective....³

Duration here is extraneous to the work of art itself, relying on the arrival and isolation of the viewer. Earlier in the essay, Fried states this more explicitly:

It is, I think, worth remarking that “the entire situation” means exactly that: *all* of it—including, it seems, the beholder’s *body*. There is nothing within his field of vision—nothing that he takes note of in any way—that declares its irrelevance to the situation, and therefore to the experience, in question.⁴

In both instances—the encounter with modernism and the encounter with minimalism—the body produces undesirable effects. In the first instance it delays the ideal instantaneousness of the aesthetic experience, and in the second it partially causes a temporal phenomenon that Fried finds distasteful.

One of the accomplishments of “Art and Objecthood” is the integration of the time of experience into criticism of the plastic arts. All aesthetic experience, because it is experience, takes place in time, and what Fried acknowledges in his essay is that the form of a piece of plastic art can to some extent organize our temporal experience of that art. For Fried this observation is normative: there are certain temporal experiences that are proper to art, and some (such as those of minimalism) that are not. Music is a much more transparently temporal art form; insofar as music is an acoustic phenomenon, it is also necessarily a temporal phenomenon,

³ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 166–167. Emphasis in original.

⁴ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 155. Emphasis in original.

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not only experientially but formally. Music unfolds in time, even when the *experience* of music is excluded from consideration. The time of music is the occasional subject of study for academic musicians—perhaps most notably in Jonathan Kramer’s *The Time of Music*, on which more below—though it quite often escapes comment or is taken for granted. Time in minimalist music *has* been fairly commonly remarked upon, suggesting that there is something different about the treatment of time in musical minimalism.

Often comments on the time of minimalist music revolve around the problem of boredom, whether because a critic is complaining about being bored or because he or she is surprised not to have been.⁵ Surely one notable aspect of minimalism’s treatment of time manifests through the music’s remarkable consistency over long stretches of time, and listeners expecting a greater diversity of musical events might well find themselves bored (a fact critics have often been quick to point out). But boredom alone does not adequately account for the new experience of time that minimalism entails.⁶ Boredom also fails to account for all (or perhaps even most) experiences of minimalism—if I found minimalism boring I would likely have chosen a different subject for this dissertation—nor is minimalism the only genre of music that is often criticized for being boring. Thus while boredom may suffice to describe *some* experiences

⁵ Though Tom Johnson avoids the word boredom, his “La Monte Young Diaries” demonstrate ambivalence on this subject. Several times Johnson falls asleep during Young concerts, and even decides not to attend a performance he has been asked to review, but he also clearly enjoys and respects the music. In his words, “It’s wonderful stuff, and it probably presents all the great spiritual truths as well as anything does. But somehow, about once a year is enough.” Tom Johnson, *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972–1982* (Eindhoven: Het Apollohuis, 1989), 136.

⁶ Boredom is of course also not an invention of musical minimalism, nor is it something at which minimalism could be said uniquely to excel. The New York avant-garde has embraced boredom since Cage, and as Dick Higgins relates, in comparison to many of the boredom-centered works of the early 1960s, minimalist music was often quite eventful. See Dick Higgins, “Boredom and Danger,” *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde* 5 (1968), 15–17.

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with minimalism, this is as likely to result from a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the listener, or from minimalism's *relative* lack of internal differences, than from any intrinsic feature of minimalist music itself.

Inquiries into the time of minimalist music have also often grappled with the question of teleology, which, as discussed in Chapter 1, seems to have appeared first in Ivanka Stoianova's article, "Musique répétitive."⁷ Wim Mertens picks up this thread to contrast minimalism to traditional tonal music on the one hand and European post-tonal music on the other. Mertens considers the former to be teleological because of its reliance on tonal goals, and the latter negatively dialectical because of the tension between its form and content. Minimalism, for Mertens, Stoianova, and many others, is a-teleological. The degree to which this presumption is valid was discussed in Chapter 1, and can largely be laid aside here. Because a universally comprehensible concept of a musical "goal" is a practical impossibility, teleology itself becomes an unwieldy and largely useless concept. The foregoing discussion of time in music will make sense for some readers in terms of teleology, but there is sufficient ambiguity about what constitutes a proper telos that the term will be avoided.

The issue of time in minimalism invoked by Stoianova and Mertens that fits best into Fried's line of thinking is the issue of beginning and ending, and therefore of finitude—the question, in other words, of formal closure. Stoianova claims that "Repetitive music [which encompasses Riley, Reich, and Glass] renounces the formal functionalism of traditional music and all pre-established formal schemes."⁸ Quoting Philip Glass, Stoianova argues that this

⁷ Ivanka Stoianova, "Musique Répétitive," *Musique en Jeu* (February 1977), 64–74.

⁸ I take Stoianova's meaning here to be maximally general when she references "formal schemes." Because she is discussing music practices as a whole, it is likely that her reference to form extends beyond those musical classifications—sonata, rondo, etc.—to which musicians

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situation creates a music that has “no beginning, no end.” Effectively Stoianova suggests here that when minimalist composers remove traditional narrative structures from their music and replace them with repetition, they inaugurate a new mode of perceptual temporality: “The non-directional statement demands a new perception of musical time: the listener is no longer forced to follow the story of a narrative development.”⁹

Wim Mertens, whose *American Minimal Music* drew considerably upon Stoianova’s “Musique répétitive,” extends the idea of a music without beginning or end to La Monte Young’s work, which had been excluded from Stoianova’s essay. Drawing on *Village Voice* critic Ron Rosenbaum, Mertens argues that Young’s “anti-apocalyptic” music entails “an extra-historical experience of time, brought about by discarding teleological and dramatic elements. La Monte Young has removed finality, the apocalypse, from music, and what is left is mere duration and stasis, without beginning or end; eternal music.”¹⁰ (Recall that Mertens explicitly conflates narrative and teleology.) The ultimate conclusion of Mertens’s argument on minimalist music, that as a genre it is problematically anti-apocalyptic and therefore in some respect both utopian and counter-revolutionary, suggests an application of his reading of Young to Reich, Glass, and Riley as well. Mertens derives the universal eternity of minimalist music from his reading of Adorno, which suggests to him that minimalism is work-as-process rather than work-as-object.

often refer when they say “form.” I understand her distinction to be between content and form, and thus between pitches and the formal ordering of pitches. Thus a tonal chord progression, no matter how innovative, is still an example of embracing “pre-established formal schemes,” even if to expand or comment upon them.

⁹ “L’énoncé non directionnel demande une nouvelle perception du temps musical : l’auditeur n’est plus forcé de suivre l’histoire d’un développement narrative.” Ivanka Stoianova, “Musique répétitive,” 70.

¹⁰ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, trans. J. Hautekiet (London: Kahn & Averill, 1983), 88–89. In the next Chapter we will take a closer look Young and eternity.

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Thus minimalist compositions do not have proper beginnings or endings because they are not proper musical objects, but processes. For Mertens (echoing Reich's "Music as a Gradual Process"), "A work becomes a process when it relates only to itself."¹¹ (This claim will gain importance when we compare Mertens's conception of minimalist time to that of Jonathan Kramer.)

Jonathan Bernard is the first (and to my knowledge only) author to link the question of temporality in minimalism directly to "Art and Objecthood."¹² Citing Fried's claim that minimalism, especially in Tony Smith's work and in its serial manifestations, produces a sort of inexhaustibility or endless duration, Bernard suggests that

Analogous criticisms might plausibly be directed towards minimal music as well. Though it is clear enough where such pieces as [Alvin Lucier's] *I Am Sitting in a Room* or Reich's *Come Out* begin (or at least *start*), it is not at all clear that their endings are controlled by anything other than having run up against the limits of human perception. In a way, maybe they never do end.¹³

This perspective relies on the implicit claim that the encounter with minimal music is primarily, to once again use Fried's term, a question of "interest," rather than of formal exploration (or, that the formal component of minimalist music is so simple that the one cannot but attend to the piece as a whole rather than the individual moments). That is to say that the individual moments, apart from the very first iterations of the repeated cell, of *Come Out* or *I Am Sitting in a Room* are effectively interchangeable, in so far as any given moment is representative of the process as a whole; what is taken as important is precisely not the individual sounds, or even the specific

¹¹ Wim Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, 89.

¹² Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 31 (Winter, 1993), 86–132. Edward Strickland, in his *Minimalism: Origins*, discusses Fried at length, but never in relation to the time of minimalist music.

¹³ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic," 121. Emphasis in original.

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realizations of each moment of the music as it processes, but the large-scale manifestation of the process itself. This generally formalist approach to music is largely consistent with Fried's own framework, though Bernard jettisons the traditionalist moralism of Fried's formalism; though Bernard is skeptical about the long-term historical value of music that cannot justify its own form, the extent to which minimalism fails on these grounds is a purely aesthetic question for Bernard, lacking the apocalyptic sentiments displayed by Fried.

Of course not all minimalist music can be usefully understood as process music, but the experience of endlessness, or at least a novel temporality, arises in the music of Young and Glass as well, in pieces that are not so transparently driven by process: "[E]ndlessness is a potential problem even with works that do seem to have definite boundaries—for if the governing decisions do not convince in any larger terms, the pieces they define will not so much begin and end as start and stop."¹⁴ Minimalist music in this model becomes sort of cross-sectional; unlike those pieces that Mertens's places in the category of work-as-object, minimalist pieces seem to possess arbitrary lengths, implying the possibility of being much longer. For Bernard as for Mertens, this reading is based on the perception of directionality, though Bernard correctly insists on the *perception* or *sense* of directionlessness, rather than on a definitive a-teleology:

Some minimal music, including much of Glass's, takes the *implication* of endlessness in process pieces even further, doing away with any sense of directedness without, however, denying temporality entirely. Glass has asserted that his music "does not deal with events in a clear directional structure," but as far as time is concerned says only that he has dispensed with the conventional clock variety. This claim should not be taken to imply that one cannot sense the passage of time in Glass's work. And Young's *Dream House* project, though it has no beginning (as far as the composer is concerned) and goes on indefinitely, gives at least some critics a sense of time as "pure duration."¹⁵

¹⁴ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic," 121.

¹⁵ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic," 122. Emphasis in original.

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Crucial here is Bernard's insistence that endlessness is presented, rather than actualized; time does not stop, nor do our experiences of these pieces amount to any real sort of eternity (even in the case of Young's music, which is at least nominally eternal—as in the work of the Theater of Eternal Music).

Bernard suggests that the presentation of endlessness encountered in many minimalist compositions is reminiscent of what Jonathan Kramer calls “vertical time,” a concept put forward in his landmark *The Time of Music*.¹⁶ Kramer makes the connections between “vertical time” and minimalist music quite clear; as Bernard points out, Kramer's book contains an analysis of Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge* that considers the vertical dimension of the piece, and the author also briefly discusses Reich's *Come Out* and Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1968) in these terms as well.¹⁷ What is new in Bernard's essay is the juxtaposition of Kramer's work on the time of minimalist music with Fried's comments on time in minimalist plastic art. I would like to explore this connection further.

Given that he approaches musical time from the perspective of experience, it is not surprising that Kramer declines to comment on the temporal qualities of minimalism as a whole. Time in music is frustratingly elusive, and Kramer is careful to acknowledge the slipperiness of his subject. While the formal analysis of pitches and rhythms relies on the discrete and verifiable placement of musical materials, the analysis of time deals only in the experience of the music, even while the formal components of music are a major influence on our experience of the time of music. Any theory of the diversity of musical times will have to come to terms with form.

¹⁶ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer, 1988).

¹⁷ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 55, 57, and 388–394.

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Owing in part to his commitment to the diversity of musical experiences, Kramer is keen to avoid a taxonomic partitioning of music (for example, dividing music into vertical and non-vertical). Instead, certain characteristics of a piece may lead to one sort of temporal experience, while other characteristics may lead to another. The flexibility of Kramer's thought must be kept in mind as we go on to examine his definitions.

In order to understand vertical time, we must first account for the broader framework of which vertical time is only one part. Kramer's theory of time in music operates in relation to the concepts of linear and nonlinear time. Consider Kramer's definitions for these two terms:

Let us identify linearity as *the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implication that arise from earlier events of the piece*. Thus linearity is processive. Nonlinearity, on the other hand, is nonprocessive. It is *the determination of some characteristic(s) of music in accordance with implications that arise from principles or tendencies governing an entire piece or section*. Let us also define linear time as the temporal continuum created by a succession of events in which earlier events imply later ones and later ones are consequences of earlier ones. Nonlinear time is the temporal continuum that results from principles permanently governing a section or piece.¹⁸

Roughly speaking, linear music is internally determined, or autonomous, while nonlinear music is externally determined, or heteronomous.¹⁹ A classical example of linear music might be a composition from Beethoven's middle period, in which each musical event can be understood as arising from or developing out of previous events. Linear pieces of music often fit well within organicist conceptions of music. Events in nonlinear music, on the other hand, appear to arise not from previous events within the music, but from an external source. Cage's chance compositions

¹⁸ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 20. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹ Readers should be cautious of too facile an identification between the autonomy of linear music and the autonomy of modernism, as well as the concurrent association of nonlinearity with postmodernism. The heteronomous character of nonlinear music does not necessarily extend beyond the contingent relationship between the music itself and its determining system. This is not necessarily an interdisciplinary or political heteronomy.

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are a useful example; musical events succeed one another not through relation to one another, but through independent relations to an external, governing chance operation. It is worth underlining, however, that linearity and verticality are ultimately a question of experience, even while experience is necessarily supported by formal qualities. Thus we might follow Kramer in linking linearity with tonal harmonic logic, but this is by no means the only way to experience or theorize tonal harmony.

Here a difference between Kramer's treatment of time and that of Stoianova and Mertens will be apparent. Kramer's attribution to tonal music of internal logic is exactly opposite to Stoianova's and Mertens's argument that tonal music is externally determined. This difference is symptomatic of the different general epistemologies of European and American musicologists.²⁰ Both perspectives must be understood as to some degree correct. Stoianova's claim that tonal processes precede and influence a given tonal composition is demonstrably true; tonal hierarchies make sense to a listener because they have been historically established as sensible. Absent a rich history of authentic cadences a deceptive progression could not be understood as deceptive.²¹ Kramer, on the other hand, emphasizes the internal manifestation of this external influence. While it is surely the external history of tonality that allows for tonal linear processes to function, these processes nevertheless function internally. That is to say that while in a general sense we can attribute tonal linear processes to the external history of tonality, specific, particular tonal linear processes occur within the piece itself, and indeed are generated within the piece

²⁰ Rose Rosengard Subotnik, upon whose work the following passage depends, uses the terms "Continentalist" and "Anglo-American." Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Developing Variations: Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 4 and passim.

²¹ And given their own similarly rich history, canonical V–vi "deceptive progressions" are probably not best thought of as truly deceptive.

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itself. Adopting Subotnik's perspective, this becomes a difference in emphasis. European musicology tends to emphasize the cultural contingency of tonality, and in Stoianova's case this is done deliberately to advocate for the avant-garde as a sort of unmasking of tonality's artificiality. American musicology (again from Subotnik's perspective) tends to underemphasize tonality's contingency, bringing internal formal relationships to the forefront. This is not to say that Kramer is blind to or ignorant of the cultural and historical origins of tonality. Comments on the Western bias toward linearity abound in *The Time of Music*, and Kramer explicitly argues that "young listeners not conditioned at an early age exclusively to tonal listening" have easier access to nonlinear music.²² Kramer is not insensible of the historical and cultural origins of linearity (tonal or otherwise) but emphasizes the internal formal determinations over the external historical ones.

This emphasis is particularly apparent in Kramer's choice of Markov processes as the means of explaining linearity. Instances of linear time can be identified by the presence of a growing sense of probability. Previous events lead the listener to assign probabilities to future possible events. A progression from the tonic to the dominant, combined with specific metrical and hypermetrical patterns, will lead an educated listener to expect a cadential tonic. Conceived of as a Markov chain, each event in this tonal phrase increases the degree of certainty of these predictions. The failure of the tonic resolution to arrive does not indicate a moment of nonlinearity, but instead adjusts the expectation for future musical events, and further emphasizes the act of predictive listening. So long as a predictive relationship between the past

²² Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 56.

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and the future is maintained, even while some of these predictions may be frustrated, a linear mode of listening dominates.

Nonlinear time in music arises not when expectations are not met, but when expectations become useless. The terminology of Markov chains suggests that the best examples of nonlinear music would be those of total chaos, rather than the obsessive uniformity of much minimalist music. These examples are covered by Kramer, but he also argues that the minimalist extreme, not where music is completely unpredictable, but when it is so predictable that prediction is no longer engaging, also implies nonlinearity. “Vertical music,” says Kramer, “can be, paradoxically, totally nonlinear or else so totally linear that (as in process music) predictability reigns.”²³ The emphasis for the listener moves away from probabilistic listening because it quickly becomes clear that the most likely next event is better understood as a certainty. The perception of determination shifts then from the internal musical structure to an external factor that uniformly affects the entire piece. In *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), for example, the perception is not that each instance of the looped phrase “It's gonna rain” begets the next instance, but that all instances are determined by an exterior decision to repeat the phrase until a process has played out.²⁴

²³ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 61.

²⁴ Perhaps the greatest potential pitfall with respect to Kramer's use of the words internal and external is the risk of the intentional fallacy. It should be stressed that Kramer's stated concern is for the musical listening experience, not for the historical facts (be they what they may) of composition. What is important here then is not whether Reich (or any other composer) composed a piece with a systematic logic in mind or by attending to the internal implications of each musical event. The focus, when thinking in terms of Kramer's book, ought to be on what the listener is likely to have perceived. Thus if a composer were to write a traditionally tonal piece through the use of some sophisticated but fixed algorithm, the result would still quite likely be harmonically linear, since the listener would perceive the tonal harmonic events as internally determining one another.

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Markov chains are a particularly ingenious method for discussing linearity, in part because they help explain how tonal processes, originating from an external system, can be understood as internal to a piece, but also because they provide Kramer with a means of avoiding dualistic or taxonomic thinking. Conceptualizing musical time in relation to probabilities allows for the possibility of nonlinear tonal music. Kramer suggests, amongst other pieces, the familiar example of the first prelude from the first book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The harmonic processes of this piece are easily thought of as linear, in the sense that harmonic expectations arise and are eventually either fulfilled or frustrated. However, the feature by which many people identify this piece is its uniformity of texture. In terms of rhythm, articulation, timbre, phrasing, and dynamics, this piece exhibits almost complete uniformity. Kramer's verdict is that this piece exhibits elements of linearity and nonlinearity. Indeed, he goes further, beginning the second chapter of his book (the chapter which lays out the foundational definitions with which he will go on to work) by stating that "Virtually all music utilizes a mixture of linearity and nonlinearity."²⁵

This does not mean that all music displays some verticality—though perhaps for some listeners this is true. Kramer looks to do more than simply identify which elements of a piece might be linear and which nonlinear. Beyond these two general guideposts, Kramer sets out a number of more specific temporal modes of which vertical time is merely the most extreme (in the nonlinear direction). The foundation for the theory of vertical time relies in part on Karlheinz Stockhausen's "moment form," in which a piece of music gives listeners "the impression of having heard a series of minimally connected sections—called moments—that form a segment of

²⁵ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 20.

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an eternal continuum.”²⁶ These “moments” do not begin or end in any linear sense, but rather, as Bernard says of minimalist music, simply start and stop. Vertical compositions “seem to have adopted the requirements of moments (self-containment via stasis or process) as their *entire essence*.”²⁷ These vertical pieces are the extreme examples of zero-order Markov chains, in which the listener is not listening predictively.

The result is a single present stretched out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite “now” that nonetheless feels like an instant. In music without phrases, without temporal articulation, with total consistency, whatever structure is in the music exists between simultaneous layers of sound, not between successive gestures. Thus, I call the time sense invoked by such music “vertical.”²⁸

Because of the emphasis on continuity, Kramer suggests that one of the clearest indicators of vertical time is a lack of phrases, but he argues that phrased music can also produce vertical time.

Terry Riley’s *A Rainbow in Curved Air* is an example of this phenomenon. This piece

remains within its own world (except for one striking articulation about one-third through the piece), despite the regular rise and fall of phrases. The reason that this piece is heard in vertical time is that its phrases refuse to form a hierarchy and are therefore heard to some extent as arbitrary. Every cadence is of approximately equal weight. No distinction is made as to the degree of closure. Thus the work exists primarily in vertical time despite the presence of comfortable phrases.²⁹

Amongst the more interesting moments—for our purposes—in Kramer’s discussion of vertical music is his use of the word “theatrical.” Kramer says nothing to indicate a familiarity with or debt to Fried’s earlier use of the term, and he sets up neither an equivalence between theatricality and vertical time nor a subset/superset relationship. Theater here is not quite the same as theater in Fried’s writings, but there are some useful correspondences. The pieces that

²⁶ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 50.

²⁷ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 54–55. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 55.

²⁹ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 55.

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Kramer identifies as “theatrical” all involve some sort of disruption of the traditional relationship between listener and audience, through positioning performers in the audience, for example, or incorporating audience members into the ensemble, or through some other method. In theatrical music, “The situations *are* the pieces.”³⁰ These pieces often invoke vertical time because “the destruction of the self-other dichotomy leads, as psychoanalysts have demonstrated, to a feeling of timelessness.” Some minimalism fits this more narrow definition of theatricality—Glass’s *Strung Out* (1967) particularly comes to mind, where the ambulation of the violinist becomes the situation of the piece—but much of it does not without some terminological stretching. More to the point, Rzewski’s *Les Moutons de Panurge*, the analysis of which is the centerpiece of Kramer’s exposition on vertical time, does not correspond very closely to this idea of theater (although the acceptance and even encouragement of performance errors does some work in problematizing the objectified performer).

While the examples Kramer adopts for theatrical vertical music involve a much more overt and thorough-going sort of theater than the sculptures to which Fried applied the term, the fundamental concern over a disruption of the traditional relationship between the subject and the object is the same. Thus while Kramer might not have considered *Les Moutons* to be theatrical, Fried quite likely would have. The emphasis this piece places on the rigors of performance and reading, as well as the incorporation of errors, challenges the view of the performing ensemble as a finished product, highlighting the individual subjectivities of the performers. A great deal of music from the middle half of the twentieth century can be understood in these terms, which is

³⁰ This and the following quotation from Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 383. Emphasis in original.

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perhaps Fried's point. If the supposed war between modernist art and theater warrants Fried's comments, there must be a vast repertoire of theatrical music in Fried's view.

As a treatise on musical time, Kramer's book must take subjectivity as a concern. Explorations of the form or structure of music can and often do emphasize the musical object, but the study of musical time is the study of listening to music, which is always a particularly subject-oriented event. Consequently Kramer's comments on vertical time are organized around the relationship between the listening subject and the musical object. Kramer titles the second section of his chapter on vertical time "Personal Experience with Timelessness"; in this section he recounts his experience listening to Satie's *Vexations*, and performing in a 1970 happening. These accounts serve both to explain what vertical time is and to emphasize the importance of subjectivity in Kramer's theory of time.

Kramer's comments on his own experience of vertical time, as well as his association of verticality with timelessness, bear a striking resemblance to Fried's comments on the temporal component of theatricality. While listening to *Vexations*, Kramer reports initially being aware of the small-scale linearity of the repeated phrase, which quickly cedes its ground to the non-hierarchical relation of the repeats. In this case the uniformity of the music frustrates the search for temporal relations, replacing the relation of the past to the future with a continuous present—much like the presentation of a uniform or familiar object gave Fried a sense of endlessness. Though the music is not literally without time, or timeless, the temporal relationships between moments do not seem to matter if there is no use in tracking probabilistic causation. Similarly, the heterogeneous, radically irrational chaos of the happening frustrates any effort at attending to temporal relationships. There is only the noise of the present, which does not follow formally from the noise of the past. When the listener has no incentive to predict the path of the music,

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attention turns to the present moment, and since this moment does not lead to the next, moments become indistinguishable, melding into a timeless present. Crucial to the relation between vertical time and theater is the irrelevance of the position of formal components. In vertical music no one sound leads rationally to another; in theatrical sculpture, the viewer's eye is not compelled to follow a gesture from one place to another—there is no danger of missing the elements that make the piece meaningful.

From this it seems as though Fried and Kramer share in common a tendency to think of the temporal experience of art in terms of the rationality of form. If one moment in a piece can be related rationally to another, the temporal experience of these two moments will be linear; if no such rational relation can be established, there will be no motion from one moment to the next, and time will become vertical.

A vertically conceived piece, then, does not exhibit large-scale closure. It does not begin but merely starts. It does not build to a climax, does not purposefully set up internal expectations, does not seek to fulfill any expectations that might arise accidentally, does not build or release tension, and does not end but simply ceases. It approaches zeroth-order Markov music. No event depends on any other event. Or, to put it another way, an entire composition is just one large event. A vertically conceived piece defines its bounded sound-world early in its performance and stays within the limits it chooses. Respecting the self-imposed boundaries is essential because any move outside these limits would be perceived as a temporal articulation of considerable structural import and would therefore destroy the verticality of time.³¹

Similarly, Fried argues that excessive simplicity and a lack of formal relation circumvents the (unfortunately) temporal process of viewing a modernist work of art that eventually leads to a conviction of quality, leaving viewers to stare aimlessly for as long as they like. In music, because formal relations are always revealed in a fixed temporal order (for any given performance), this distinction between relational and nonrelational form amounts to a distinction

³¹ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 55.

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of narrativity. The first event will always be followed by the next, but in linear time there is a sense that the listener is being directed from one moment to the next, while in vertical music there is no such implied narrator. The musical time of linear music is the time of narrative; the time of vertical music is nonnarrative. In vertical music, without any of the compulsions of narrativity, there is no reason to distinguish one moment from another. The piece might be perfectly logical, but there is no rational basis for change, and no impetus for the listener to follow the course of events.

Though the time of Fried's modernist plastic art lacks the necessary temporal ordering of the implied narrativity of Kramer's linear time, there remains a strong similarity, at the level of form, between these two quite different authors' understanding of the role of time in the arts of the twentieth century. Kramer's comparison of vertical time to the experience of sculpture is, in this regard, quite illustrative. If Kramer's view of how one experiences sculpture coincides at all with Fried's, it is only does so in the realm of theatrical art:

Listening to a vertical musical composition can be like looking at a piece of sculpture. When we view the sculpture, we determine for ourselves the pacing of our experience: we are free to walk around the piece, view it from many angles, concentrate on some details, see other details in relationship to each other, step back and view the whole, contemplate the relationship between the piece and the space in which we see it, close our eyes and remember, leave the room when we wish, and return for further viewings. No one would claim that we have looked at less than all of the sculpture (though we may have missed some of its subtleties), despite individual selectivity in the viewing process. For each of us, the temporal sequence of viewing postures has been unique. The time spent with the sculpture is structured time, but the structure is placed there by us, as influenced by the piece, its environment, other spectators, and our own moods and tastes. Vertical music, similarly, simply *is*. We can listen to it or ignore it. If we hear only part of the performance we have still heard the *whole* piece, because we know that it will never change. We are free to concentrate on details or on the whole. As with sculpture, the piece has no internal temporal differentiation to obstruct our perceiving it as we wish.³²

³² Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 57.

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Missing in Kramer's account is any allusion to conviction, or to the agency of the work of art. Consider, for example, Fried's claim that elements of Anthony Caro's sculpture *Deep Body Blue* "gather the beholder into a far more compelling embrace than could be achieved by literally embracing him."³³ The arresting agency Fried ascribes to *Deep Body Blue* is a far cry from Kramer's ambulatory freedom. Fried's analysis of Caro's *Prairie*, in the same review, relies on the viewer being directed by the sculpture to specific points of view, suggesting that without following direction to these particular vantage points one could not adequately understand the sculpture. Recall also that the inclusion or even acknowledgment of the environment in the appreciation of sculpture, thematic in Kramer's account of the experience of sculpture, is anathema for Fried, indicative of the corruption of theater.

Vertical time does exhibit compelling similarities to theatricality, both in a similar interest in what is often called a postmodern approach to the subject/object relationship, and in an attention to a basic difference in form (linear/formal versus vertical/non-formal). It should be clear, however, that these are not identical theories. Fried's choice of musical examples of modernism and theater (Carter and Cage, respectively) are practically textbook, making it difficult to anticipate what he might have thought of Xenakis or Stockhausen. And while narrativity is arguably the driving force behind Kramer's theory of linearity, we cannot suppose that this would be true of Fried, had he written on music. For Fried the question is not of one formal element leading to another out of narrative necessity, but of the two elements interacting with each other in a way that combats objecthood. The narrative of linear music surely serves this purpose, transforming music from a collection of sounds to an artistic progression that

³³ Michael Fried, "Two Sculptures by Anthony Caro," in *Art and Objecthood*, 180. Originally published in *Artforum* 6 (February 1968), 24–25. Emphasis in original.

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functions above its own material sonority, but Fried's theory leaves room for the possibility of other means of transcending objecthood. Thus, there are surely modernist linear compositions (as I think much of Carter's work illustrates), but it is unclear whether or not the play of rhythmic sieves and stochastic sections in Xenakis's music (for example) would have struck Fried as similarly modernist. However, in spite of this ambiguity in the hypothetical application of Fried's theory to music, the main issue of formal rationality or relationality remains central to both Fried's modernism and Kramer's linearity.

But as we turn to examining the verticality of minimalist compositions the most important thing is not to conjecture about which vertical compositions should or should not be considered theatrical, but to remember Kramer's opposition to dualism. The most important disagreement between Kramer and Fried is in the moral arena; Fried considered theater to be a corruption, while Kramer consistently celebrates both linearity and nonlinearity. Kramer's opposition to partisan aesthetics is most visible in his aforementioned observation that most music will exhibit linearity and nonlinearity. If theater and verticality were identical, then the latter would corrupt as swiftly as the former, and those pieces that exhibited verticality could only be understood as wholly vertical.

This leads logically to the first observation about minimalist music and verticality: most, if not all, minimalist compositions exhibit a vertical use of timbre, instrumentation, and harmony. Verticality in these dimensions is usually precisely what lead critics initially to using the word "minimal" to describe such music. The unusually limited quantity of harmonic material, restricted in most cases to only a few notes in a very few configurations deployed over time spans that range from long to theoretically eternal, gives the listener the sense that there is not much happening, and also contributes to the sense, described by Kramer and Bernard, but

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also repeated in less rigorous terms throughout the literature, that each moment of a minimalist composition is exchangeable with any other.

But minimalist music like most other music exists in many dimensions, and is not reducible to its idiosyncratic use of pitch. Consider first Kramer's own analysis of Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge*, which attends to the varying treatment of time in the work. Kramer shows that though *Les Moutons* lacks the sort of melodic development one would expect from linear music, Rzewski's gradually revealed melody involves enough traces of tonality to encourage the listener, initially at least, to listen linearly. As the piece progresses, new pitches appear with less frequency, transforming expectation into repetition. As the melody begins to be stripped away in the second half of the piece, linear listening once again becomes possible. However, while the beginning and end support limited linearity, overall the piece is, in Kramer's analysis, decidedly vertical: "[T]he piece strikes us as far more consistent than developmental, as more static than dramatic."³⁴

Judging from the critical response, the same conclusion can be applied to most—if not all—minimal music from the period currently under investigation. However, I would like to argue here that some minimalist music is less linear than others. La Monte Young's sine wave installations, for example, are entirely nonlinear, at least while the composer is not improvising with them. To confuse the piece with complete stasis, however, would be an error. The music is subject to change, but these changes are largely regulated by the motion of the listener and other subjects in the room. These changes are a curiosity with regard to the question of linearity, since a listener might well play with predicting how the music changes with her or his movements. As

³⁴ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 393.

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I understand Kramer, these predictions must be understood as nonlinear, primarily because of their relation to theater. The subject/object relation of linear music clearly establishes the music as the agent of change and the listener as the observing subject. In Young's sine wave installations, the agent of change is the listener her or himself. Recordings of Young's live performances are quite rare. A half-hour fragment of *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* (1964–present) available online suggests the sort of phrase-based verticality attributed by Kramer to Riley. This section of the composition, entitled *Map of 49's Dream The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery 31 VII 69 10:26 – 10:49 PM, the Volga Delta* (1966–present, recorded 1974), features a melody of quite limited means in the domain of pitch.³⁵ In this piece it is quite likely that any given moment could be substituted for another without any fear of significantly altering the trajectory of the piece.³⁶

Terry Riley's minimalist output from this period is better documented than Young's, giving the analyst the opportunity for more definite pronouncements. I will focus here on *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, perhaps Riley's second most influential composition after *In C* (1964), offered by Kramer as an example of vertical music, though his comments do not go much further than indicating the presence of phrases and of a single formal break around a third of the way through.³⁷ (This break occurs at 6:39 in the commercial recording.) As indicated above,

³⁵ La Monte Young, *Map of 49's Dream...*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLx92-eUTUA>, last accessed 04/28/2013. For the full title I refer to Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 360. As Potter indicates, this recording originates from the very rare *Studies In The Bowed Disc 23 VIII 64 2:50:45 – 3:11 AM*, also known as "The Black LP."

³⁶ The extent to which Young himself would agree with this comment is questionable, though we will see in the next chapter that his most explicit formal concerns are for consistency of tuning; if his mean-tone compositions are meant to express anything, it is the eternal perfection of his rational tunings.

³⁷ Terry Riley, *A Rainbow in Curved Air, Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* (Terry Riley)

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Kramer's argument regarding the verticality of this piece is that though there are phrases that in themselves have beginnings and ends, there is no overall motion from phrase to phrase. As Kramer hears the piece the ordering of the phrases is immaterial, and there is therefore no movement in time, no probabilistic relationship between what has passed and what is yet to come.

To address this claim, I would first like to point out that the linearity of the phrases is nontrivial. Many of these phrases indicate some modal goal, and especially in the cases of the longer phrases, there is a sense of anticipation and prediction, as the listener waits to see where the phrase will finally rest. Given Kramer's rejection of dualism it seems quite likely that he would agree with this point; the phrases are linear, but the overall form is vertical, and this last takes precedence. But the single formal break Kramer indicates oversimplifies the piece. *A Rainbow in Curved Air* is made up of three distinct sections, the first coming before the break at 6:39, and the second and third divided by another formal event at 11:42. The first section consist of an ostinato—present throughout most of the piece—which begins alone, but is soon accompanied by several interweaving synthesizer timbres, each of which is associated with its own melodic style. The phrases played by these instruments show their own limited linearity, but

0:00	6:39	11:42
Opening section. No percussion, interwoven melodies over ostinato.	Middle section. Tambourine, breaks in the ostinato, concluding with sustained organ harmonies.	Closing section. Dumbec, crescendo to conclusion.

Figure 1: Terry Riley, *A Rainbow in Curved Air*

CBS MK 64564/ MS 7315 (LP, 1969; reissued on CD, 1988). It should be noted that this piece is at least partially improvisatory, and exists in longer versions than this one.

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the density of their interweaving also ebbs and flows, providing longer term trajectories for directed listening. At the point of a lull, one listens with anticipation for the next entrance, and the timbre of that new line provides information suggesting—but not determining—which type of melodic line will lead the next group of phrases.

The second section, beginning at the break identified by Kramer, is largely unprepared, though there is an occasional doubling of the ostinato which might be taken to indicate the approach of a formally significant event. This section begins much more softly, with the first interruption of the ostinato which temporarily alternates, at a lower volume, with a much slower melodic line. This is also accompanied by the first clear use of percussion with a tambourine playing sustained rolls. At 7'30" there is a complete but brief break in the pulse of the piece, followed by the removal of the tambourine and a very gradual crescendo, lasting until the next formal division at 11:42. This crescendo is largely realized through accretion, and does not progress consistently or through a rigorous process. The ostinato is present only intermittently during this section. At 10:31 a strong, open-stopped organ timbre enters, at first doubling the already present dominant melodic line that resembles the original ostinato. At 10:54 the organ begins playing slower, harmonic passages that markedly change the tone of the piece. The organ is interrupted once by the ostinato, returns to its sustained harmonies, and exits at 11:42, bringing the second section to a relatively dramatic close. The final section ushers in driving rhythms played on the dumbec, and consists largely of compositional techniques similar to those with which the piece opens, building to a crescendo that signals the piece's end.

A Rainbow in Curved Air challenges the equivalence between modal composition and nonlinearity. There is a cultural bias toward distinguishing between tonality and modality by associating the former with linearity and the latter with nonlinearity, largely because modal

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music lacks the established harmonic functions or progressions found within tonality. Surely the relative lack of harmonic and melodic compulsion lends modal music, and *A Rainbow in Curved Air* in particular, a relative nonlinearity, but the positioning of formal divisions, and the support and preparation they are given melodically, timbrally, dynamically, and rhythmically, subvert a consistently nonlinear listening.

I do not mean this analysis to contradict Kramer's reading of *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, but to add to it more detail. The fact that listeners—particularly such careful and educated listeners as Kramer—can hear this piece as vertical is sufficient evidence to establish it as a fact, since the question of verticality is fundamentally an issue of listener experience. However, what I hope to have highlighted here is the presence of a formal landscape that *can* be heard with some linearity. There is a sort of relation between phrase groups, facilitated, for example, by the use of timbre in the first section. The second formal juncture is prepared by the aggressive use of the organ, and is further indicated by the introduction of a consistent metrical percussion part, creating an identifiably directed formal motion. These formal characteristics are not of the same order of linearity as is often attributed to classical sonata form, for example, in which listeners might identify and follow large-scale thematic arguments developed throughout a movement, but at the same time the novelty of Riley's compositional language and formal technique perhaps allows us to overlook linearity when it is presented in a modal context, free from overtly functional harmonic progressions.

It should be noted here that none of this is to pit tonality against modal composition. First of all, the claim that tonal music can be experienced linearly is formally defensible, but this does not amount to a claim that tonal music *must* be experienced linearly, or that formal defenses of tonal linearity constitute the only valid modes of analysis, formal or not, and temporal or not.

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The bottom line with respect to linearity or verticality is the listener, not the form. Second, to conclude both that *A Rainbow in Curved Air* possesses a degree of modal linearity, and that critics have in general associated modal music with non-linearity (not always calling it by name), does not in either case lead to a claim that all previous modal composition had been non-linear (making Riley's work exceptional). Nor does it imply that all other modal composition is similarly linear. Each of these determinations must be made on a piece by piece basis. Kramer's work fairly well requires this sort of anti-categorical approach, insisting as it does upon finding mixtures of temporalities rather than clean partitions.

Reich's first minimalist compositions shared Young's interest in control, but reflected it not in an obsessive attention to tuning, but to rhythmic relationships. In *It's Gonna Rain*, after a brief introduction, and after the phasing process is established, there is no modification of the process. Nothing at all is left to chance, and there is no interest in establishing probability models for future events. There is always a question of whether the composer will break the pattern, but with each moment the chances of this seem fewer and fewer. *Come Out* (1966) works with time similarly, although the process is different. Once the initial phasing pattern is doubled and phased against itself, the actual process becomes clear. An attentive listener may anticipate the second doubling, but the linearity of such a prediction is nearly inconsequential. There is a final question of estimating when the composer will abandon this potentially infinite scheme, but aside from that there is little to listen predictively for. Like much of what we know of Young's early minimalism, Reich's first two phasing compositions studiously avoid what Kramer calls linearity.

Piano Phase (1967), Reich's first foray into live minimalism, replicates most of these results. Perhaps because the context of the source material no longer holds semantic or political

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weight, there is no introduction; instead the phasing begins directly. The only formal deviations from phasing are freedom of the performers to follow their intuition regarding the length of pauses on a particular phase (whereas the tape pieces phase at a constant rate), and the juxtaposition of three different (though related) phased melodies, each with its own formal section. None of these elements does much to contribute to predictive listening.

With a technique as simple as phasing it is not surprising that Reich began adding tools to his compositional repertoire fairly quickly. *Violin Phase* (1967) features a technique that would reappear in *Drumming* (1970–1971) some four years later: the addition of “resultant melodies.” In these pieces the performer is asked to play repeated melodic fragments derived from a specific phase juxtaposition of the main melody, either by using melodies suggested by the composer or by picking out simple melodies themselves.³⁸ Here there is the potential for the limited sort of melodic linearity Kramer identified in Satie’s *Vexations*, and as in *Vexations*, whatever linearity these resultant melodies may possess is quickly discouraged by repetition. Resultant patterns may signal the beginning of Reich’s move away from process, but they do not disrupt the verticality of his music.

The other new tool Reich began experimenting with relates to pitch duration. Reich’s interest in process and duration begins with the unrealized composition *Slow Motion Sound* (1967), in which a selected recording is repeated with each iteration slower than the last, without distorting (namely lowering) pitch. Though at the time of composition technology would not allow for the realization of this composition, the process behind the piece later led to the

³⁸ Although in the recently published score for *Drumming* the liberty of devising one’s own melodies is denied.

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composition of *Four Organs* (1970).³⁹ Like the rest of Reich's output at the time, *Four Organs* exhibits uniformity of timbre and dynamics as well as static pitch content. Every non-rhythmic element of the piece is presented in the first two measures. These facts alone indicate what Kramer would call a high degree of verticality in the piece; those listening for variations in pitch, harmony, timbre, or dynamics would see no probabilistic relationship between any two measures of the piece.

Variation in this piece comes through changes made to rhythm (and eventually meter) as the piece progresses. Unlike Reich's phasing pieces, the process by which the chords of *Four Organs* are gradually transformed from vertical to horizontal pitch events is not entirely external. When a melody is phased, the changing relationship between pitches is predetermined by the process of phasing. In the case of *Four Organs*, the pitches Reich selects to either appear early (as "pick up" notes) or to sustain beyond the duration of the original chords are arbitrary. Nothing about the initial chords themselves makes any particular selection more obvious than another. Further, as I have argued in my master's thesis, the process of rhythmic and subsequently metric expansion involves a considerable degree of ambiguity.⁴⁰

Once the initial chords of *Four Organs* have been elongated to fill the measure, Reich moves on to begin extending the length of the measure itself. This process extends beyond what Christopher Hasty calls mensural determinacy, or our ability to perceive durations with

³⁹ Steve Reich, *Writings On Music: 1965–2000* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.

⁴⁰ Peter Shelley, "Three Analytical Essays: A Harmonic Analysis of Lutosławski's Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Ligeti's Sonata for Solo Viola, and Christopher Hasty's Theory of Meter as Rhythm in Steve Reich's *Four Organs* and J.S. Bach's Prelude in C" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 2006), 64–78.

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accuracy.⁴¹ Under these conditions the onset of a measure is no longer a question of perceptual certainty, but of probability. Listeners attending to the progressive distension of meter are likely to anticipate and guess at the return of notable pitches. This predictive process through probabilities is largely linear, but it is also worth bearing in mind that most of these long measures are experientially interchangeable. Listeners who are steadfastly counting beats will be able to identify the addition of each new beat, but most listeners, once the state of mensural indeterminacy has been reached, will not be able with certainty to distinguish one long measure from another. At the same time, the progressive lengthening of measures is precisely the Markov process that allows for linear, predictive listening in the first place. *Four Organs*, from this perspective, attains a particular kind of linearity, where the largely unperceived differences between subsequent measures work in concert to give a listener the information needed for linear listening. This is a sort of linear verticality, where the ordering of events is both phenomenally irrelevant *and* accumulatively linear. It likely goes without saying that the limited linearity of this piece is subordinate to the piece's verticality, both because of the phenomenal interchangeability of the mensurally indeterminate measures and because the linear practice of anticipating the onset of the next measure does nothing to suture the piece together into a coherent narrative form. The arrival at this linear verticality must be gradual, and surely varies from listener to listener, as attentions to and perceptions of metrical distension differ.

The application of process to duration exhibited in *Four Organs* reappears in *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* (1973), and then again in the landmark *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–1976). These pieces also indicate a marked move away from verticality in

⁴¹ Christopher Hasty, *Meter as Rhythm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

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Reich's music. Harmony and timbre become more important, as does form. From this historical perspective, the extremely limited linearity of *Four Organs* foreshadows an increased compositional dedication to linearity. If verticality is identified with minimalist music as closely as theatricality is identified with minimalist plastic art—a claim to which we will return below—then *Four Organs* foreshadows the beginning of Reich's move to post-minimalism.

Glass's earliest minimalist compositions share with those of Reich a uniformity of instrumentation, dynamics, and pitch content (although this last is given just the slightest flexibility in Glass, as we shall soon see). Glass's music differs from Reich's in the strength of its commitment to process, falling in this respect between Reich's minimalism and that of Riley. A useful place to begin an abridged tour of Glass's minimalism is his aforementioned "theatrical" composition, *Strung Out*. This piece, composed for solo amplified violin, derives its name from physical form of its performance, in which the lengthy score is strung out along the wall; the score in turn strings the violinist along as she or he moves through the space of the performance in order to be able to read the music. The score, published in 1984, approximates the performance time at around twenty-one minutes; the Alter Ego performance, to which I will refer to alleviate the difficulties that arise from a want of measure numbers, is 14:29 in duration.⁴² Repetition is amongst the most salient formal characteristics, not only in the partial, whole, and elaborated repetitions of motives, but in the exact repetition of the entire piece, through the use of a da capo.

⁴² Philip Glass, *Strung Out*, (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser Co., 1984). Philip Glass, *Alter Ego Performs Philip Glass* (Alter Ego Ensemble); Orange Mountain Music OMM0034 (CD, 2007).

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I will return to the temporal effects of the da capo shortly, but first it will be useful to dwell on the smaller scale use of repetition in *Strung Out*. In terms of systematicity, *Strung Out* is amongst the least rigorous of Glass's minimalist compositions, lacking any strict adherence to process. The opening material of *Strung Out* illustrates this with the most clarity: here, the distinctive opening motive (referred to as Motive A forthwith) of the piece—E₄-G₄-E₅-D₅-C₅ played in eighth notes—is fragmented and elaborated in a way that sounds both obsessive and haphazard. (See Example 1.) Because this portion of the piece consists of consistent eighth notes, every truncation or added note alters not only the expectations of melody and rhythm, but of meter as well. The piece stutters. In addition to removing notes from the end of the motive, Glass also occasionally inserts notes (most notably a C₅, transforming the motive to E₄-G₄-C₅-E₅-D₅-C₅). Lastly, Glass begins to focus on the last three notes of the motive, undulating diatonically from C₅ up to E₅, forming a stepwise motion, C₅-D₅-E₅-D₅ that will become the means of transitioning into the next formal section. None of this is governed in any obvious way by what Kramer would call an external process.

By the second line of the second page of the score, Glass has abandoned Motive A (until its return just before the da capo). The last version of Motive A comes at around 0:51. After this point all that remains of Motive A is a small scalar fragment spanning from C₅ to E₅. Soon after,



Example 1: Motive A and its immediate continuation
Strung Out

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at 0:54, Glass introduces B₄ into fragmented scale, followed soon by A₄ at 1:06. Following this Glass unsystematically explores the space between A₄ and E₅, focusing by turns on descent, undulation, and ascent, sometimes restricting the range to exclude D₅ and E₅. In the second line of the third page, at 1:49, the music moves away from E₅ for the last time in this section; in the fourth line, at 1:58, D₅ is removed, reducing the melodic content to a three-note scale fragment starting on A₄. Here the music arrives at the only other content that serves as an easily distinguished motive: Glass breaks the steady stream of eighth notes to introduce the first version of a stuttering motive shown in Example 2, to which we will refer as Motive B1 (consisting of --- C₅-B₄-A₄-B₄-C₅, with the initial C₅ usually repeated in sixteenth notes). This figure also



Example 2: Introduction of Motive B1 and preceding material
Strung Out

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gradually dissolves, first by turning from triplet sixteenth notes back to eighth notes, separated often but not consistently by eighth rests. Once the rests disappear, Glass immediately returns to the five-note scale fragment from A₄ to E₅. From here a similar process unfolds as before, introducing successively lower pitches one at a time, now extending down to D₄, though the scales extend only up to D₅, omitting the high E. As the music approaches the second version of the second theme, again the scale is truncated to its lower register, but this time not so gradually. Once D₄ arrives, the upper pitch is immediately restricted to A₄. G₄ disappears when the second motive returns, this time using the pitches D₄, E₄, and F₄. The return of Motive B, referred to in the example as Motive B2, retains the interval content of Motive B1, but alters the contour. The stuttering note is now in the middle of the figure, as it undulates around E₄. Here the rhythm breaks once again, introducing a simpler version of the second theme at a lower pitch level. (See Example 3.)

The extension of the scale back up to E₅ is not systematic but also not immediate; First A₄ returns, then B₄, but then the music quickly jumps up to E₅, with the ascending octave scale



Example 3: Introduction of Motive B2
Strung Out

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played three times, followed soon by the full major ninth from D₄ to E₅. The remaining music temporarily contracts as narrowly as the tetrachord from A₄ to D₄, but soon returns to the entire major ninth span returns. This expanse is abruptly curtailed when the music returns to the three-note fragment from C₅ to E₅. When B₄ returns, just before the boxed sections labeled “1.” and “2.” the melody extends to a perfect fourth, preparing, through a tonal reference which lends the piece a certain amount of E-centricity, the vault up to the trichord E₅-F₅-G₅, which in turn ultimately announces the da capo. (See Example 4.)

The degree to which any of these formal events can be understood as linear or vertical surely depends upon attention. If one listens to *Strung Out* as a process piece (which it is not, though it mirrors process music aesthetically), or simply with an ear to small-scale yet salient

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Strung Out'. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff has two boxed sections labeled '1.*' and '2.' with '(Fine)' below the second box. The second and third staves show continuous melodic lines. The fourth staff ends with 'D.C.' above the final notes.

July/August 1967, NYC

* The boxed group of notes are to be played as follows: Play both units “as is” the first time; on the D.C., repeat both units eight to ten times. Then repeat only the second group eight to ten times, thereby ending the piece.

Example 4: Closing and “first ending”
Strung Out

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changes, one will hear the unsystematic, unpredictable push downwards that follows the removal of the first theme. The fact that this process is interrupted by the second theme at its first transposition might suggest to the listener that a similar process might follow, a prediction which is quickly supported by the arrival of G₄ after the first version of the second theme. There is little to suggest the pitch level of the second arrival of the second theme, and so while the parallel processes found before and after the first instance of the second theme would likely insist to the listener that rhythmic disruption is likely to return, the timing and pitch level would remain mysterious until the actual event.

Formally, many of these events can be predicted, but without any certainty, suggesting a linear, Markov-process approach to listening. The ubiquity of the diatonic system, as well as the usually limited pitch range, the uniformity of dynamics, and the almost constant stream of eighth notes, make *Strung Out* a comparatively non-linear sounding piece, but close listening to the details suggests a linear approach to form, if not to content. It is interesting to consider the effect the large-scale repeat has on this phenomenon. Without the aid of the score, the attentive listener will surely be aware that both the main theme and both instances of the second theme are repeated, but Glass exploits the unsystematic, truncated repetitions of the first theme to obscure the fact that this repetition is in fact exact. He does this by returning to the first theme *before* the actual da capo; the first theme returns at 7:20, but the da capo doesn't take place until 7:25. Glass's transition back to Motive A differs from many traditional transitions (or retransitions); transitions that make use of primary motivic material typically either place the primary motive in a different context (by reharmonizing it, for example, or by using different instrumentation or accompaniment) or they separate the transitional use of the motive from the authentic return (as in the case of a false recapitulation). In *Strung Out*, nothing but the most careful of listenings will

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allow the listener to differentiate between the “transitional” appearance of Motive A just before the da capo and the “authentic” return to Motive A after the da capo. This suggests to the listener that the return to Motive A is only a return to the idea of Motive A, realized through a different series of abbreviations and elaborations, since the initial return to the motive is not identical to the beginning of the piece. This is of course not the case. The overall effect of this compositional decision is uncertainty about whether or not the music heard after the da capo is identical to that which preceded it; this is compounded by the bewildering, unsystematically shifting meter and limited melodic material. Of course, live performance removes this ambiguity, since the violinist’s body reveals the position in the score.

Keith Potter’s concluding remarks on *Strung Out* aptly summarize the music’s relation with linear and vertical time:

For the listener, *Strung Out* is disconcerting. It is hard to get much out of such simple music, and in particular to concentrate on its progress, when what *appears* logical on a note-to-note level cannot be “read” on a note-to-note level as it unfolds, when rigour is implied but not offered.⁴³

The uniform texture and pitch palette of *Strung Out* lend the listener the impression—which in turn is reinforced by our experiences with Reich—that there is a logical process transpiring in this piece; but attention to detail, if such attention can be maintained throughout this prolonged onslaught of shifting meters and monotonous melodic ideas, reveals a system more compositional (as opposed to arranged) and intuitive than is suggested by the musical idiom. We might take issue, however, with Potter’s conclusion that while “Glass is composing with a clear overall and audible design.... [A]nalysis in greater detail here risks merely providing evidence to

⁴³ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 280. Emphasis in the original.

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frustrate the listener more than to assist the listening process.”⁴⁴ I would submit on the contrary that close listening reveals an intuitive, rational composer at work in an idiom that is both structurally and historically predisposed toward logical arrangement. These two aspects of *Strung Out* may be understood to contradict one another, but the conflict is surely generative (indeed, generative of the piece) and only frustrating if we insist on minimalism being *either* logical (arranged) *or* rational (composed), or if we insist, contrary to Kramer, that a minimalist composition must be entirely vertical in its reliance on system.

Glass’s later *Music in Similar Motion* (1969) makes more thorough use of the additive processes and exact repetition for which the composer has become well known. As an example of Glass’s more rigorous minimalism, *Music in Similar Motion* offers a more interesting site for the exploration of the question of linearity in Glass’s music. Like most repetitive minimalist music, *Music in Similar Motion* frustrates attempts at linear listening through its uniform texture and (in this case nearly) uniform pitch content, but a close attention to form will reveal audibly linear structures.

Music in Similar Motion has a continuous three-part form: a brief introduction (mm 1–5), the main body (mm 6–22), and a coda (mm 23–33).⁴⁵ The introduction, consisting of only the first five measures, functions to set up the eight-note central melodic cell, as well as to introduce the four note cell that both marks the end of every subsequent measure and later serves as the main material for the coda. Unlike *Strung Out*, which begins with the first theme, the material in the first measures of *Music in Similar Motion* has some distance to travel before becoming the central thematic cell for the main section of the piece. (See Examples 5 and 6.) This development

⁴⁴ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 280.

⁴⁵ Philip Glass, *Music in Similar Motion* ([New York]: Dunvagen Music Publishers, Inc., 1973).

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Example 5: First four measures
Music in Similar Motion

Example 6: 8+4, the main theme and codetta
Music in Similar Motion

is neither rigorously systematic nor rationally developmental; instead fragments are duplicated, removed, or added through a method wholly mysterious to the listener. It is not until the process is complete that its purpose becomes known. If we follow Glass's beaming to group the notes, then the processes of the introduction are as follows: first, the central group is repeated, expanding the melody from eight beats to eleven; second a four note tag is appended, consisting of a replication of the first two notes of the measure followed by a similar figure with the first pitch lowered a whole step; third, the first two notes are removed and a two note figure is inserted between the second and third remaining groups, replicating the first two pitches of the third grouping; finally, the new first grouping is removed, leaving a twelve note measure to which I will refer, for reasons soon to be clear, as the basic eight-note cell plus the four-note codetta.

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Changes in melodic and metric structure are neither announced nor predictable. Further, the number of repetitions of each measure is not fixed, depriving the listener of any certainty of when these unpredictable changes will occur. In a recording by the Philip Glass Ensemble, the number of repetitions declines as the length of the measure increases, though not in a way that holds the total length of each repeated measure constant, so while the listener may generally expect that longer measures will be repeated fewer times (in the interest of retaining a uniform length of time to hear each transformation of the melody) the decline of the number of repetitions as the measures lengthen is neither rigorous nor even, leaving the listener to guess more or less probabilistically.⁴⁶ Figure 2 charts the notated length of each measure (in eighth notes), the number of times it is repeated, and the resulting product, the resultant length of each measure including repeats. There is no explicit indication in the score regarding the number of repetitions, absolutely or relatively. This establishes a curious alliance between the completely predictable texture and pitch content of the introduction and the completely unpredictable changes in melodic and metric organization, both of which contribute to a sense of verticality through opposite means.

Unlike the introduction, the main section and much of the coda employ process, though still not so rigorously or transparently as Reich's contemporaneous music. The main section of *Music in Similar Motion* consists of a gradual lengthening and then shortening of the repeated measure, through systematic accumulation and then removal. Accumulation in the main section of the piece can be divided into two sub-sections, the first occurring in the space of the measure

⁴⁶ Philip Glass, *Music in Fifths; Music in Similar Motion* (Philip Glass Ensemble): Shatham Square 1003 (LP 1973); reissued along with *Two Pages* and *Music in Contrary Motion* on Elektra/Nonesuch 7559-79326-2 (CD, 1994).

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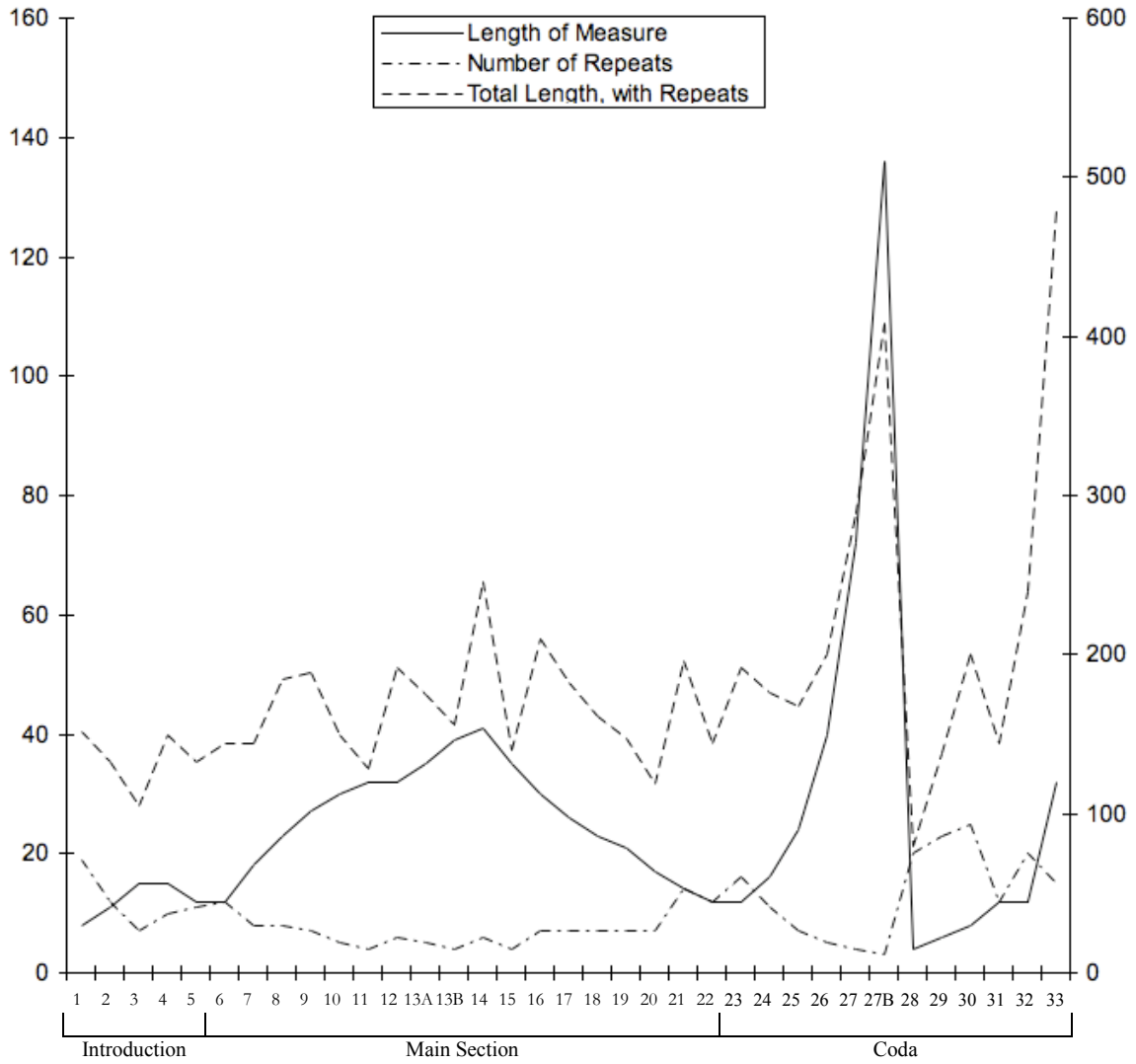


Figure 2: Chart of measure lengths, repeats, and total lengths
 Total length is measured against the right axis
Music in Similar Motion

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before the basic eight-note cell, and the second occurring in the space between the eight-note cell and the four-note codetta. The first accumulation makes use of the basic eight-note cell, less the two-note group in the middle. In the bass clef staff at measure 7, this six-note pattern, consisting of G-B \flat -C-D-C-B \flat , is inserted into the beginning of the measure. Initially the listener has no reason to anticipate this particular formation, nor does she have reason to expect the linear progression soon to arise from it. In measure 8, five further notes are added between these six new notes and the basic eight-note cell, repeating the same pattern less the ultimate B \flat . Here one may begin to anticipate the pattern: Glass proceeds to add successively truncated versions of this six-note figure, eventually culminating in measure 11, in a pattern of 6+5+4+3+2, followed by the eight-note cell and the four-note codetta, shown in Example 7. Glass does not complete the linear progression (there is no one-note group), likely because the resultant repeated pitch would contrast too greatly with the melody of the rest of the piece.

Following the completion of this linear progression, Glass continues to expand the measure. Again the listener will have no means of anticipating this new process or its content. In

6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 8 + 4

Example 7: Completion of first progression, shown with the eight-note cell and codetta
Music in Similar Motion

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measure 13A, the final three notes of the primary eight-note cell are immediately duplicated, inserted between the eight-note cell and the four-note codetta. The previous linear progression suggests that this will be followed, in measure 13B, by a truncated two-note group, either before or after this new three-note group. Instead, Glass inserts a four-note group, before the new three-note group, which replicates it with the addition of a fourth note, the duplication of the second note of the figure. Now a reasonable listener with an ear for process might expect measure 14 to introduce a five-note group in the space before this new four-note group. Again Glass frustrates, this time by adding a two-note figure—a duplication of the first two notes of the previous groups—in between the four-note and three-note figures, yielding a progression of 4+2+3. The effect of avoiding either a 4+3+2 or a 2+3+4 progression will be explored shortly. The results of this progression are shown in Example 8.

The first of these two progressions is concluded in measure 11, the second in measure 14. Following this they are disassembled. The first progression is removed first, in the same order it was constructed: first the six-note group is removed, then the five-note group, and so on. Once

6 + 5 + 4 + 3 + 2 8 4 + 2 + 3 4

Example 8: Completion of second progression shown with eight-note cell and codetta
Music in Similar Motion

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all five groups have been eliminated (in measure 19), the second progression is disassembled. Again the largest group (four notes in this case) is removed first, but then Glass again frustrates expectation. Instead of removing either the two- or three-note groups from the progression, he removes the final three-note group from the primary eight-note cell, a group which is identical to the three-note group from the second progression. This unexpected removal leaves two identical two-note groups adjacent to one another. One of these is removed in the next measure (measure 22), allowing the remainder of the second progression to collapse upon the remainder of the eight-note cell, returning it to its original state. This is shown in Example 9. The four-note codetta remains unaltered during the entire main section.

Referring back to Figure 2, the reader will see that the main section of *Music in Similar Motion* is presented in the solid line—charting the length of each measure in eighth notes—by a gradual ascent followed by a gradual descent. The slope of this small mountain is regular at the beginning of its ascent and descent, reflecting the regularity of the process employed, and irregular in the completion of its ascent and descent, reflecting the irregularity of process here. The further irregularity of the disassembly of the second process, where the last segment of the

Example 9: Uneven removal of second progression
Music in Similar Motion

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basic eight-note cell is removed in lieu of the three-note cell from second process, is not reflected in the chart.

The coda, starting in measure 23, is also in two sections. The first follows a strict process, consisting of successive doublings of the codetta material, which has the effect of swapping the functions of the two parts of the measure. The codetta material, which used to serve as a cue that the measure was about to repeat, now becomes the most prominent component, while the eight-note cell, rapidly dwarfed by the repeated codetta, comes to function as a cue that a new measure has begun, and is the only means of identifying how many repeats the codetta is being subjected to. (Incidentally, there is a discrepancy between the published score and the Philip Glass Ensemble recording: between measure 27, in which the codetta is repeated 16 times, and 28, the ensemble inserts an additional measure, consisting of the eight-note cell and the repetition of the codetta 32 times, repeating this measure three times. I refer to this measure in Figure 2 as 27B.) As the codetta is subjected to more and more repetitions during the first section of the coda, the expectation that the listener will accurately apprehend the precise number of repeats dwindles, though she or he may reasonably assume that each new measure involves a doubling. This process is shown in Example 10.

Measure 28 inaugurates the second section of the coda, but the listener will not know this for a certainty at first; measure 28 repeats the codetta material, omitting the eight-note cell, initially giving the impression that the eight-note cell had been displaced even further. Measure 29 dispels this assumption by repeating the first two-note group of the codetta, transforming it into a six-note pattern, shifting the meter in the process and suggesting—though not declaring—that the eight-note cell may be gone for good. This turns out to be the case. The remaining measures consist of logical though not necessarily rigorously processive or predictable

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The musical score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system covers measures 23 to 26. Measure 23 is marked with a box containing the number 23. Measure 24 is marked with a box containing 24. Measure 25 is marked with a box containing 25 and has a '2x' annotation above it. Measure 26 is marked with a box containing 26 and has a '4x' annotation above it. The second system covers measures 27 to 29. Measure 27 is marked with a box containing 27 and has a '16x' annotation above it. Measure 28 is marked with a box containing 28 and has a '16x' annotation above it. Measure 29 is marked with a box containing 29 and has a '16x' annotation above it. The notation includes eighth notes and rests, with repeat signs at the end of each measure.

Example 10: Progressive dwarfing of the eight-note cell
in the first section of the coda
Music in Similar Motion

arrangements of the two two-note subsets of the four-note codetta, expanding the measure from four notes to six, eight, twelve (for measures 31 and 32), and thirty-two notes. Here, though there is no clear process of accumulation (measure 29 replicates the first dyad, and 30 replicates the last dyad, but this pattern, limited as it is, is broken in measure 31, and the complete rearrangement in measure 32 thwarts any attempt at prediction), Glass does choose to maintain a simple meter, no longer mixing in metrically dissonant three-note groups.

Indeed, most of the coda section, from measure 23 on, can be heard in simple meter, in spite of the three-note groups in the eight-note cell. Repetition, combined with the melodic

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accents on notes one, nine, and eleven, encourage the listener to hear measure 23 in 3/2 time.

The subsequent enlargement of the codetta material through repetition strengthens this metrical impression, since the codetta lasts a single beat in 3/2, and is divided in half by its melodic contour. Measures 29 and 30, each lasting six eighth notes, convert the meter to 3/4, which is in turn transformed into either 6/4 or 3/2 in measures 31 and 32. Notation and pitch suggest 3/2 in measure 31 and 6/4 in measure 32, which, like measures 29 and 30, temporarily disrupts the simple meter of the coda. The coda closes by converting back into an unambiguously simple meter of 8/2.

Meter is one of the tools Glass uses to accentuate the formal scheme of *Music in Similar Motion*. The other is the stepped expansion of the piece's pitch content. The strong metrical contour of the codetta lends a predisposition toward simple meter, though the additive development of the main section often undermines the application of this metrical pulse to the entire measure. There are four points outside of the second section of the coda that arrive at simple meter. The first is the first measure of the piece, although the absence of the codetta and the unresolved conflict between triple and duple groupings renders a complex metrical reading much more plausible. The second, third, and fourth possibly simple measures are measures 5, 11, and 22; each of these three measures is followed by a measure identical in contour and meter that either adds a melodic part which replicates the main melodic line, transposed up a perfect fourth (from measure 5 to 6) or adds a new part below the main line, following the contour of the melody, but in similar rather than parallel motion.⁴⁷ These pairs of measures (5 and 6, 11 and 12, 22 and 23), whose melodic contours are identical, can be heard in 3/2, 8/2, and 3/2 time,

⁴⁷ The penultimate note of the top voice in measure 6 breaks the parallel motion.

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respectively. (The melody at measures 11 and 12 is sufficiently long and syncopated to make the meter of 8/2 very difficult to feel indeed, but listeners attending to the meter implied by the codetta will find an even number of half-note pulses.) They also mark, again respectively, the beginning of the main section, the beginning of the second progression (4+2+3), and the beginning of the coda. Further, the unusual evenness of the meter in measures 11 and 12 suggests a motivation behind Glass's "out of order" second progression. Had the four-note group been introduced first, the meter would have remained (relatively) stable, dividing into ten half-note beats. The two-note group would have upset the meter, but not so drastically as the three-note group clearly does. Every other measure of the piece (excepting the coda) is in compound or complex time, and there is a compositional interest in creating a maximally dramatic metrical transition out of measure 11 or any other of these metrically stable moments. It is important to note, however, that in spite of the mathematical evenness of these measures, the piece as a whole is certainly not in any uniform meter. Instead, these pairs of measures signify moments in which one can feel the music fall into an even groove, however syncopated.

The question of how these observations on form relate to the verticality or linearity of *Music in Similar Motion* must remain ambiguous. The extremely limited diatonic melodic content—especially in the context of the Euro-American avant-garde—surely discourages many listeners from listening toward or predicting important musical changes, since on the scale of much of the music that historically precedes minimalist music, there are no such events here. However, those listening from within the usual scope of minimalist musical changes will find a comparative wealth of unexpected turning points in this piece. But beyond this "wealth," such as it is, is the nature of these turning points. They are not the logical, systematic movements of much of Reich's minimalism, or of much of the sculpture that shares this name. Instead, to

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borrow Sol LeWitt distinction, Glass opts for rational over logical change; for relational compositional decisions over the adherence to a predetermined process.⁴⁸ The unusual blend of complete predictability and chaos found in the introduction may not permit much linear listening, but the clear, formal aspirations of the main section, and the structural role of the eight-note theme in particular, retroactively supply the strange shifts in melody and meter of the introduction with reasonable purpose. Within the main section, only the rise and fall of the first progression follow a strictly logical rule, and this too is interrupted by the rise of the “out of order” second progression. The rationality of Glass’s composition—as distinct from the logic of its arrangement—is perhaps most evident in his use of meter and the gradual but stepped expansion of the piece’s pitch palette. The arrival at an even meter and the introduction of new melodic content are both unsystematically compositional and sensibly formal; if these moments were removed, if the basic cell were nine instead of eight notes, for example, or if Glass maintained the same pitch content throughout, the overall logic of the form would remain unchanged. These moments are clearly compositional signposts—though less noticeable than many of those of tonality, for example—indicating important changes to the listener.

When compared to the more intuitive designs of *Strung Out* or Riley’s *A Rainbow in Curved Air*, *Music in Similar Motion* appears austere and rigorous, but when put alongside *Piano Phase*, the formal compositional decisions Glass made in this piece take on a sense of interest and direction. Changes in the melodic structure which initially seem random gain significance as the piece progresses, which in turn supplies the listener with the confidence to predict future changes, even while some of these predictions may not bear out. Considering the piece as a

⁴⁸ Condensed, for example, in his “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” 1969.

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Markov chain, a listener might come to understand the predictable linearity of the first progression in the main section as setting up the frustrated expectation of a similarly uniform progression in the second half of the measure. Here Glass uses realized expectations to foster later deception. (Recall that expectations are again thwarted in the descent, when the second progression is removed by a different means than that through which it was originally added.) These crafted deceptions work in conjunction with the overall arch plus coda form of the piece to grant *Music in Similar Motion* a comparatively high degree of linearity, though only for listeners focusing on melodic change over the scale of the piece.

It is useful to compare this reading of *Music in Similar Motion* to Glass's earlier piece *Two Pages*. Wes York's analysis of this piece, mentioned in chapter 1, alternates between highlighting the piece's inert mathematical ratios (often by rounding ratios to the nearest 4/5) and discussing process-derived moments of ambiguity.⁴⁹ By contrast to *Music in Similar Motion*, however, *Two Pages* (1969) follows its processes with precision. Each of the five parts of the piece identified by York follows its own process with nearly complete predictability; the only surprises, such as they are, come in the number of repetitions. York's Part I is surely the clearest illustration in the different treatments of time between these two pieces. Part I is a small-scale arch form making use of the same sort of linear progression found in the first part of the main section of *Music in Similar Motion* (measures 7–11), this time starting with five notes rather than six. Here, however, there is no second progression embedded (and distorted) between the accumulation and removal of this process. Instead, much as in Reich's *Piano Phase*, once this process has run its course, the piece moves on to the next. The clarity of process in *Two Pages* is

⁴⁹ Wes York, "Form and Process (1981)," in *Writings on Glass*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Schirmer, 1988), 60–79.

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accentuated by Glass's decision not to repeat most of the longer measures, allowing the listener to track the gradual and completely predictable motion from one measure to the next. When we think in terms of the Markov chain, there are very few moments in *Two Pages* where the listener isn't completely in control, or completely inattentive due to the ease of prediction. Parts III and IV expand without contracting, leaving some doubt as to when they would stop, and Part II is an arch form that also expands, giving no logical cue for the exact point of reversal. Parts I and V *do* have logical conclusions, leaving the only the number of repetitions to be guessed.

In all of these Glass compositions, however, it bears stressing that there is, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the composition, a domination of smaller components (be they externally determined as in *Two Pages*, internally as in *Strung Out*, or somewhere in between as in *Music in Similar Motion*) by the textual uniformity of the whole. Bernard focuses on this overriding effect in discussing both *Music in Fifths* (1969) and *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971–1974).⁵⁰ This observation goes beyond remarking that some dimensions of Glass's music are less linear than others by insisting that each of these dimensions is inextricably entwined with the others. This is surely true of all music, but achieves greater strength in Glass's minimalism through the dizzying use of shifting meters in a melody that grants no breaks to collect oneself.

* * *

We have seen how Fried's ideas of the time of modernist art rely on an idealist regret of the necessary corporeality of the viewer of modernist art. We have also seen that his dislike of the time of theatrical art stems in part from an again idealist notion that the body of the viewer

⁵⁰ Jonathan Bernard, "The Minimalist Aesthetic," 105. Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz Since 1945*, Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann eds. (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 273.

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should not be implicated in the presentation of the work itself; literalist art, by setting up a theatrical scene, does exactly this. Musical time necessarily functions differently. The need for music—modernist or otherwise—to unfold formally in time is a result not of the limits of human sensory perception but of the fundamentally temporal nature of the art form. Thus even idealist musical aesthetics, so long as they conceptualize the acoustic phenomenon of music as being essential, would understand time as an appropriate component of music.

Within the ambit of sculptural minimalism as understood by Fried, the change in the mode of temporal experience is not only a moralistic change, but a corporeal change as well. More to the point, the increased relevance of the viewer's body in minimalist sculpture strikes Fried as morally compromising. Feminist scholars have convincingly pointed out a frequently gendered relationship between a moralistic distaste for corporeality on the one hand and bad gender politics on the other, and as we have seen in Chapter 2, and as we will see in greater depth in Chapter 5, problematic gender politics abound in minimalist sculpture and its reception. Further, while Fried may use the necessary corporeality of minimalist time as a point of disparagement, for Morris, whose analysis of minimalist sculpture is surely at least as troubling from the perspective of gender as Fried's, the protracted temporal engagement of minimalist sculpture is not only affirmative, but claimed as masculine (under the guise of the public, as we shall discuss in the next chapter). But since music is necessarily temporal, and indeed since in most cases minimalist music is even performed by physically present bodies, one must anticipate that the body politics of minimalist musical temporality are at least different from, if not necessarily at odds with, minimalist sculptural temporality. In what remains of this chapter, I would like to discuss the role of gender in the perception of minimalist music.

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In spite of the material and moralistic divergences between Fried's and Kramer's work, there remains a fruitful similarity between Fried's pejorative "theatricality" and Kramer's more neutral "vertical time." As we have seen, both entail a historically non-normative approach to organizing—or choosing not to organize—aesthetic experience. In both cases the experiencing subject is both detached from the art work, in the sense that attention is not directed or narrated by the art object, and incorporated into the art work, in the sense that this new-found (sometimes metaphorically) ambulatory freedom foregrounds the presence of the experiencing subject as a condition of art. This conflicting combination of distancing and incorporation, because it relates to the literally present experiencing subject, is necessarily corporeal, and if one approaches the issue of vertical time with Fried's idealist bias, one is likely to reach the same moralizing, negative conclusions about vertical music as Fried did with minimalist sculpture; one is also likely to miss the ambiguous formal play of linearity and verticality found in Glass and Riley above.

The question of narrativity in both music and sculpture held considerable importance for artists and critics of many different perspectives during the twentieth century, and though, from the perspective of many observers (especially in the United States), the exploration of this problem culminates in minimalism, it is certainly not unique to this comparatively small group of artists and composers. It is surely clear to even the casual listener that directed formal climax has held an important position in Western music at least since the eighteenth century. Susan McClary observes that the roots of tonality, which brings with it the dominant-tonic function, a phenomenon that prior to Glass's work in the 1970s seems to have been essentially narrative, coincide historically with the origins of cultural modernity— both dating from around the beginning of the seventeenth century with the works of Claudio Monteverdi and the writings of

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Galileo Galilei.⁵¹ Says McClary, “[G]oal-oriented tonality develops to provide the illusion of narrative necessity that underlies the new music of the modern era.”⁵² This “illusion of narrative necessity” becomes a key component of modern concepts of masculinity, and not surprisingly becomes legible in much Western common-practice music by way of metaphors of idealized if often banal male sexuality.⁵³

I would like to focus here not on the validity or clarity of sexual metaphors in minimalist music, but on the more general concept of cultural, modern masculinity. The proximity of modern masculinity to idealized male sexuality—a sexuality normalized as heterosexual by the prevailing heteronormative ideology of modernity—will be taken as apparent, but by choosing to focus on masculinity rather than sexuality I am adopting the supposition that sexuality is neither foundational nor primary, allowing for what I consider to be the likely possibility that idealized male sexuality develops alongside, not prior to or as the essence of, modern masculinity. From this perspective, the important issue with respect to the role of narrative time in music is not the resemblance or lack of resemblance to sexual activity (of any sort), but the importance of production.

In discussing masculinity in modernist cultural production I follow Gayatri Spivak (following Derrida) in locating in modern masculinity a displacement of reproduction by production. Through reference to reproduction, modernity codes reproduction as decidedly

⁵¹ McClary also names Descartes and Copernicus. I focus on Galileo in order to make clear the similarity between McClary’s view and that of Hannah Arendt, about which more subsequently.

⁵² Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 120.

⁵³ Within this context, I will mean “modern” to indicate the cultural context of the Western world from Galileo up until the onset—ambiguous in date—of postmodernism. It should by no means be mistaken for “contemporary.”

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feminine. The privilege granted to production, on the other hand, betrays an anxious and insistent attempt to defend a patriarchal social and political order that relies on essentialized male superiority.⁵⁴ Within this dominant epistemology, men are privileged in their capacity to create permanent works and deeds, while women are subordinated to the domestic sphere of repetitive domestic management. Childbirth, considered within this framework to be *the* quintessential female activity—which is problematic not least because of its dismissal of transexuality and its further subordination of women who do not have children—is recoded as a cyclic phenomenon, a part of the natural cycle of life and death, rather than the unique creation of a new life.

The attentive reader will recognize in minimalism's new formal practice an echo of the distinction, borrowed by Mertens from Adorno, of the work-as-object and the work-as-process. The latter concept, associated by Mertens with tonality, indicates what is often referred to as the closed form, a form with a rational narrative trajectory that leads from an opening to a conclusion. The work-as-object is a definitive artistic work. The latter, work-as-process, indicates a work for which closure, and by implication formal narrativity, is not only unimportant but to be avoided. This will in turn remind the reader of the observation, made by Bernard and others, that much minimalist music does not seem to begin or end in a properly formal sense, but simply to start or stop. Much minimalism (and I hope to have challenged the ubiquity of this claim above by pointing at the formal layouts in Riley's and Glass's minimalism) does not present an artistic work to be marveled at as a testament to compositional virility. (It is worth

⁵⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman," in *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, ed. Nancy J. Holland (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 43–72.

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briefly returning here to the emphasis on the ambivalence of Glass's music, as somewhere between work-as-process and work-as-object.)⁵⁵ [Paragraph removed]

Rosalind Krauss's narrative of the progressive de-narrativization of advanced sculpture from nineteenth century modernity to the onset of postmodernity offers a counter-narrative to Fried's insistence that modern sculpture must fight to retain its status as transcendent of objecthood through a formal organization of time—which again, paradoxically, is for Fried only directed through time due to the unfortunate exigencies of imperfect human material corporeality.⁵⁶ For Krauss art *can* succeed as art by creating temporal stasis, and this success is itself at least partially a political success, contesting the narrativity of enlightenment rationalism. The similarities here with McClary's analysis of Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II* and of the Western musical canon generally are clear. But when we recall Morris's "Notes on Sculpture"—and Morris plays an important role in Krauss's narrative—it is clear that any analysis of minimalism (whether in music or in sculpture) as affirmatively feminist ought to be arrested and examined more carefully. The mechanics of this problem will be explored in the next two chapters. Thus while McClary was right to identify in Vandervelde's anti-narrative composition a deliberate feminist rebuke of the pejorative link forged within modernism between femininity and reproduction, we should not be so hasty to attribute such progressive ends to minimalism. Even where minimalism has destabilized the modernist bifurcation between production and reproduction, or between linearity and verticality, it has clearly not done so in a way that reflects

⁵⁵ It must be noted though that this is not the agonistic work-as-process attributed by Adorno to Schoenberg, characterized by the former as the struggle of content against form. Minimalist work-as-process is not a virile struggle for individuality, but a disavowal of a specific, nineteenth-century masculinity in general. This theme will return in Chapter 5.

⁵⁶ Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 1981), 7–38.

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a progressive interest in gender politics. Instead, as we will see in Chapter 5, minimalism has often merely reclaimed repetition and reproduction for the masculine dominant, doing little at all to upset the associated problematic gender politics.

In a passage discussing Paul de Man's reading of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Spivak highlights the problem with assuming that the mapping of the dyad of one-time tasks (such as creating a work of art, in our example) and repetitive tasks (which by their nature are never completed) onto public (or professional) and domestic:

I recall our efforts in the early days of academic feminism: to distinguish between male tasks and domestic (female and servant) tasks, as one-time only and repeated because forever necessary, respectively. Something you can footnote as opposed to cooking and cleaning, let us say. Schiller's woman is upper class at first glance. If, however, you look closely at the passage de Man quotes, you will see that the distinction between access to truth and access to figuration is a displacement of the distinction between one-time and repetition that we discussed as historically assigned to male and classed male/female.⁵⁷

Here Spivak points not only to the problematic displacement of access to truth onto one-time activities (which in turn are coded as male), which is easily recognized in Fried's equivalence of grace with presentness, but also more obliquely at the double displacement of women, as representative of an even larger group of those associated with repetitive tasks which includes working-class men. Here the misogyny of Morris's dismissal of domesticity becomes apparent: he is marking out a space for masculinity within the realm of repetitive tasks, at the expense of other repetitive tasks (creating ornamental objects) which are explicitly named domestic.

[Paragraph removed]

More generally Spivak's reminder serves as a warning against accepting minimalism's rejection of high modernist masculine aesthetics as a rejection of masculinity generally.

⁵⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 33.

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Minimalist sculpture interacts with the tradition of modern masculinity not only by throwing off the cultural expectation of directed formal completeness, but often by incorporating repetition and reproducibility into its formal syntax. As Bernard points out, this is a primary point of contact between minimalist sculpture, minimalist music, and the temporal criticism of Fried and Kramer. But one must take great care not to mistake minimalism's historical progression away from ideologically modernist formal paradigms for a progressive reassessment of gender politics within cultural production. A rejection of an outdated mode of masculinity is not an endorsement of gender equality or any other ethical gender politics, nor is it even necessarily a rejection of the presumed dominance of masculinity. We will see in Chapter 5 how minimalism in both music and the plastic arts can be read as introducing a new form of masculinity, one free from many of the formal suppositions of high modernism, but which nevertheless functions through ubiquity and the insistent yet tacit assumption of normality.

This care to avoid binaries and mappings—this decision not to accept the enemy of my enemy as a friend, not to accept the supersession of modern masculinity as in any way necessarily feminist—applies not only to the cultural politics of music, but to our immediate experience of musical time as well. To the extent that the analyses I have offered are convincing, they contest the claim that all minimalism is definitively vertical. More fundamentally, most of these analyses provide further evidence—if such evidence is necessary—supporting Kramer's claim that all music is likely to support a mixture of linear and nonlinear listenings. These analyses also cast doubt on blanket claims about the temporal nature of minimalism without allowing for the rather marked discrepancies between different minimalist compositions. Glass's music in particular resists the timelessness associated with verticality.

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The exact repetition in Reich's music and the interminably sustained tones in Young's surely offer a much stronger sense of verticality, but the pressing question ought to be why the thematic but often not exact repetition used by Riley and Glass is so often understood to offer the same sort of vertical experience, or why, for that matter, the inexact repetition of *Four Organs* should correspond to the exact repetition of *Piano Phase*. Any answer to this question must be partial, since there can be no exhaustive answer that speaks for every experience of this music. Vertical time in addition to being experiential must therefore also be to some extent personal, and I cannot hope—and should not try—to account for all personal experiences. But the personal nature of verticality offers a beginning to the partial answer I would like to propose. The formal character of Kramer's theory of time does not exist outside of the history of culture. On the contrary, counter to prejudices against formalism, Kramer's book argues for the temporal experience of music as both personal and cultural, suggesting that there is a particular historical Western bias toward linearity and often a non-Western bias toward nonlinearity. I do not have the expertise to confirm or contest the broad claim that non-Westerners are predisposed toward listening nonlinearly, but regardless of the truth of this claim, it is clear that the cultural education of the listener has some effect on that listener's experience of musical time. Thus listeners who believe that the linear aesthetic of Romanticism is the only or best temporality for music are unlikely to have access to verticality at all—they will listen to vertical compositions only with a sense of boredom.

The availability of vertical experience therefore depends as much on the specific disposition of the literally present embodied listener as it does on the specific formal qualities of the music. There is nothing to suggest that there is a particular set of experiences necessary for an openness to vertical time—nor, more radically, is there anything to suggest that all vertical

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experiences are the same or equivalent. One listener may experience vertical time as a result of a lifetime of education while another may suddenly begin attending to phenomena she or he had until that point dismissed. One of the salient points to be taken from the above analyses of minimalist compositions is that the particularity of linear or vertical experience, and its dependence on a specific embodied listener, affects the perceptibility both of verticality—as Kramer specifies—and linearity. This is also to say that a traditional education in Western linear forms will not necessarily produce in a listener a special sensitivity to *all* linear music. The linear formations I have argued for in some of Riley’s, Reich’s, and Glass’s music are not the linear formations of Mozart or Brahms, but nor are those formations which Kramer isolates in *Les Moutons de Panurge*. When Kramer says that “Traditional analysis has little to say about vertical music,” he both identifies the formal nature of linearity (insofar as “traditional analysis” is concerned with form in the broadest of senses) and insists upon the development of new analytical tools for dealing with new treatments of time in music.⁵⁸ However, our education in what lends earlier music its linearity must not deafen us to new methods of creating linearity, as it likely has in some of the reception of minimalist music.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 388.

CHAPTER 4: SPACE, INTEREST, AND UNIQUENESS

The adoption of space as the theme of this chapter will seem misleading initially. The ambulatory space of minimalist sculpture as described by Robert Morris will be of importance below, but the true object of study will be the relation between the subject and object that causes this space to become something of which to take notice. In sculpture this space is between the viewer and the sculpture; in music it is the space between the listener and the performer (or amplifier). But we will not be concerned with the literal architectural location of performance or display. Instead we will be looking at why it is that the space of the minimalist sculptural encounter was felt to require remark, and whether this need for remark extends to or otherwise has implications for minimalist music. Within sculpture this requires taking seriously the question of anthropomorphism in minimalism, in which the space between viewer and object takes on a character analogous to the relational space between human bodies. Hannah Arendt's political philosophy will help us wrangle with this issue, but will not help us much in understanding the corresponding musical phenomena. Instead, we will examine at length Adriana Cavarero's philosophy of vocality, which insists upon and theorizes the importance of the speaking or singing voice within the space of the ethical encounter between unique people. Once a clear understanding of the framework of Cavarero's philosophy has been established, we will look closely at the vocal practices of La Monte Young and Steve Reich. But first we must look more closely at the role of anthropomorphism in "Art and Objecthood."

Michael Fried's reservations about the durational characteristics of minimalist sculpture stem from his contempt for minimalism's apparent indifference toward critical conviction. Minimalism's telltale simplicity leads the viewer away from the possibility of a definitive critical judgment and toward a perpetual state of interest. Fried's modernist gallery experience, in which

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the critic is either attentively engrossed in a successful sculpture or moving on from an unsuccessful one, is replaced by an experience in which all facets of the space—the room, the viewer(s), and the sculpture itself—achieve more or less equal prominence. The scene created, says Fried, is a scene of theater, an artistic discipline in which the singular object is far less important than its milieu and presentation.

In the context of theater, Fried's troubling and somewhat confusing accusation that minimalism is guilty of anthropomorphism makes some sense, since one of the essential elements of theater is the human actor—a play without players is difficult to identify as such. The viewers and the gallery in which they view clearly cannot fill this role, so it must be left to the sculptures themselves, even if they seem to refuse to take on any dramatic character. As Fried says, minimalist sculptures possess “a kind of stage presence,” as if they were themselves people.¹ Within the context of the art criticism of his time, Fried's association of presence with anthropomorphism was quite unorthodox. In the 1960s, the body had become an important focus for American artists and critics. With the birth of numerous cool and geometric styles, accompanied as they were by the decline of abstract expressionism, the questions of gesture and expression became important aesthetic concerns. Frances Colpitt explains that for many artists during this period, and for minimalists in particular, “anthropomorphism” in art became something of a taboo, or at best a polemical lightning rod.² The definition of “anthropomorphism”—easily enough understood in the context of representational art—is obscured in the context of non-representational art, and indeed, as can be seen both in Colpitt's

¹ Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 155.

² This and the following arguments Colpitt makes regarding anthropomorphism and presence are from Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 67–99.

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account and in reading some of the most commonly cited texts on minimalism, understandings of “anthropomorphism” in the 1960s were sometimes at odds with one another. For current purposes, Colpitt’s formulation of anthropomorphism will serve well as a foundation to which we can contrast other definitions. For Colpitt, anthropomorphism in abstract art takes one of two forms: gesture and biomorphism. Most abstract paintings, of course, in so far as they rely on anthropomorphism at all, tend more toward gesture than biomorphism. In this sense, Pollock’s all-over paintings can be described as anthropomorphic even though they clearly do not present any biomorphic qualities; the presentation of the subjective bodily activity of the artist—gesture—suffices. Abstract sculpture, as Colpitt relates, is more likely than painting to exhibit biomorphic anthropomorphism. David Smith’s vaguely biomorphic sculptural work is perhaps the best example for our current discussion, given his importance for critics Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg. Anthony Caro, on the other hand, along with Mark di Suvero, work with a more gestural anthropomorphism.

Most critics keep the concepts of anthropomorphism and presence at a distance from one another, often considering the two to be either contradictory or at least in aesthetic opposition. In “Art and Objecthood,” Michael Fried directly challenges this paradigm, arguing not only that minimalist art has the characteristics of both presence and anthropomorphism, but that the manifestations of presence and anthropomorphism in minimalism are closely related to one another through the umbrella concept of theater.³ Minimalism for Fried, because of its reliance

³ “I am suggesting, then, that a kind of hidden or latent naturalism, indeed anthropomorphism, lies at the core of literalist theory and practice. The concept of presence all but says as much...” Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 157.

on presence, is essentially anthropomorphic—however lacking it may be in either gestural or biomorphic anthropomorphism.

Here we should take some care before continuing on, recalling that in spite of the unifying epithet, minimalist sculpture is in fact quite diverse. Fried primarily concerns himself with the works of Morris, Judd, and Tony Smith, all of which fill the role of a mute, featureless body fairly easily: they tend to be large (if not too large), imposing, and, in Fried's lexicon, literal. Some of Walter de Maria's and Sol LeWitt's work, as well as most of Anne Truitt's, also correspond reasonably well with Fried's model of anthropomorphic interest, although much of de Maria and LeWitt's work would better be described as skeletal than bodily. Of the best known minimalist sculptors, Dan Flavin and Carl Andre pose the greatest problem with respect to anthropomorphism. Flavin's fluorescent light sculptures, which nearly lack any body at all (composed as they are more of light than of matter), challenge the stout physicality implied by Fried's invocation of anthropomorphic stage presence. However, when viewing Flavin's light sculptures one becomes aware of a certain warm proximity, as the glowing tubes emit not only light, but sound as well; standing near them, even with one's eyes closed or back turned, one senses the presence of the sculptures in a fashion not entirely unlike the experience of standing near another human being.⁴ Andre's work is more problematic. Though some of Andre's first minimalist efforts (such as *Cedar Piece* (1959)) demonstrate sufficient verticality to appear anthropomorphic, by the time Fried penned "Art and Objecthood," Andre had turned almost exclusively to a horizontal idiom, stacking bricks at most two high, and often simply laying thin

⁴ The exhibit I viewed was of Flavin's "monuments" [*sic*] for *V. Tatlin* (1964–1980) on display as part of the permanent collection of the DIA foundation's gallery in Beacon, New York. Viewed in the summer of 2012.

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metal plates on the ground side by side. Andre's challenge to anthropomorphism will be engaged more directly in the next chapter, since it offers a much different understanding of the human condition than that which we will be exploring presently. For now, we might point at Andre's presentation of bare materiality and avoidance of illusionary compositionality, both of which correspond quite closely, in spite of their almost complete lack of height, with the minimalist sculptures to which Fried principally attends. Andre's low-lying sculptures may inspire a different political model of literalist anthropomorphism, but if we accept Fried's thesis that anthropomorphic stage presence is largely a question of occupying a room rather than occupying attention, then Andre's nearly two-dimensional sculpture has its place within this critique in spite of its refusal to occupy vertical space.

Deciding whether or not the form of the "surrogate person" constitutes an essential or merely a common component for "stage presence"—and therefore for minimalist sculptural practice—might be useful for distinguishing various relationships within minimalism, but it may be beside the point with respect to "Art and Objecthood." After all, it is not anthropomorphism as such that troubles Fried. As Colpitt's analysis of the reception of minimalism reminds us, anthropomorphism in one form or another is a common enough occurrence in Western art. What disturbs Fried about minimalism is not merely its anthropomorphism, but the quality of its anthropomorphism. "[W]hat is wrong with literalist work is not that it is anthropomorphic but that the meaning and, equally, the hiddenness of its anthropomorphism are incurably theatrical."⁵ Fried's attention to the hidden elements of minimalist sculpture—which mirrors claims made by Greenberg with respect to minimalism's gendered sensibilities—allows him to include Tony

⁵ Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 157.

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Smith's nighttime drive on an unfinished turnpike in his critique of minimalism. In Smith's story there is no art object at all; there is only a scene. For Fried, this scene—*theater*—separates minimalism from modernism. Fried's modernist encounter is between the viewer and the object which transcends itself as art. Theatrical art, on the other hand, subverts the distinction between the art object and its surroundings. In the previous chapter we looked at the temporal aspects of the artistic experience of minimalism. Presently we will look at its spatial component.

In order to discuss the theatrical experience of minimalist art, Fried borrows an appropriate word from Donald Judd: *interest*. As discussed above, Fried argues that minimalism relies upon a viewer that will take interest in the minimalist object as well as the situation of the object in the gallery. In contrast, modern art compels the viewer to focus on the art object itself and develop a conviction as to its quality. By allowing attention to roam from the art object itself to its setting, minimalism participates in a theatrical sensibility.

In keeping with the generally puritan tone of Fried's article—"Presentness is grace," for example—we can conceive of minimalism and the theatricality of the scene more generally as being worldly.⁶ Worldly in this case indicates not merely the material reality of the work of art—a reality held in common amongst all plastic art—but the perceived non-transcendence of the art object itself, as well as its implication or inclusion of the entire gallery scene. The reality of artistic transcendence, a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree at length, is irrelevant at present; what is important is the invitation of the entire space into the artistic experience, which for Fried derives from a failure to transcend objecthood, and for Robert Morris occurs through formal decisions on the part of the artist.

⁶ For the relationship between Puritanism and "Art and Objecthood," see James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 234–238.

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What this leaves us is a situation concerning the appearance of a “person” in the form of a sculpture and an intervening space between this faux person and the viewer. Hannah Arendt’s political philosophy, as expressed in *The Human Condition*, usefully theorizes the spatiality of human encounters, and will serve as a preliminary model for our discussion of this topic.⁷ The scene of minimalist sculpture, as theorized by Fried and Morris, is twice worldly in Hannah Arendt’s sense of the term: first, the gallery is a space made by humans, semi-permanent and set apart from the natural environment; and second, it is a public scene of encounter. Arendt draws a distinction between the natural environment and what she conceives of as the world. The latter is always constructed through human work, serving the purposes of providing shelter (in the case of a home) or a public space in which humans can meet. In the context of human encounters, the world becomes an object of interest, a word which she means in its “most literal significance, something which *inter-est*, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together.”⁸ It is extremely unlikely that either Judd or Fried intended the word *interest* to carry Arendt’s specialized denotation, but there is evidence in both Fried’s and Morris’s essays on minimalism that this sort of inter-est *is* operative, that the interest of minimalism is much more concerned with the spatial encounter of viewer and object than with the formal qualities of the art itself. We have seen that Fried is especially disturbed by the emphasis on the space of minimalism, which for him functions in excess of the art object itself, connecting the viewer to the object while simultaneously maintaining distance. We have also seen, in a previous chapter, that a major consideration for Morris’s minimalist aesthetic was the avoidance of intimate space

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 182.

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in preference for a public realm. In particular Morris insists on the concomitant spatial (as well as temporal) effects of public art, which, in part through its persistent avoidance of ornament and detail, impels the viewer to circulate within the space of the object.

What is peculiar about both Fried's and Morris's position on what we might call the publicness of minimalism is that in strictly material terms minimalism and modernism do not occupy fundamentally different spaces. Both are viewed in the physical space of the gallery and both are equally public. Here an important distinction needs to be reiterated between the generally worldly and the specifically public. For Arendt, there is a classical distinction between public and private spaces, the latter being the space of living—characterized by the often autocratic order of the family—and the former ideally reserved for properly political action, the face to face meeting of unique equals. The advance of modernity brings with it, in Arendt's view, a decline in authentically public spaces. Public spaces are gradually replaced by social spaces, characterized by private or personal activities performed outside of the private sphere of the home. Indeed, the nineteenth century, which for Fried as for Greenberg is the crucible of modernity, for Arendt represents a culmination of growth in social—which is also to say intimate—art forms, begun a century earlier:

The astonishing flowering of poetry and music from the middle of the eighteenth century until almost the last third of the nineteenth, accompanied by the rise of the novel, the only entirely social art form, coinciding with a no less striking decline of all the more public arts, especially architecture, is sufficient testimony to a close relationship between the social and the intimate.⁹

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 39.

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That the work of many minimalist sculptors, and Morris in particular, is often understood to implicate architectural forms—even while refusing architecture’s essential functionality—surely verifies a return to a public aesthetic.

On the other hand, Fried’s entire aesthetic of conviction relies on an implicit preference for intimacy over publicness. Through the grace of presentness, Fried argues that the revelation of the quality of modern art is accomplished through a sort of social (private but taking place in a common space) communication between the work of art and the viewer, whose careful attention is rewarded by the grace of art, just as the pious Christian is rewarded through the grace of a personal God. (And just as the Bible discourages making public the intimate act of prayer, Arendt discourages social forms of art.)¹⁰ Fried’s authentic elitism, as well as Greenberg’s, rejects the idea that art could ever be displayed in a truly public setting in Arendt’s sense of the word. Within the protocols of this form of modernism, viewers are not distinct equals but instead are more or less privileged, depending upon education, sensibility, and attention. Fried’s elitism exceeds Greenberg’s in this sense, transforming the critic from merely educated and sensitive into blessed. Minimalist sculpture, on the other hand, is understood to be authentically public, presented to and present for the viewer not as an intimate communication of artistic quality (presentness), but as a public and open interaction of everything in the space, viewers and sculptures included. Minimalism would appear to be truly for everyone with the leisure to frequent the galleries, achieving this feat—viewed by Fried as a demerit—by discouraging intimate examination. In Greenberg’s terms it is thoroughly middlebrow.

¹⁰ Matthew 6:5.

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Morris too, it will be recalled, had a considerable investment in the distinction between private and public art. Morris's minimalism—or better put, his theory of sculpture—is founded on a dismissal of what he terms domestic art, which is characterized by its use of detail and diminutive size, which lead to intimacy. Morris effeminizes earlier modernist idioms, which make recourse to dynamic colors and compositional forms, by comparing them to domestic baubles—and by implication to handicraft rather than art. We looked briefly at the problematic gendered tropes which enable Morris's theory of sculpture in Chapter 2 (recall his association of intimacy, domesticity, spacelessness, and incoherence, all of which are asserted to indicate bad artistic practice), and his “Notes on Sculpture” will resurface again in the next chapter when we turn to the material character of minimalism. For now, Morris serves as an accidental caution against utopianism: Fried's preferred private art may be elitist, but Morris's misogynistically motivated negation of the private in favor of public art is by no means politically unproblematic or egalitarian.

Attention to the publicness of minimalist sculpture suggests a refinement of our understanding of Fried's analysis. Arendt reminds us that public space is a question of human facture, separate from our place of dwelling:

[T]he term “public” signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature . . . To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.¹¹

But when Fried identifies the unusually public space of minimalism, he does not place minimalist sculpture in the same role Arendt places the table. The sculpture itself is not of

¹¹ Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 52.

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interest; rather, the world of the gallery is between the viewer and the art object. The creation of this public space is what lends minimalism its latent anthropomorphism, since, as Arendt states, it is the interaction of humans in the public space that give the world a quality of interest.

However, Fried's anthropomorphic reading of minimalism stands in strange contradiction that with the simultaneous claim that minimalist sculptures are merely objects. This contradiction has implications for the material character of minimalism, explored in the next chapter, but in terms of Arendtian public space, it ought to be expected; the fact of publicness relies upon the presence of another person. For Fried, this contradiction is positive and generative.

Whatever the conflicts between its objecthood and anthropomorphism, minimalist sculpture would seem to serve an adequate replacement for a human in the creation of an awareness of public space, in a way that modernist painting and sculpture, perhaps due to their more intimate revelation of artistic expression, could not. Though Fried argues that the theatrical scene of minimalism—what we are referring to as its public space—would be possible in the absence of the object itself, it is clear that the minimalist object plays a decisive role in the specifically minimalist—rather than generally theatrical—manifestation of this phenomenon. The question that must be addressed here then is whether minimalist music occupies a similar role. Does it project anthropomorphic presence? Or more generally, how do the spaces of minimalist music compare with the spaces of minimalist art? It has been frequently remarked that minimalist music and minimalist sculpture often shared venues, and we have referred above to studies of the material space of minimalist performances (David Chapman's work on Reich, for examples, as well as Peter Kivy's),¹² but the question here is not one of material space, but of

¹² David Chapman, "Space, Collaboration, and Cultural Practice at Park Place Gallery and Filmmakers Cinematheque, 1967–1968," conference paper presented at the Third International

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the *transformation* of space by the music, through the roles of the human bodies involved in the production of the music. Minimalist and modernist sculpture shared gallery space just as minimalist music and minimalist sculpture did, but in the former case the use of the space, in terms of its relation to the public or the intimate, was different. It is not the form of space that dictates its public- or privateness, but its use. Accepting that all minimalist performances take place within the world, the question is how minimalist music treats this space in the world.

The diversity of modes of physical presentations of minimalist music in the 1960s and early 1970s outstrips that of minimalist art in the same period. Minimalist music was performed in lofts, art galleries, and even concert halls, and it was performed by soloists, ensembles of varying sizes, and, in the case of tape compositions, by no one at all. I cannot hope to be exhaustive in treating every presentation of music, but will tend, below, to emphasize the activity of the performers (where performers exist) over their locations. The unique space of any given performance is likely to influence the sort of public/private space created, but, lacking access on account of my age to authentic performances of much of this music, I must content myself to discussing the music “itself,” allowing that this “itself” includes the necessity (or not) of live musicians.

Furthermore, it is surely true that the most relevant aspect of musical performance is the music produced, even while the means of production will always influence how we perceive this production. The spatial politics of Arendt’s work relies more on the presence amongst each other of people than on the acoustic emanations of these people. Arendt esteems speaking as a

Conference on Music and Minimalism, Leuven, October 12–15, 2011; Peter Kivy, “Making the Codes and Breaking the Codes: Two Revolutions in Twentieth-Century Music,” in *New Essays on Musical Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001).

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component of action, but is more concerned with what is said and what it means than on the pure act of vocalizing. Speech for Arendt is a conduit for communication of content, not an aesthetic phenomenon. Thus it is difficult, within her framework, to develop a politics of musical aesthetics. More recently, however, Adriana Cavarero has worked to develop a philosophy of vocality that relies partially upon a transposition of Arendt's politics of uniqueness into a phonocentric philosophy of the voice.¹³ This new framework can usefully be modified for our discussion of minimalist music.

As we move from Arendt to Cavarero, it is important to account for why the distinction between private and public space was important to Arendt, and why Cavarero and other feminist philosophers have a stake in Arendt's philosophy. Although *The Human Condition* tends in the direction of taxonomy and terminological specificity, a central concern guides Arendt's thought, as it does in most of the rest of her work. Arendt is concerned with the threat of the erasure of human uniqueness, a threat which she sees actualized in the rise of totalitarianism and elsewhere. In *The Human Condition* this concern is developed through the concept of natality. Each person who has the opportunity to act in the public realm, says Arendt, is born into the world through acting, announcing her- or himself as a unique participant in a conversation amongst equals. Natality, public self-birth through action, which requires authentically public space, is the core of the human condition.

Natality holds a great deal of importance for Cavarero and others who work with Arendt's philosophy because it shifts the emphasis of philosophy away from universal categories such as Man or Being and onto the problem of human specificity. As Arendt says, "the human

¹³ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

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condition of plurality” is indelibly linked to “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.”¹⁴ The subject of natality, in this reading of Arendt, is not abstract Man, but a specific speaker. Each of these speakers is unique; while the conditions of uniqueness are generalized under the categories of actions and speech, the actualization of action or speech by each agent is both unique to the actor and unpredictable, both in its realization and its implications. In Arendt’s text, access to this mode of uniqueness is contingent upon the ability to act politically. Indeed the narrative arc of *The Human Condition* takes the reader from an idealized Greek polis, in which free men form a vibrant and authentically human political body, into modernity, in which the dominant form of behavior is no longer action, in which one authentically communicates with one’s peers, or even work, in which one produces durable objects in the world, but labor, in which one merely sustains one’s own life. Labor, for Arendt, is not even strictly speaking a human activity—her term for a laborer is *animal laborans*.

In our final chapter we will return to the *animal laborans*—a concept which relies on repetition rather than on the definitive, productive work of Arendt’s *homo faber*—in order to discuss the industrial materiality of minimalism. For now it is sufficient to remark that in Arendt’s text, the biological facts of a particular individual do not suffice to make that individual authentically human. (It should be noted, before continuing on, that this is not so much an expression of bad class-politics as it is a condemning critique of industrial capitalism and fascism. The responsibility for the production of *animal laborans* rests much more upon society than upon *animal laborans* him- or herself.) Cavarero shares Arendt’s concern for theorizing and

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 7. Arendt follows the outdated tradition of using the terms “Man,” “men,” “man-kind,” and “mankind,” but it is clear from her own position within her writings that she means these terms to signify—in various ways, depending on the term used—humanity.

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preserving the uniqueness of human individuals, but casts aside Arendt's behavioral taxonomies. For Cavarero, writing on the continent in the wake of Derrida, Irigaray, Deleuze, and others, Arendt's broad, distinct categories of human difference surely are too simple, too deterministic, and too clean. While Arendt theorizes how humans can become unique, Cavarero's presumes ontological uniqueness and explores how this uniqueness has been obscured in the history of European philosophical thought.

For Cavarero, the process of recuperating and revising Arendt's philosophy of natality for a philosophy more concerned with difference than taxonomy is best served by jettisoning the logocentric tradition out of which Arendt's work arises. This means, as we shall see, confronting Plato, but it also means grounding human communication in something other than language. Cavarero opts for the voice, the necessary precondition for spoken language, and a factor of the human condition that, she argues, has been historically omitted from philosophical discussions. The voice, even the a-semantic voice, is fundamentally communicative, says Cavarero: "Paraphrasing Hannah Arendt, we could say that before communicating 'merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear,' the human voice communicates itself, its uniqueness."¹⁵

For More than One Voice begins with an analysis of Italo Calvino's short story "A King Listens."¹⁶ Calvino's parable depicts a king constantly under threat of usurpation, whose fear of losing his tyrannical power (and therefore surely his life) compels him to insomniac vigilance, listening with full attention to every utterance he can hear. The voices to which he attends belong to the members of his court, many or all of whom seek to take his throne. The king knows this,

¹⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 181.

¹⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 1–15.

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but the courtiers know he knows, and know he listens. In order to detect the threat to his rule then, the king listens not to the semantic content of the courtiers' speech—knowing the king listens, they dare not speak of their plots and schemes—but to the quality of their speech, which is “artificial, false, ‘cold’ like death”;¹⁷ in order to conceal their intent, they must conceal the human quality of their voices. The king's paranoid obsession is eventually broken by an unseen woman's voice, as she sings for no other apparent reason than sing. The arresting warmth of the singing woman reveals not only the artificial coldness of the courtiers—calculated to prevent betraying their sinister intent—but also the fundamental uniqueness of vocality.

Cavarero's selection of this parable to begin her treatise on the human voice reveals a great deal about the intent of her inquiry. First, it demonstrates an anti-elitist approach to politics at least partially at odds with Arendt's political philosophy. While Arendt would have agreed that there is no properly political space within tyranny (that is, no space for proper speech), it is quite unlikely that she would have looked to an anonymous woman to break the inhuman spell of autocracy. This is because while for Arendt, political action relies upon the establishment of equality, for Cavarero human equality is an ontological given. Though it may seem more political than aesthetic, this distinction carries some importance in discussing minimalism. Arendt's political action is reserved for only those who have overcome the need to labor or work, and can live freely in the political space of the world. For Cavarero, in contrast, politics does not need a special place apart from laborers and workers: “Politics takes place,” Cavarero says, “but it is not *a* place.”¹⁸ It is therefore both immanently local, occurring wherever it does, and egalitarian.

¹⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 1.

¹⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 204.

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Second, and of further-reaching consequences, with her selection of Calvino's story Cavarero opts for an epistemology that opposes both logocentrism and videocentricity.¹⁹ The voice in the darkness which rescues the king from his acoustic paralysis does so not through rhetorical overtures, but simply by being the honest, open expression of a person's body. It signals neither allegiance nor betrayal, but simply existence. The singer also remains invisible, concealed in darkness, challenging the received wisdom that seeing is believing; here human uniqueness is better perceived acoustically than visually. These issues make up the core of Cavarero's text.

For More than One Voice is not a philosophy of music; Cavarero's intent is not to reserve or demarcate a specifically musical epistemology within philosophy. The voice arises as Cavarero's central object of philosophical investigation because it contests the tradition of philosophical videocentricity and seeks to revocalize logos.²⁰ For Cavarero, the act of vocalizing, the act of the vocal utterance independent of intent or semantic content, suffices to announce the presence of a unique person. The voice, which emanates from the body cavity, indexes an unrepeatable, living human body. Thinking about music in this context requires some care, since music scholarship, even in its newer forms which have grown out of the now old New

¹⁹ The concept of videocentricity is central to Cavarero's argument and developed throughout her text. Distilled, it can be understood as the privileging of the visual over the acoustic, and extended to include the privileging of the static and the scrutable over the transient and ephemeral. Because of its connection to flux and experience, it is associated with logocentrism (the privileging of the determinacy of meaning) and phallogentrism (the privileging of the engendered subject).

²⁰ As Cavarero recounts, the meaning of "logos" can be ambiguous, or even ambivalent. "Often a synonym for what we call 'language,' the term oscillates between 'discourse' and 'reason,' between the realm of speech and the realm of thought." Philosophy, says Cavarero, focuses on "thought" at the expense of "speech," robbing logos of its voice. Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 33 and passim.

Musicology, tends to rely upon the same brand of philosophical epistemology that Cavarero explicitly problematizes.

Cavarero chooses the phrase “vocal ontology of uniqueness” to indicate that the concern with centering the voice as an object of philosophical investigation extends well beyond questions of political action and into the issue of human existence.²¹ This ontology is fundamentally opposed to the various philosophical concepts to which she refers as “fictitious entities.”

[T]he ontological horizon that is disclosed by the voice—or what we want to call a *vocal ontology of uniqueness*—stands in contrast to the various ontologies of fictitious entities that the philosophical tradition, over the course of its historical development, designates with names like “man,” “subject,” “individual.” For what these universal categories share is the neglect of the “uniqueness” of those human beings (or, to use the metaphysical lexicon, their “particularity” and their “finitude”).²²

Because the voice indexes only and precisely the specific body that speaks, a philosophy grounded in vocality is fundamentally dissonant with concepts that rely on universality.²³ Like the woman in Calvino’s story, the being born into the world through vocality does not do so in a subordinate relation to the king, but merely in relation:

Who speaks, as a unique being, is above all open to the uniqueness of another; he or she has nothing in common with the sovereign, self-mastering subject of the philosophical tradition. Leaving aside all pretenses of the autonomous ‘I,’ Saying is above all ‘the supreme passivity of the exposition to Others’—proximity as the eminent form of relation.²⁴

²¹ This phrase appears occasionally throughout the text but receives its clearest exposition in an eponymous chapter. Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 173–182.

²² Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 173.

²³ Throughout her text, Cavarero uses the terms “vocalic” and “vocality” to refer to her treatment of the voice. Though the translator’s introduction does not make it clear whether or not these derive from Italian neologisms, they serve the purpose in the text to distinguish between a reference to the voice and vocalizations as such on the one hand and Cavarero’s specific philosophical treatment of the voice and vocalizations on the other hand.

²⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 30. Cavarero here is citing Emmanuel Levinas

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The experience of speaking in common is not a universal experience, even while it is something most humans do. The essential corporeality of speaking and the passivity of hearing renders each vocal experience quintessentially local and unique to the vocal exchange at hand. This stands in direct contrast to various philosophical ontologies that entail a universal concept of (hu)man.

Cavarero's insistent distinction between the universality of Man and the un-universalizable uniqueness of the speaking body is not merely pedantic, but ethical. Cavarero clarifies:

“Man”—a name in language—is an abstraction that creates a disembodied and fictitious entity; it makes of plurality a faceless one, without biography. And this, obviously, does not change—indeed, it gets worse—when in modernity the term *man* gets replaced by the name “individual” or “subject.”²⁵

Cavarero goes on: “They [those who vocalize] are unique beings in flesh and bone who, unlike the abstract and universal ‘individual,’ have a face, a name, and a life story.”²⁶

Here we must take care not to carry Cavarero's philosophy too far in what might be presumed to be the other direction, away from universal categories of “man” and “individual,” and into the abyss of subjective dissolution. One of the elements of vocality that lends it its destabilizing political potential is its irreducible link to sensation, and through sensation to pleasure. The voice, after all, originates from the oral cavity, “the quintessential erotic locus” in Cavarero's terminology, resulting from a process of flows of air and vibrations of flesh.²⁷ Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, whose work plays an important role in reviving philosophical attention to the voice, link the bodily and intellectual pleasure of the voice to the maternal scene,

(quoting from his *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 61) whose work distinguishing, in the interest of ethics, Saying from the Said is crucial to Cavarero's work on the voice.

²⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 190. Emphasis Cavarero's.

²⁶ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 193.

²⁷ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 15.

in which the asemantic acoustic commingling of mother and infant operate in the absence of—or perhaps even at the expense of—conceptually coherent subjectivity:

From Cixous' perspective, as from Kristeva's, this pleasure coincides with the register of the unconscious. Therefore, there is no self-conscious "subject" here, no *ego* that could be linked to a *cogito*. The unity of the "I"—along with any other cultural or social system, including language—gets broken down precisely by the unconscious drive that blurs this "I's" boundaries.²⁸

While largely sympathetic to Cixous's and Kristeva's ethical program, Cavarero warns against the logical trajectory of this particular argument: "Yet in its movement that flows from unconscious drives, this disorganization ends up washing away, along with the subject, the uniqueness that the voice (because it is always the voice of someone) announces."²⁹ Later, Cavarero is explicit about the stakes of the politics of vocal pleasure: "Understanding pleasure as the site of the individual's or the subject's dissolution—if not of the political order on which they are founded—thus ends up paying yet another homage to the binary economy of metaphysics."³⁰

Like many continental philosophers since 1968, Cavarero reserves a central place in her thought for resistance to binarism. This project is not simply about recuperating the subordinate element of any given pair—the subordinate element most often being associated with femininity, such as in the case of domestic/public, for example—but in abolishing dichotomous political thought generally, and attending to that which is conceptually excluded from the binary to begin with. This particular turn to Cavarero's thought is both important for our following discussion of music and difficult to attend to.

²⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 142.

²⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 143.

³⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One voice*, 199.

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Cavarero's ability to discuss dichotomy without endorsing it can be demonstrated in her discussion of what she calls Plato's minor and major philosophies.³¹ Plato is well known for his concept of the Idea, that very real but inaccessible model upon which imperfect objects of experience are based. The goal of Platonic philosophy—what Cavarero calls Plato's major philosophy—is the silent, still contemplation of these Ideas in their perfection. And yet, Plato's philosophical writings, though they discuss Ideas and theorize their role in creating the world, are not examples of this sort of contemplation. Indeed to do so would be impossible, since writing, however fixed on the page, is a temporal, progressive activity, and is furthermore material, necessarily imperfect. Herein lies what Cavarero terms Plato's minor philosophy: the internal logical progression of thought. Minor philosophy, in fact, is essentially logos, once Plato has finished the process of devocalization. Minor philosophy operates in a subordinate role to major philosophy, providing the philosopher with the tools to gain access to major philosophy. This creates an oppositional structure, between the major philosophical contemplation of ideas and the minor philosophical internal (devocalized) dialogue that gives us the tools to approach and codify (if not necessarily understand) the Ideas. Characteristically, the voice is not only absent from this, but it and the uniqueness of individual humans which it entails are systematically excised from minor philosophy, in spite of the connection between logos and the voice. In philosophy after Plato, this linguistic link between logos and voice has been severed. Speech becomes an imperfect, material manifestation of thought, rather than the other way around: The voice thus becomes the limit of speech—its imperfection, its dead weight.³²

³¹ See especially Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 42–46.

³² Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 42.

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Cavarero's philosophy of vocality shares in common with Plato's minor metaphysics the quality of motion. The process of retrieving vocality from metaphysics is not, however, the process of retrieving minor philosophy from its subordinate role to the silent contemplation of the Ideas. The shared quality of motion between vocality and minor philosophy may suggest a mutual opposition of these two concepts to the inertia of major philosophy, corresponding roughly, in part because of the musicality of vocality, to the classic opposition between Dionysus and Apollo. Cavarero cautions against this, however, suggesting that the connection Nietzsche claims between music and Dionysus overlooks the videocentricity of the latter. Citing the philosopher Giorgio Colli, Cavarero suggests that neither Dionysus nor Apollo can be associated with vocality. "As the god of divination and the oracular sentence," says Cavarero, "Apollo in fact inspires words that are then joined to one another according to enigmatic formulae."³³ Apollo presides over enigmatic logos. Dionysus, on the other hand, is associated with, in Colli's words, "a mystic vision of beatitude and purification," analogous to the ecstatic contemplation of the Ideas.³⁴ Vocality has no sanctioned place in this economy.

Nevertheless, the vocalic origins of logos continue to haunt Plato's attempts at devocalization. Plato's logos is disembodied and instrumentalized in the interests of metaphysics, understood entirely within the framework of vision; but the effect of devocalization is an incurable instability: "[B]ecause it is constitutively extraneous to the noetic sphere of vision that characterizes it, logos gets its revenge by continuing to blow a disturbing breeze."³⁵ The expression "constitutively extraneous" recalls Luce Irigaray's critique of Plato's conception of

³³ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 77.

³⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 76.

³⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 45.

matter, in which she demonstrates the problematic presentation and exclusion of women from the foundations of metaphysics.³⁶ Irigaray's attention is focused on the relationship between form and matter in Plato's work, arguing that within Plato's cosmogony, matter takes on a double-role of both the generative site of the manifestation of forms, and the impossibly barren receptacle of the same.³⁷ Matter, within the bounds of idealism, proves to be difficult to discuss, since it is conceptually distinct from form but only exists with form; "material objects," says Butler, "are copies of Forms and exist only to the extent that they instantiate Forms."³⁸ Consequent of this difficulty is Plato's acrobatic treatment of matter itself. Plato characterizes matter as a "receiving principle," and provisionally likens it to a mother or nurse.³⁹ However, the figures of mother and nurse can *only* be provisional:

There is here a prohibition on resemblance (*mimeta*), which is to say that this nature cannot be said to be like either the eternal Forms or their material, sensible, or imaginary copies. But in particular, this *physis* [dynamic nature; another figure for the receiving principle, or matter] is only to be entered, but never to enter.⁴⁰

³⁶ The following discussion will refer to Judith Butler's discussion of Irigaray's analysis, contextualizing it in the broader post-structuralist climate in which it was written. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 27–56. See also Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, tr. Gillian Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

³⁷ This might be better expressed as the relationship between form and the location of the reception of form, since, according to Butler, Plato does not discuss matter as such:

The word matter does not occur in Plato to describe this *chora* or *hypodochē*, and yet Aristotle remarks in *The Metaphysics* that this section of *Timaeus* articulates most closely his own notion of *hyle* [matter]. Taking up this suggestion, Plotinus wrote the Sixth Tractate of the *Enneads*, "The Impassivity of the Unembodied," an effort to account for Plato's notion of the *hypodochē* as *hyle* or matter.

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 43.

³⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 39.

³⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 40.

⁴⁰ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 40.

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Gradually it becomes clear that the figuration of matter in Plato as a receptive, motherly nurse relies on a complete disavowal of the agency of these figures of women. In Plotinus's words, quoted by Irigaray to emphasize her reading of the treatment of matter in the Platonic tradition, matter is "female in receptivity only, not in pregnancy ... castrated of that impregnating power which belongs only to the unchangeably masculine."⁴¹ This is obviously a deeply problematic mobilization of representations of women, but for Irigaray and Butler the troubling methodology of Plato's philosophy extends significantly further. "[T]aken as a figure," says Butler, "the nurse-receptacle freezes the feminine as that which is necessary for the reproduction of the human, but which itself is not human, and which is in no way to be construed as the formative principle of the human form that is, as it were, produced through it."⁴²

In Irigaray's critique, the goal is not to relieve effeminized matter from form, but to detail the gendered tropes deployed by Plato to establish his cosmogony, in order to show how the feminine is both denigrated by its representation as matter, and abjected, since the feminine is denied any potentiality within the form/matter dichotomy. "[Irigaray's] speculative thesis is that those binaries, even in their reconciled mode, are part of a phallogocentric economy that produces the 'feminine' as its constitutive outside."⁴³ Plato's removal of vocality from a philosophy that relies so heavily upon logos follows a similar, though not identical, methodology. In converting spoken language from a semantic vocal expression to an imperfect material manifestation of a more authentic thought—by devocalizing logos—Plato eliminates the

⁴¹ Quoted in Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 43. Butler quotes from Irigaray's essay, "Une Mère de Glace," which consists entirely of excerpts from Plotinus's Sixth Tractate of the *Enneads*, cited in footnote 20, above. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, 179. Ellipsis Butler's.

⁴² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 42.

⁴³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 35.

bodily potential of vocal speech, transforming it from an active, immersive act into a passive and (from Plato's perspective) unfortunately material medium. As Butler states, "The problem is not that the feminine is made to stand for matter or for universality; rather, the feminine is cast outside the form/matter and universal particular binarisms."⁴⁴ Butler goes on to note that "There are good reasons, however, to reject the notion that the feminine monopolizes the sphere of the excluded here."⁴⁵ Both matter and the voice can be usefully understood in terms of the "constitutive outside," but it should be clear that Cavarero is not recuperating the voice for the same reasons that Irigaray looks to recuperate a place for women in philosophical thought (voices not being people, after all). Instead, Cavarero's project, like Irigaray's, pursues a philosophical discourse which accounts for individuals, and, again like Irigaray, Cavarero identifies the erasing mechanisms of universalism in tropes of femininity, flux, and corporeality. Though the stakes are decidedly different in these two constitutive exteriors, much of the methodology—and in particular the trope of marginalizing women—is the same.

It would be irresponsible to speculate about why, in *Speculum*, Irigaray identifies only the feminine in the position of abjection within Western metaphysics, but there is arguably room within her text to expand her critique of philosophical universality to allow for the plurality insisted upon by Butler and Cavarero. At the beginning of the central section of *Speculum*, Irigaray makes a bold—though I think quite accurate—claim about theories of subjectivity:

We can assume that any theory of the subject has always been appropriated by the "masculine." When she submits to (such a) theory, woman fails to realize that she is renouncing the specificity of her own relationship to the imaginary. Subjecting herself to objectivization in discourse—by being "female."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 42.

⁴⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 48.

⁴⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum*, 133. *Speculum* is divided into three sections; two lengthy critiques of

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The claim made here refers specifically to the position of women within metaphysics, but it does so strategically through juxtaposing the erasing mechanisms of universality with the need for personal specificity. Insofar as the denial of a woman's specific relationship to the imaginary results from the problematic imposition of the universal category of the "subject," there is room within this claim to argue, as Cavarero does, though within a different context, that the "subject" interferes with *all* specific relationships with the imaginary (or indeed with *all* specific relationships). When making this argument, however, it is crucial to bear in mind that the erasure of specificity is not uniform, and that we cannot responsibly read *Speculum* or *For More than One Voice* as accounts of the oppression of all people. Even while the trouble with universal "fictitious" categories (to recall Cavarero's term) has troubling effects on all human interaction, the specific critiques leveled against philosophy and psychoanalysis by Irigaray in *Speculum* cannot be appropriated to describe all other human conditions. So too, must we keep in mind that while all vocal exchange entails the communication and relation of unique beings, the political realities of these beings might be far from egalitarian.

* * *

At the end of this essay, we will examine the relationship between Cavarero's vocality and Fried's modernism. For now let us take a close look at what Cavarero's work can show us with respect to the space and anthropomorphism of musical minimalism. Rather than attempting an exhaustive survey, I will focus on the two canonical minimalists whose music relies most heavily upon the voice: La Monte Young and Steve Reich. Young's music since 1964 will be of interest in part because it pursues an agenda of intervallic purity implying a distinct relation to

Freud and Plato surround a central section of shorter essays.

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idealism, but also because it stands in almost direct opposition to sculptural minimalism's everyday literalism or process minimalism's quotidian diatonicism. Young's music presents a continuous pursuit of acoustic purity, with the introduction of just intonation in his music transforming his fluxus-era interest in the mundane into an obsessive attention to perfect intonation. Reich's minimalist music is occupied with process-oriented manipulations of more or less mundane acoustic material: tape fragments of speech, or short, monophonic, diatonic melodies. The story of the voice in his music is less a pursuit of ideal perfection and more a narrative of the changing role of the human body in his music, beginning with his disembodied tape compositions and ending with *Music for 18 Musicians*, his definitive move away from minimalism. In what follows I would like to look at how Cavarero's work on vocalicity can guide a certain feminist listening of this music.

LA MONTE YOUNG

In 1964 Young began composing what are best understood as his first mature minimalist compositions, and to do so his compositional style underwent two important changes, one major and one minor. The major change, which affected all of his subsequent compositional activities, is the adoption of just intonation. The minor change is undertaken in the service of the major: to produce just intervals with his (at the time) limited equipment, Young began singing professionally.

In part following his earlier instinct to avoid major and minor thirds—as expressed, for example, in *Trio for Strings* (1958)—Young began working with seven-limit tuning schemes which omitted multiples of five; all or most of the tones used in his just-tempered pieces can be expressed relative to a (usually subsonic) fundamental using multiples of the prime numbers two,

three, and seven.⁴⁷ Of course most instruments Young had at his disposal, including his soprano saxophone on which he had been performing much of his music just prior to adopting just intonation, do not easily (or at all) accommodate the purely rational intervals Young now sought. As a result, he abandoned the saxophone for the piano—retuning Marian Zazeela’s childhood upright⁴⁸—and the voice. Singing was not new to Young at this point—he had sung folk tunes frequently during his childhood—but it was not something he had yet done professionally.⁴⁹ This fact seems to have inspired some reluctance in the composer, whose years of accumulated saxophone technique would now have to be abandoned.

It struck me that I could build one saxophone in one tuning, but then if I wanted to have another tuning, I’d have to have another one built. And I decided to make the leap and switch to voice. That was quite a leap because I had played saxophone since I was seven years old.... I hadn’t really formally worked on my voice the way I had worked on saxophone.⁵⁰

It is significant for our current concerns that this transition is not motivated by a love of vocalizing but by the inflexibility of the saxophone with respect to temperament. Even after he took up the serious study of Indian Classical music under the tutelage of Pandit Pran Nath (of whom Young became a disciple in 1970),⁵¹ Young’s interest in singing is linked more to the ability to sing in just intonation with precision than to the physical pleasure of vocalizing

⁴⁷ There are several sources which detail Young’s various tuning systems. See Kyle Gann, “La Monte Young’s *Well-Tuned Piano*,” *Perspective of New Music* 31, no. 1 (Winter, 1993): 134–162; and Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It: The Music and Mysticism of La Monte Young* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 129–138 and 161–172.

⁴⁸ Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2: Interviews With American Composers* (Metuchen, NJ and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), 494.

⁴⁹ Young discusses his childhood experiences with singing in Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 53–54.

⁵⁰ Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, 494.

⁵¹ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 105.

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musically. Indeed the piano seems to serve Young's musical aims equally well, with the speed and consistency of the instrument counter-balancing the time and labor commitment of tuning. Continued development of *The Well-Tuned Piano*, however, was inhibited by the discouraging fact of the expense of performance; during the period under consideration, Young was much better known for his sound installations and vocal performances with *The Theatre of Eternal Music*.

In what follows we will take a look at the motivating concerns behind Young's music in order to understand the sorts of bodies presented in his music. Young walks an aesthetic line identifiable as idealism, but with Cavarero's help we can distinguish his idiosyncratic idealism from Platonism. The crucial element here will be the body itself, as well as materiality generally. The body runs alongside Young's idealist perfectionism just as Plato's minor philosophy of the logos inhabits and enables the major philosophic goal of static contemplation. But here too there is an important difference, best characterized by the fact that Young, unlike Plato, is not afraid of corporeality.

Vocality in music itself is often a complicated affair, particularly in the context of what is generally referred to as art music. Often when one speaks, it is both *as* oneself—here of course in Cavarero's sense, as identifying oneself as a unique speaker—and *for* oneself. In this general case, vocalization is not instrumentalized unless it is instrumentalized by the speaker on her or his own behalf. It is also conceivable, indeed common, that one's speech might be instrumentalized by another; in these cases the politics of vocal natality—indeed even the bare possibility of the properly political—risks being obscured by the instrumental subordination of the speaker to another, on whose behalf she or he speaks. Instrumentalized speech disrupts the equality needed for authentic politics. Such instrumentalization is a central concern for the

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political philosophy of natality, and indeed much of Hannah Arendt's work explicitly addresses this problem, in which human equality is effaced by the instrumentalization of action. In music, again particularly in art music, the voice is *necessarily* instrumentalized, though, contrary to Cage, usually not to such sinister effect as is often the case within the realm of speech. In either case—both with instrumentalized speaking and singing—the vocal natality of the singer is undeniable, taken by Cavarero as an ontological necessity; a singer, like a speaker, brings her- or himself into the world as an identifiably unique vocalizer. However, each of these vocalizers vocalizes with the metaphorical voice of another, neatly conflated in discussions of music by the expression “compositional voice.” Cavarero's work, which explicitly distances authentic vocality from the metaphorical voice of the author, is concerned with recuperating the instrumentalized voice for the unique speaker.⁵²

In Young's case, as in the case of all composer/singers (and especially in the absence of a sung text), the contradiction between the metaphorical voice of the composer and the actual voice of the singer never comes into being. Young instrumentalizes himself; the composer and the singer overlap in a single body. Nevertheless, it is clear from Young's comments on his own artistic inspiration that the uniqueness of his voice, at least in so far as his music is concerned, operates in subordination to the eternal source of the music itself. Indeed, while at the piano as well Young is clear that he considers his body to be a vehicle of musical expression, not a unique object that is in itself expressive. (Or at least the expression of his own uniqueness appears irrelevant.)

When I sit down to play *The Well-Tuned Piano* I basically pray that I can become the servant of this source of information that comes through me, that I will be able to realize it in the most pure and direct way, and that I will be able to have the energy and strength to

⁵² Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 89.

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perform what comes to me. I follow the dictates of this stream, source of information that comes through me, and I don't get in the way of it. It's true I practice, it's true I've composed the piece, it's true I've set it all up in advance, but when I sit down to play I just let it happen.⁵³

Young then goes on to suggest that the tuning itself has a direct influence on his role as a musical conduit: "The tuning determines how I play the piece. If Michael Harrison tunes a certain chord extremely well, you can be sure I will linger on that chord and do new things with that chord."⁵⁴ Further, Young's insistence on being involved in all performances of his music, most typically as the primary performer, though also by directing rehearsals (such as for more recent pieces such as the 1990 string quartet, *Chronos Kristalla*), comes not out of a desire for his own unique touch, but to insure that his music is performed perfectly. Thus his decision not to let anyone but himself perform *The Well-Tuned Piano* (and to allow Michael Harrison on one occasion to perform it privately)⁵⁵ stems from a concern about the perfection of the performance, not from his an insistence of his own creative or interpretive touch:

Well, after I die, I think it's important that it be carried on ... – or after I can no longer perform it. But at the moment, I think my performances are the definitive performances. And the only thing that would come from letting other people play it is that they would go out and play it for one-tenth the price, and everybody would want to hire them instead of me and nobody would want to do the real thing ... I'm doing music because I feel I was created to do it and that I have a responsibility to do what I'm doing.⁵⁶

To observe that Young identifies his creative inspiration as originating outside of himself is not to suggest that he is involved in a musical politics of self-denial. Young explicitly

⁵³ Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 65.

⁵⁴ Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 66. Young reiterates this in Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, 497. Michael Harrison studied under Young, and often served as his tuner.

⁵⁵ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 59.

⁵⁶ Cole Gagne, *Sound Pieces 2*, 498–499.

distances himself from Cage's anti-personal aesthetics, drawing an analogy between himself and yoga on the one hand, and Cage and Zen on the other:

Around 1960 I became interested in Yoga, in which the emphasis is on concentration and focus on the sounds inside your head. Zen meditation allows ideas to come and go as they will, which corresponds to Cage's music; he and I are like opposites which help define each other.⁵⁷

Young may be hasty to emphasize the external origins of both his compositional principles and many of his improvisatory decisions, but he himself remains essential to the processes of composition and performance. In this sense Young lies at least partially in what Cavarero identifies as the Platonic tradition, demonstrating more interest in the natural properties of his music than in the either his role as a composing subject or unique being: "For Plato," Cavarero says, "and for treatises on music until Descartes, the joining of sounds does not depend on the subject, but rather on the intrinsic quality of the sonorous object."⁵⁸ However, Young's hope and insistence that listeners be "carried away" by his music retrieves him somewhat from this Platonic heritage, insisting as it does on an emotional, overwhelming effect. In discussing the work of Augustine, Cavarero highlights the Platonic genealogy of Augustine's statement that he had to be liberated by God from the enthralling pleasures of music. "The remedy for this enthrallment," says Cavarero, "... is the disciplining of sounds into a music that he [Augustine] intends to be a science by numbers, and an experience of divine order inscribed in the world."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Quoted in Kyle Gann, *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 211.

⁵⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 158.

⁵⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 128. Leo Treitler has shown an interesting link between the codification of Gregorian chant and the strategic effeminization and orientalizing of Roman chant, which parallels Cavarero's argument well. See Leo Treitler, "Gender and Other Dualities of Music History," in *Musicology and Difference*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 23–45.

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We will return below to the role of number in Young's work, but for now we must observe the distinction between Young's claims of the extra-personal basis of his music and the bad body politics Cavarero identifies in Plato and Augustine. These earlier thinkers adopt numerical and rational approaches to music to fend off the perceived dangers of subjective dissolution. Young has no such fears. Vocality is particularly important in this expression of fearlessness—or of a knowledge that there is nothing to fear—considering the frequency with which the voice is associated with femininity and formal subordination. Recounting the treatment of the voice in nineteenth-century opera, Cavarero identifies the purely vocalic with concepts of femininity:

When there is song, melody, and a voice, then there is generally a feminine experience, whether or not the composer or performer is a man (and all the more if she is a woman; the prima donna is the fulcrum of nineteenth-century opera). When, on the other hand, the words and their meaning come to the fore, then it is a masculine experience in which the intellect reigns sovereign.⁶⁰

Young's music sits somewhere outside this dichotomy of purely melodic vocal music opposed to text-oriented music, in a way that could not have been imagined in the nineteenth century. His music lacks text, but it also is often not melodic in any traditional way. There is little reason to suspect that his adoption of rational tuning models arises from a fear of the body.

It is important to keep in mind that even while Young clearly believes in an extra-personal, autonomous source of musical expression, and that his interaction with this extra-personal music is a question of patience and extremely gradual development, nevertheless Young's musical practice is one of deliberate action. Because Young composes music that changes only very slowly, and because he explicitly identifies many of his post-1964 compositions as eternal in duration, one feels a temptation to understand Young's music as

⁶⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 122.

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existing independently of the listener. Young's music is peculiar in its lack or slowness of formal change, leaving those who are unaccustomed to his work with a sense that there is nothing for them to listen for, and therefore also that there is nothing for them to do. Young insists that this is not the case, that the listener not only can but must be active to understand his music. The question is not whether or not there is something to listen for, but whether or not the listener is advanced enough to appreciate and understand the music.

Jeremy Grimshaw characterizes this component of Young's musical outlook as a belief in the teleological development of a person through steady work, originating in the composer's Mormon upbringing.⁶¹ Here moral and intellectual development entails a gradual evolution not of the species, but of the individual, who ultimately is destined toward godhood. Comments made by Young in conversation with Ramon Pelinski support the idea that Young understood the relationship between people and music as one of personal evolution.⁶² In terms of Cavarero's philosophy, this clearly creates an association between Young and the Platonic strain of European thought, emphasizing an explicitly hierarchical, teleological, normative subjectivity over an ontology of uniqueness. Indeed all of this suggests that while there may be no immediate conflict between the origins of the compositional and literal voice in Young's vocal

⁶¹ This reading of Young's work appears throughout Grimshaw's book, but is emphasized in the final two chapters. Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 142–181.

⁶² "The person [who does not understand Young's music or Indian classical music] may have certain pre-conditioned blocks which just prevent him from experiencing it for what it is, and he may just simply not have the concentration... And that's it, you know, and there's no changing it, and maybe in thirty years that person will have developed his sensitivity and his awareness to the point where he might appreciate the concert ... but today, no, and there's no changing him." Ramon Pelinski, "Upon Hearing a Performance of the Well-Tuned Piano: An Interview with La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela 78 1 x 22 4:58:25 – 7:15:00 PM NYC," *Parachute* 19 (Summer 1980), 7.

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compositions, there *is* a dislocation between his allegedly Mormon (trans)humanism and the post- or anti-humanism of the vocal ontology of uniqueness, implicit in the bare act of singing.

Politically speaking—in the context of the politics of vocal uniqueness—Young’s music suggests a curious form of authoritarianism: the authority of the composer in relation to the work of art (which is not to be interpreted, but reproduced); and the authority of the evolved musician, who alone can access and understand Young’s music. However, there is more to this curiosity than Young’s unwavering control over his performing ensembles and his intellectual property rights. Young may assert a militant control over the production of his music, but it is neither an attempt to defend his own rights as a unique equal among many, nor to assert his control over others for the sake of his own authority. Instead, he is clearly concerned with the purity and precision of his music; it is from this perspective no coincidence that he arrived at just intonation—understood as pure and precise—as his preferred compositional material. There is a generative conflict in Young’s music between the raw unique humanity of his singing and his striving for pitched perfection in the service of a perceived musical ideal. To understand this peculiarity, we must turn now to his use of just intonation.

Though Young may have been attracted to the abstract mathematical purity of just intonation, his explicit justifications for its continued use in his music are the closely related concepts of control and truth. Pointing out that the irrational intervals of equal temperament produce infinitely non-repeating composite wave forms, Young asserts that only rational intervals, whose composite wave forms repeat cyclically, can bring about a truly repeatable musical experience.

The thing about the system of equal temperament is that, if indeed you tune really true perfect equal temperament – and it is questionable as to whether or not it can ever be done – you have a composite waveform which is infinitely non-repeating, so that in other words

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any time you hear the so-called same interval in equal temperament, you aren't hearing the same interval. In fact it's highly unlikely that you can ever hear the same interval in equal temperament twice, because, since it's a composite waveform which is infinitely non-repeating, the chances of you picking up on the part of it that would be the same as what you heard the time before are very small. It might happen, but this is certainly not the kind of information that will allow you to build up a system whereby you can capture the information, store it, and repeat it.⁶³

The transition from the acoustic chaos of some of Young's earlier compositions—most notably *Poem for Chairs, Tables, Benches, etc., Two Sounds*, and *Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) to H.F.* (all 1960)—to the strictly controlled just intervals of his post-1964 compositions effectively reverses the role of repetition in Young's music. Young contrasts the precise control afforded him by just intonation with his earlier approach to repetition (to which he refers here as the “second model”): “On the other hand, in the second model that you mentioned, by having repetition every tiny little difference becomes immediately noticeable.”⁶⁴ *Arabic Numeral* in particular illustrates well Young's earlier approach to repetition: no matter how attentive the performer and how simple the repeated task, difference persists. With the adoption of just intonation, Young claims to have arrived at an authentic repetition, leading to a consistent and controllable aesthetic experience.

In effect, the transition from repetition-as-difference to repetition-as-control constitutes the definitive break between Cage and Young. In 1962, Cage remarks to an interviewer that Young is able “to bring it about that after, say, five minutes, I discover that what I have all along been thinking was the same thing is not the same thing after all, but full of variety.... You see that there is something other than what you thought there was.”⁶⁵ Later, in a 1965 diary entry,

⁶³ Ramon Pelinski, “Upon Hearing a Performance,” 5.

⁶⁴ Ramon Pelinski, “Upon Hearing a Performance,” 8.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 70. Originally published in Robert Dunn, *John Cage* (New York: Henmar Press, 1962), 52.

Cage is less enthusiastic: “In the lobby after La Monte Young’s music stopped, [Henry] Geldzahler said: It’s like being in a womb; now that I’m out, I want to get back in. I felt differently and so did Jasper Johns: we were relieved to be released.”⁶⁶ Cage does not identify the composition he, Johns, and Geldzahler had been hearing, but by the time Cage wrote this diary entry Young had begun performing *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* and working with just intonation. Discussing the distinction between Cage’s Zen and Young’s yoga, Grimshaw borrows Young’s expression “to get inside of a sound” to characterize Young’s particular approach to musical singularity.⁶⁷ As Grimshaw notes, the expression appears in Young’s “Lecture 1960,” when discussing the advantage of long, harmonically rich sounds, such as those used in *2 Sounds*.⁶⁸ In 1960, especially again in the context of *Two Sounds* and similar compositions, “getting inside the sound” involves an active attention to the rich, loud, and shifting conglomeration of frequencies produced in the piece. Similarly, in his *Poem* (the name of which apparently was selected to circumvent music union policies and wages)⁶⁹ the aggressive chaos of the apparently uncontrolled sounds is not so much a Cagean assertion that all sound is music, but that these specific sounds are beautiful, and worth actively exploring.⁷⁰ For this

⁶⁶ Quoted in Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 71. Originally published in John Cage, *A Year From Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967). It is possible that Grimshaw’s decision not to cast this changed opinion in the light of Young’s intervening change in compositional interests results from mistaking the date of publication of Cage’s book as 1963.

⁶⁷ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 65. “Getting Inside the Sound” serves as the title to the second chapter of Grimshaw’s book (49–83), which deals principally with the compositions between *Trio for Strings* and *Pre-Tortoise Dream Music*, those compositions most easily associated with Fluxus.

⁶⁸ La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings*, 74.

⁶⁹ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 68.

⁷⁰ Young does say, in discussing *Poem*, “Through John [Cage] I learned that perhaps an infinity of sounds could be considered music,” and strongly implies that this lesson has a great deal to do with the composition of *Poem*. This does not imply, however, that Young ever had a desire to

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reason Zazeela emphasizes the importance of a properly resonant floor, not so that the piece is appropriately shocking, but so that the sounds are as rich as they can be.⁷¹ Although these compositions appear neo-Dadaist at first blush, as if Young were simply collecting discordant noises with the intent of challenging the meaning of “music” or shocking his audience, it is more appropriate to understand this music in terms of its specific sounds. Young’s acoustic palette from this period is certainly chosen for its novelty, but its harmonic richness is essential.

Young’s post-1964 work remains interested in the specificity of sound and the need to inhabit these sounds, but attends to much different materials. As was the case with the earlier works, extreme volume remains a priority, not to shock or offend the audience, but in order to make the space inside the sound easier to occupy:

One factor that shapes the use of the system of just-intonation and what the audience hears at my concerts is amplification. It happens that the audibility of harmonics can be a function of amplification—the louder a sound is, the more likely you are to hear the harmonics that sound makes, which is to say that they increase as the amplitude goes higher. . . . With amplification, the seventh harmonic in my voice and often the ninth harmonic in Marian’s become clear and audible for everyone. That’s only one reason we play the *Tortoise* piece so loud.⁷²

Young’s claim here is that it is only at sufficient volume that the higher overtones of the composite waveform are audible, and thus that the music itself can truly be understood. This obsession with perfect hearing reflects Young’s belief that the purity of just intervals, resulting from their cyclic repetition, lends these intervals a quality of truth.

composer with an “infinity of sounds.” Even the diversity of *Poem* is regulated by the controlling hand of the composer.

⁷¹ Marian Zazeela comments on the “lovely cello-like sounds” produced by dragging furniture over a floor. Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 62.

⁷² Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: an Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and other Mixed-Means Performances*, (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 201. Reprinted in La Monte Young & Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings*, 40–41.

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Young is quite clear that making use of rational intervals elevates music from an imitation or representation of truth to truth itself. As Young transitions into just intonation, composition becomes less a practice of asking questions (such as “Are the noises made by a butterfly music?”) and more a practice of presenting answers, or the “truth.” Here again is Young in conversation with Pelinski:

It’s obvious that you have something which is not repeatable in equal temperament, and it’s also obvious that you have something which is repeatable in just intonation, and so I think the chances of the direction that I’m indicating being accurate are very good. My experience in life leads me to believe this is the case. When I hear the same interval in just intonation, it evokes in me a same feeling. When I hear intervals in equal temperament, it’s like the *remind* me of the truth, whereas when I hear intervals in just intonation, it’s as though I’m *hearing* the truth.⁷³

Young reiterated this perspective years later, in conversation with Geoff Smith and Nicola Walker Smith, by way of explaining his view on vibrato:

As long as vibrato is there, people will never even know that the pure intervals exist, because the kind of intervals that are going on today in equal-tempered music and music with vibrato are only approximations of intervals. They’re like reminders of truth. But if the reminder of the truth is always just a reminder and you never see the truth, eventually people will doubt that the truth ever existed and say, “Well, there was nothing there in the first place,” and it’s lost.⁷⁴

The connection Young forges between just intonation and a conception of truth recalls as well his interest in eternity. The logic of Young’s rational intervals as existing independently of himself as cosmic resources to be made available for and through composition strongly implies the eternity of these resources—an eternity which is reinforced by the composer’s frequent invocation of eternity in his music, both through *The Theatre of Eternal Music* and through his understanding of permanent compositions, which may evolve over time but are essentially

⁷³ Ramon Pelinski, “Upon Hearing a Performance,” 7.

⁷⁴ Geoff Smith & Nicola Walker Smith, *New Voices: American Composers Talk about Their Music* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995), 266–267.

eternal in nature. And though Cavarero is referring to the Platonic metaphysical tradition, she could just as easily refer to Young when she says, “Eternity, understood as a dimension immune to the movement of temporality, thus becomes the mark of truth.”⁷⁵

In discussing just intonation, Young has clearly adopted the lexicon of idealism. Music becomes a question of distinctions between the authentically true and the merely representational.⁷⁶ Plato’s philosophical project is concerned with our ability to discern differences in quality between objects that are at least superficially similar. As Deleuze points out, this becomes a project of drawing distinctions, not merely to identify the authentic, but also to “hunt down the false claimant as such.”⁷⁷ Cavarero echoes Deleuze’s analysis, extending it to the tradition which descends from Plato: “To separate, to oppose, and to subordinate—the work of the phallogocentric tradition consists in nothing other than this.”⁷⁸ Crucially, in Deleuze’s analysis of Plato both the authentic claimant and the false claimant are evaluated in relation to the Idea, and *both* are identified as imperfect. (The false claimant, of course, is so imperfect that it cannot reasonably be considered a copy.) Young’s idealism differs from Plato’s in some important ways, principal amongst them being the material possibility of perfection. When Young moves to adopt just intonation, there is an explicit alteration of the process of “getting inside the sound” which relies on a change in his conception of repetition and control, and therefore of perfection. As we shall see, Young does not share Plato’s reservations about the attainability of the Idea.

⁷⁵ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 39.

⁷⁶ My own understanding of Platonism draws, of course, upon Cavarero’s treatment, but also principally that of Gilles Deleuze, especially his “Plato and the Simulacrum,” trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 27 (Winter, 1983), 45–56.

⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” 47.

⁷⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 139.

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Just intonation brought with it the perceived possibility of perfect repetition and therefore perfect control; long, sustained intervals transformed from the radically self-different (in the sense that they never repeat), to the radically self-same. These sonic objects internalize what may be *the* generative contradiction of Young's late work: the superimposition of static repetition upon the irreducibly temporal experience of music. Surely in spite of Young's arithmetic rigor, his music does as much to invoke Dionysian rapture as it does to invoke Apollonian logic. Indeed, in some respects, he may have accomplished what Plato could not; by synthesizing time and contemplation, Young presents, at least in the sphere of music, a conjunction of Plato's major and minor philosophies. We will see momentarily the extent to which this retains any the problematic notions attributed by Cavarero to Plato.

Young's post-1964 compositions invite the listener, as Grimshaw puts it, to "listen to what this sound *is*."⁷⁹ *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* retains the aesthetic of active patience developed in the pre-1964 pieces, but, as Young suggests in interviews, the active portion of active patience now travels both ways. The listener actively attends to the music, and the music actively affects the listener. Young argues that, as a result of the fixed repeated composite wave form of just intervals, listeners to his post-1964 music experience specific feelings, corresponding one-to-one with the tuning modes employed. Young is clear about what he means by "feelings":

Yes, I think it's very important here that I define what I mean by feelings because many people, when they read this, think that what I mean by feelings is happy, sad, amorous, angry, these types of feelings. This is not what I mean. What I'm thinking of is that feeling that one has each time he hears a piece of music in the same mode. For instance, I hit upon this idea after listening to a piece in Dorian many, many times, and it came to me that every time I heard the piece I felt the same way. What was it? Finally I decided that what it was, was the set of periodic patterns that is established in our nervous system, and in our system

⁷⁹ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 50.

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for analyzing, which is the representation of the air molecule patterns that reach the ear, and this is what is the same each time we hear the same piece of music.⁸⁰

While Young may, in a limited way, replicate the Platonic notion that particular modes effect particular affects, he clearly stops short of the moralistic framework famously attributed to the Greek philosopher. He does not suggest that some modes are more harmful than others. Instead, his logic suggests that only justly tuned collections are accompanied by a feeling (equal-temperament lacking the periodicity to create feelings with any reliability), and that that feeling is more or less equivalent to exploring the mode itself. This is less a question of which modes are good and which bad (Young surely prefers tuning systems that avoid traditional major and minor thirds, but he does not refer to any mode being superior to another on moral grounds), than of an elaboration of Young's conviction that justly tuned modes are authentic while those relying on irrational intervals are false claimants, merely approximations. The ostensibly natural result of their authenticity is the repeatable, controllable, sensual response of the listener (though this listener Young has in mind must be sufficiently evolved). Thus unlike Plato, for whom the affective projection of a mode is an object of political importance, in most cases so negatively affecting the rationality of the listener that the mode itself would be banned from the utopian Republic, for Young feeling is itself a positive quality of music. In this respect Young is thoroughly anti-Platonic: the sensual response to authentic—that is, justly tuned—music is in itself something to be sought and appreciated.

Young's attention to just intonation and his insistence on and belief in the possibility of realized perfection have led critics to two cosmogonies, both of which he only partially accepts as influences on his music: Pythagoreanism and Mormonism. Edward Strickland asked Young

⁸⁰ Ramon Pelinski, "Upon Hearing a Performance," 6.

twice about the importance of Pythagoras in his work, and twice Young did not deny the association, but instead steered the conversation toward other influences.⁸¹ Tony Conrad, who is at least partially responsible for Young's adoption of just intonation,⁸² and who is now at odds with Young in part over a dispute regarding the rights to the output of *The Theatre of Eternal Music*, has drawn decidedly unfavorable comparisons between Young and Pythagoras, associating the former with the well-known authoritarianism of the latter's cult.⁸³ The comparison is to some extent appropriate (as Young's tacit acceptance of Strickland's comments suggests). The Pythagoreans, according to Aristotle, believed number to be the basis of all things, music included; they pioneered the study of intervals as ratios, and like Young supposed an essential authenticity for rational intervals.⁸⁴ The Pythagorean argument, as Andrew Barker reconstructs it, would seem to be that rational intervals are the proper foundation of music not because they present music that sounds better, but because they are explicable by ratios. According to Barker, there was a controversy "among Hellenistic commentators, as to whether a 'proper' scalar sequence is one conforming to rationally excogitated mathematical principles (Pythagoreans, Platonists), or one to be defined in terms of what musical perception accepts (Aristoxenus and his followers)."⁸⁵ The Pythagoreans endowed numbers with a fundamental truth, and understood musical intervals through their association with numbers. Young does not understand just intervals as a mediation or presentation of number; instead, numbers are a means

⁸¹ Edward Strickland, *American Composers*, 64–65.

⁸² Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line*, 88.

⁸³ Cited in Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line*, 99–103.

⁸⁴ My understanding of Pythagoreanism in relation to music relies principally upon Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings II: Harmonic and Acoustic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 28–52.

⁸⁵ Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings II*, 43, n. 61.

of representing intervals (and in fact occupy the central position in the scores he has produced for *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*). Further, rational intervals are preferred because of their repeatability and the supposed effects on the material brains of the listeners, not because of their mathematical relationships. Once again Young's perspective exhibits an insistence on the material, in spite of the theoretical rigor of his music. Number may provide the means of finding or describing just intervals, but it is the intervals themselves that possess truth, not by virtue of their capacity to be described numerically, but because of their cyclic repeatability.

For Grimshaw, Mormon cosmology serves as a more likely origin for Young's odd brand of material idealism, in which the pure Idea is not only literally real, but materially attainable. Grimshaw observes that one of the important distinctions between Mormonism and most other contemporary monotheistic religions is the materiality of the divine. God within the Mormon religion exists in the same realm as humanity, and indeed is believed to dwell on a specific planet called Kolob.⁸⁶ Grimshaw argues that the belief that divinity is a quality of the material realm—that divinity in this sense is non-transcendent—allows Young to consider just intervals themselves to be authentically true. “Residing in the realm of the subsonic, La Monte Young's low E flat [fundamental] is hidden, in much the same way that God remains veiled, earthly time remains fixed, and Kolob remains distant.”⁸⁷ The Mormon tradition of material divinity described by Grimshaw, as opposed to transcendent divinity which characterizes most other

⁸⁶ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 170.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 172. It is worth pausing to point out that while I distinguish here between the material and the transcendent, in Grimshaw's terms, as in Young's, the transcendent *is* material. Thus when Grimshaw goes on to describe Young's music as a “conduit to the celestial realm,” (172) he means to indicate the literally present heavens, or what we now refer to as the cosmos or the universe. The Platonic and Christian heritage of these terms makes this situation somewhat confusing, as “transcendence” takes on different meanings depending upon the situation.

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modern monotheistic religions, allows Young to reverse both Pythagoras and Plato, putting number in the service of interval, and putting the concept of the just interval in the service of the just interval itself.

Overall, this uncommon brand of idealism, which affirms rather than condemns both sensuality and materiality, does little to overturn the juridical hierarchies of Platonism that leftist philosophers such as Deleuze and Cavarero contest. It is surely worthwhile to displace the impossible-to-attain Idea by affirming the value of material reality and sensual experience. That Young believes that material objects are not essentially flawed by virtue of their materiality is a step closer to an ethical aesthetic. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Young remains deeply entrenched in a politics of hierarchy, both in the musical domain (in which just intonation is true and equal temperament reminds one of the truth) and in the social (in which one's worthiness of truth can be assessed relative to one's appreciation for time and tuning). Even Young's affirmation of the physical experience of hearing relies on the normative claim—founded on the importance of repeatability and control—that some acoustic phenomena are worth listening to while others are not.

Ultimately this problem returns us to Young's voice. Although again it is inevitable that the use of one's voice enters one into the world as a unique equal, it is clear, at least with respect to *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*, that Young's emphasis is not on the expression of uniqueness (which happens of its own accord), but on the accuracy of the tone. The voice in Young's music is entirely instrumentalized toward a hierarchical economy of truth centered on the purity of just intervals. We should be clear here that this is not a question of Young singing with or without a distinctive vocal style. The troubling element here is not Young's care and precision, since again the uniqueness of the singer is registered independently of vocal

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distinctiveness. (Here the crucial distinction is between uniqueness and distinctiveness, with the former being inevitable even in the absence of the latter.) Further, as Conrad's anti-Pythagorean polemic helps to make clear, it is also not Young's use of just intonation that generates his particular brand of idealism. It is specifically the treatment of musical intervals as objects of truth, and the insistence that one must pass through these intervals to achieve enlightenment, that distances Young's vocal music from Cavarero's philosophy. Indeed Young's attention to precision and perfection, especially in the domain of musical intervals, might lead one to suppose that the inevitable uniqueness of the human voice is an obstacle to, rather than a conduit for, the expression of pure intervals. If the vocal timbre of Young's voice is unique in the world, as Cavarero would assert, then Young's vocal music is not merely an expression of pure intervals, but is instead an expression of pure intervals *as sung by him*, since the timbral irregularities and unique corporeal origins of his voice form an unrepeatable distinct acoustic emission. In this sense Young becomes, to borrow his own description of David Tudor, "an instrumentation" in addition to a composer and performer.⁸⁸

The fundamental vocalicity of much of Young's compositions in just intonation underscores the impossibility of a purely idealist performance that bases its concept of the idea in material reality. If the ratios used in Young's compositions are eternal truths accessed and presented in the performer's art, then his music stands in direct opposition to himself. Those confronted with the voice, says Cavarero, "must register the fact that, beneath the silent firmament of the ideas, there are human beings in flesh and bone who are particular, contingent, and finite."⁸⁹ If ideas are eternal and unchanging, then the vocal performance of these ideas must

⁸⁸ Quoted in Jeremy Grimshaw, *Draw a Straight Line and Follow It*, 59.

⁸⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 46.

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fall short of the idea itself, for vocality, like sound, is never complete or stable: “What characterizes sound is not being but becoming.”⁹⁰ This, it seems to me, is the vital quality of Young’s music (and also the quality Grimshaw attributes to Young’s Mormon heritage). And here we can take “vital” in both its colloquial sense—“necessary”—and its more precise sense, relating to life. No matter what the status of rational intervals may be, whether they are authentic, eternal, and material ideas, or merely contingent acoustic phenomena, Young’s vocal music is indelibly linked to his finite, bodily being. His music can be understood as neither only his idealism, nor his dedication to eternal principles, but as the necessary simultaneous juxtapositions of eternity and bodily becoming.

STEVE REICH

Reich’s earliest tape pieces, *Livelihood* (1964) and his musical soundtrack for the film *O Dem Watermelons* (1965), are generally and correctly understood as pre-minimalist (or not minimalist) and will be put aside for the present study. Instead we will begin with the pieces generally considered to be Reich’s first minimalist works: *It’s Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). In both of these pieces, as is well known, a small excerpt of speech—speech undertaken with no expectation that it might be transformed into a musical composition—is repeatedly looped against itself in a lengthy phasing process. Within Reich’s oeuvre, these pieces are followed by a period of frustration which the composer refers to as “a very depressing year”⁹¹; Reich’s frustrations are eventually overcome by his realization that phasing can be accomplished live with equally though differently thrilling effects. For a period the voice—even the recorded

⁹⁰ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 37.

⁹¹ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 54.

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voice—is put aside, replaced by live instruments. Timbre at this point remains strictly limited; Reich's tape pieces focus on a single instrument—the speaking voice, though there is important incidental sound as well—and his subsequent live pieces employ a single instrument type, either with multiple performers (such as is the case with *Piano Phase* (1967)), or with a single performer, featured both live and on tape (such as is the case with *Violin Phase* (1967)). With the exception of *Four Organs* (which includes a pair of maracas in addition to the four identical organs), Reich composes with a single timbre until *Drumming* (1970–1971). *Drumming* features changes in instrumentation from section to section, but also employs different instruments simultaneously. For our purposes, it is notable that these new instruments include live, singing voices. The style of vocal writing that appears in *Drumming* is further developed in *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organs* (1973) and *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–1976), taking on increasingly thematic importance.

Reich's use of the voice continues to evolve after his transition away from minimalism—most notably in *Tehillim* (1981), in which the composer first successfully sets a text, and *Different Trains* (1988), which returns to repeated, recorded voices, with a much different effect—but detailed analysis of these changes lies outside the scope of this dissertation. Instead we shall focus on the two vocal developments of Reich's properly minimalist period, with particular attention to the spatial and anthropomorphic relation these pieces bear to sculptural minimalism. In Reich's early tape compositions, we find the presentation of a person's voice separate both from the composer and indeed from the compositional process as a whole. When the voice returns in *Drumming*, it is not only the voice of a live performer, but a mode of vocal performance arrived at by Reich's own playful experimentation. The different treatment of the voice in Reich's minimalism traces a narrative from the bodily absent voice of someone

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fundamentally not participating in the musical process to the non-hierarchical use of singers as bodies in a performing collective, and finally to the early post-minimalist use of singers as organs in a singular performing body. In this latter phase, even while the voice is treated as one instrument amongst many, it remains also a voice, bringing with it the indexical potential theorized by Cavarero. We will examine how this simultaneous uniqueness and integration function within the political space of Reich's late minimalism.

While considering Reich's tape music, it is useful to recall Cavarero's discussion of Ovid's Echo myth, in which Cavarero identifies in repetition the unexpected capacity for semantic destruction. Citing as examples Beckett, Kristeva, and Cixous, Cavarero theorizes a repetition wrested from its usual performative and citational implications, repetition which operates counter to, rather than in the service of, the formation of semantic meaning.

Through the fate of Echo, logos is stripped of language as a system of signification and is reduced to a pure vocalic. And yet this is not just any vocalic, but rather a vocalic that erases the semantic through repetition. Repetition—the very repetition that is the famous mechanism of the “performative,” through which meaning is stabilized and destabilized—here turns out to be a mechanism that produces the reverse effect. Echo's repetition is a babble that dissolves the semantic register entirely, leading the voice back to an infantile state that is not yet speech.⁹²

This is a repetition that serves to isolate the vocalic at the expense of the semantic, not in the service of supporting or subverting meanings, but of displacing meaning entirely. Repetition in Reich's early tape pieces is similarly confounding with respect to semantic meaning, but takes this semantic erosion further, especially in *Come Out*, by accruing so many phased layers as to obscure semantic form entirely. Echo's words are transformed by repetition into vocalized words

⁹² Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 168.

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devoid of content, while Daniel Hamm's voice, again through repetition, is transformed into pure vocality, with even verbal form is displaced.

In light of this it is tempting to hear *Come Out* and part 2 of *It's Gonna Rain*, which employs a similarly dense accrual of layers, as the disintegration of the recorded speakers, Daniel Hamm and Brother Walter respectively. Following Martin Scherzinger, we might listen here for a dehumanizing transformation of Brother Walter into "an animal or an anxious bird."⁹³ This interpretation is compelling only if we are willing to equate the voice with what is said, but as Reich has said, "Using the voice of individual speakers is not like setting a text—it's setting a human being.... When other people listen to that they feel a persona present."⁹⁴ What is left when phasing has obliterated semantic content is not the squawking of birds or the dehumanizing presentation of someone radically "Other," but instead the voice of a unique person.

Alternatively, the semantic obliteration presented in *Come Out* might evoke, as Sumanth Gopinath argues, the inexorable violence of the state, wrought against Hamm, and by association, against the Harlem Six.

This moment [encompassing the semantic disintegration of Hamm's voice] ... is one in which the phasing and multiplication processes used by Reich essentially do violence to Hamm's voice, and hence, in sublimated form, to Hamm himself and perhaps all of the Harlem Six. However one might assess the relationship between reality and the representation at play here, such an interpretation depends on the assumptions that signification in the piece transforms from a concrete sound (Hamm's voice) to abstract noises (sonic chaos = silence/disappearance) and that the various rehearsals of the piece enact this violence over and over again in the present.⁹⁵

⁹³ Martin Scherzinger, "Curious Intersections, Uncommon Magic: Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*," *Current Musicology* 79 & 80 (2005), 217.

⁹⁴ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 21.

⁹⁵ Sumanth Gopinath, "The Problem of the Political in Steve Reich's *Come Out*," in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 135. Emphasis Gopinath's.

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Gopinath's invocation of violence is peculiar first in his use of language, which insists not on the representation or presentation of violence, but on the *doing* of violence. This is troubling first because, as we are obliged to observe, Hamm's voice is constitutively distinct from Hamm himself. The voice is the index of a unique speaker, but it is not identical to that speaker. (Also, while the voice necessarily indexes a unique speaker, it is not the necessary condition for uniqueness; vocality arises with uniqueness, it does not generate it.) Nevertheless, in most cases violence done to the voice *is* a form of violence against the speaker, not by sublimation, but by transitivity. If speaking in the world is a crucial component of political action and equality, then interfering with speech does violence to the speaker's capacity to act. Thus we must draw a distinction between any violence done to the recording of Hamm's voice and violence done to his body. Physical violence and political violence are conceptually and materially distinct, even while perpetration of the latter often enables or sanctions perpetration of the former.

The second source of discomfort arising from Gopinath's invocation of violence is the identification of Hamm's recorded voice with his speaking voice. We must necessarily bear in mind here that no matter to what processes Reich exposes the recording of Hamm's voice, he does not in any way interfere with Hamm's ability to speak in the world. If the disintegration through repetition of the form of Hamm's speech is authentically violent, it is a violence that spares Hamm himself. Here too, though, we must take care. To observe the distinction between a spoken voice and a recorded voice is not to suggest that manipulating an electronic representation of a person's activities—such as speaking—has no violent consequences for that person. Nevertheless, we must distinguish between the violence done to a voice which robs it of semantic expression—preventing the speaker from political action even while preserving uniqueness—and violence against an electronic representation of a voice, which may have its

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own silencing or perhaps even empowering effects, but does not in itself impact the continued capacity for speech. However, while Gopinath conflates several forms of violence in his initial claims about the implications of Reich's composition, his foregoing analysis remains productively ambivalent regarding the political commitments of *Come Out*, positioning it as a politically progressive composition problematized by the class and race divisions between Reich and Hamm.

If we are comfortable with considering the semantic erosion in *Come Out* as a form of violence—and violence is a flexible enough term to accommodate such a consideration, so long as the above distinctions are maintained—then it is important to understand how this violence functions. Comparison between *Come Out* and Alvin Lucier's slightly later *I Am Sitting in a Room* (1969) helps to clarify exactly what is at stake here. Both *Come Out* and *I Am Sitting in a Room* employ repetition in a systematic fashion that leads to a foreseeable formal destruction of semantic content, but while the stripping away of semantic meaning in Reich's music leaves the sonic contour of the voice intact—not distorted but obscured by their own layered iteration—Lucier's use of gradual erosion strips away not only the spoken word but all identifiable features of the voice as well, “with the possible exception of rhythm.” In the former case, the vocal profile remains unaltered; even while the semantic form and content of the vocalized phrase are entirely obscured, we know as listeners that the structure of the voice itself remains intact. These sounds are the sounds of Hamm speaking, the unique result of a unique speaker speaking. In the case of *I Am Sitting in a Room*, on the other hand, the uniqueness of the speaker is dissolved, replaced by the distinctive acoustic features of the room. It is also worth pointing out that the voice in *I Am Sitting in a Room* is the composer's own, while in *Come Out* it is the voice of an uninformed and absent person. We will more closely examine the implications of this fact below.

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If there is a violence perpetrated in *Come Out*, it does not result in the destruction of Hamm, nor of his recorded voice. There is instead a strong suggestion that even while violence may occlude what is spoken, it cannot erase the uniqueness of the speaker or the fact of speaking. This particular violence, however, remains grim and inexorable, a logical process set in motion with no suggestion of cessation or relief. Gopinath's association of this violence with the state is in this sense apt, and, again as Gopinath suggests, well supported by the known history behind the recording, which is made more or less transparent by Reich's decision to reproduce a longer, unphased excerpt as a formal introduction. Even without an understanding of the specific circumstances of the Harlem Six, the introductory excerpt "I had to, like, open the bruise up, and let some of the bruise blood come out to show them..." suggests, through the accent of the speaker, that Hamm is a member of an urban African American community. The excerpt also indicates compulsory self-harm, as Hamm recounts opening up his own bruises in order to let his own blood. Better knowledge of the exact circumstances of the recording reveal not only that Hamm had been beaten by the police prior to the recording, but that in this excerpt he is recounting the fact that he was obliged to inflict further harm upon himself in order to get medical attention for his injuries. The context of *Come Out* is certainly one of violence: the violence of the police against Hamm, the compulsory violence of Hamm against himself (compelled by the police), and more broadly the violence of the capitalist state against one of its citizens. The phasing process reenacts this violence, both through its rigorous inexorability and through its concerted effacement of Hamm's spoken words. However, the retention of the vocal profile of Hamm's speech insists that while the violence of the state impinges upon Hamm's right to speak freely, it does not dissolve his uniqueness. Indeed the uniqueness of Hamm's voice, coupled with his political situation as a man wrongly accused of murder, highlights the

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mutability of phasing *as* a process: the grim, violent implications of *Come Out* are absent from the shiny insistence of *Piano Phase*.

Juxtaposing *Come Out* and *Piano Phase* helps to recall another important element of Reich's electronic minimalism. *Piano Phase* is performed by live musicians, whose bodies exist and perform before the audience. Hamm, on the other hand, is not only not present for the performance, he is both essentially *not* the performer—it is a tape composition constitutively, not because of the difficulties of engaging Hamm as a live performer—and not a voluntary participant. In terms of the vocal ontology of uniqueness, this is deeply problematic. What we find here is that tape, through the process of phasing, has rendered Hamm's voice *as* a voice, but it has also rendered it textual. Presence has been indefinitely deferred. This deferral is well illustrated when we consider the performance of Reich's 1967 tape piece, *My Name Is*, in which attendees of the performance were recorded stating "My name is..." followed by their name. In the case of this piece, the speakers *were* literally present at the time of performance, but they were present as listeners, no longer as speakers. Even with the dual identifiers of voice and name, the body indexed by the utterance remains anonymous for any listener who did not know the speaker prior to the performance.

My Name Is clarifies what I understand to be the central political implication of *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*: the anonymity of the oppressed. Through the use of phasing to emphasize the voice, rather than the name or semantic content, Reich presents a voice that is both distinct and unidentified. As Deleuze would say, these are speakers without a definite article; they are neither representations of a people nor biographical portraits. They are distinct members of the multiple. The physical absence of the body indexed by the voice recalls the anonymity and the geographical exclusion of the urban poor. From this point of view, *Come Out*

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and *It's Gonna Rain* lend a public, distinct voice to Daniel Hamm and Brother Walter while at the same time reminding us that the politics of American socio-economics excludes them structurally from the society of comparative privilege that led to the production of these musical works in the first place.⁹⁶

Regardless of the benevolent political intentions of *Come Out*, Cavarero compels us to remember that these pieces constitute representations. They are not voluntary political actions undertaken by Hamm or Walter, but aesthetic objects cobbled together by Reich, revealing a contradiction between political representation and the fundamental non-nativity of the co-opted voice, particularly apparent here due to the use of tape, which both physically excludes the body of the speaker from the spoken, and prevents an authentic possibility of response (which is to say politics). Reich's music can stand in as a reminder of the political and economic exclusion of the urban poor, both from American political life broadly speaking and from the privileged world of art-music more specifically, but it can only do so by recreating that same exclusion. Here we can usefully compare Reich's treatment of Daniel Hamm's and Brother Walter's voices and Deleuze's reading of what we might paraphrase as minoritarian modernism, characterized by the works of Franz Kafka and Marcel Proust. Deleuze discusses this strain under the concept of "health as literature," which, he says, "consists in inventing a people who are missing."⁹⁷ Reich *does* "invent" a people who are *absent*, but they are not missing: they are excluded. "The price

⁹⁶ The concept of privilege here is obviously quite complex. Here what I mean might most easily be expressed by the fact of Hamm's illegitimate arrest; whatever the financial status of Reich or any of the other downtown composers at this time, he and most of his colleagues were clearly not subject to arbitrary police brutality and arrest, and did not have need for public fundraisers in order to avoid being sent to prison.

⁹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 4.

for the elimination of the physicality of the voice,” says Cavarero, “is thus, first of all, the elimination of the other, or, better, of others.”⁹⁸

In continuing her treatment of Ovid’s Echo, Cavarero offers a second insight into the role of repetition in the myth: that Echo’s repetition is not merely about overcoming the semantic, but about pleasure itself.

For as Ovid himself no doubt knew, Echo is not so much a tragic figure of interdicted speech as she is a figure of a certain pleasure. This pleasure in vocal repetition is not even perceived as compulsive; rather, by evading the semantic, it rediscovers a time in which such pleasure was free from the very problem of this evasion. In other words, the echo [*sic*] that mobilizes the musical rhythm of language does not simply coincide with an infantile regression; it rediscovers, or remembers, the power of a voice that still resounds in logos.⁹⁹

Although repetition in this myth has the effect of destroying the semantic, its most crucial result is the physical pleasure of repetition. And indeed when Reich turns away from tape music in the late 60s, he does so explicitly out of a concern for the pleasures of performing.¹⁰⁰ As Reich’s minimalist phase progresses, the importance of physical performance becomes more prominent. Reich comments, for example, that though he enjoyed working on his phase-shifting pulse gate, the musical results were generally unsatisfying: “the experience of performing by simply twisting dials instead of using my hands and body to actively create the music was not satisfying.”¹⁰¹ And in a brief set of “Optimistic Predictions” printed in the program notes for a 1970 performance at the Guggenheim, Reich predicted that “Electronic music as such will gradually die and be absorbed into the ongoing music of people singing and playing instruments.”¹⁰² Although the maxims of “Music as a Gradual Process” often distract from this

⁹⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 46.

⁹⁹ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 169.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 22–24.

¹⁰¹ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 44.

¹⁰² Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 51.

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element of Reich's compositional aesthetic, much of his music written after *Come Out* relies on the essential humanness and sensuality of live performance. The extreme rigor and uniformity of most of Reich's minimalist compositions between *Come Out* and *Drumming* make it quite plausible for an attentive listener not to experience Reich's minimalism as in any way relying on the humanity of the performers; those familiar with Reich's post-minimalist compositions, though, are quite accustomed to hearing his music as something other than heartlessly mechanical. *Drumming* is surely the first sign of the transition from a rigorous minimalism that can be perceived as relatively inhuman—even if such a perception overlooks essential aspects of the music. According to Reich, *Drumming* marks several firsts and one last in his compositional output:

In the context of my own music, *Drumming* is the final expansion and refinement of the phasing process, as well the first use of four new techniques: (1) the process of gradually substituting beats for rests (or rests for beats); (2) the gradual changing of timbre while rhythm and pitch remain constant; (3) the simultaneous combination of instruments of different timbre; and (4) the use of the human voice to become part of the musical ensemble by imitating the exact sound of the instruments.¹⁰³

With regard to the use of “the human voice,” we can remark first that this orchestration decision amplifies the essential human component of Reich's music, rendering it quite difficult to ignore. Though it would surely upset the fundamentally human quality of Reich's music, machines could conceivably be used to replicate the sounds of *Piano Phase*, through the use of a player piano for example; there are not, and there certainly were not in 1970, any convincing means of producing the sound of a human voice without having a person actually sing. The singing voice, even if pre-recorded, insists upon a fundamentally human activity, indexing the

¹⁰³ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 64.

unique, resonant bodies of the performers. *Drumming* is quintessentially a bodily piece of music, requiring not only the bodies of percussionists, but the resonating body cavities of singers.

Indeed it is surely the human component of *Drumming* that lead Clytus Gottwald to his infamous attack on Reich's watershed piece. Upon hearing *Drumming* performed during Reich's tour of Europe, Gottwald—a prominent leftist voice in the German new music scene, and producer for new music at the Süddeutscher Rundfunk¹⁰⁴—was clearly struck by the human component of the piece, but instead of finding it vibrant or celebratory, he understood it as at best banal—likening it to Hitparade music—and at worst replicating the coercive mechanics of factory labor.¹⁰⁵ For Gottwald, the strictly controlled movements of the players working in concert construct a repetitive piece of music in which structure and sound are identical. Ultimately this leads to the accusation that Reich's music problematically replicates capitalist systems of coercion. Reich takes the opportunity provided by Gottwald's criticisms to reply not only to Gottwald himself, but to what Reich perceives to be a trend in the reception of his work in Germany: the trend of understanding the strict control in his music in terms of fascism or totalitarianism.¹⁰⁶ Reich argues that these critics overlook the important distinction between compulsive factory labor, which one undertakes due to economic or political oppression, and musical activity, which one undertakes willingly and out of pleasure.

¹⁰⁴ Beate Kutschke, "Aesthetic Theories and Revolutionary Practice: Nikolaus A. Huber and Clytus Gottwald in Dissent," in *Sound Commitments: Avant-garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 81.

¹⁰⁵ Gottwald, Clytus. "Signale zwischen Exotik und Industrie: Steve Reich auf der Suche nach einer neuen Identität von Klang und Struktur," *Melos/New Zeitschrift für Musik* (January–February 1975): 3–6.

¹⁰⁶ Steve Reich, "Steve Reich schreibt an Clytus Gottwald," trans. Ken W. Bartlett, *Melos/Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (Mai–Juni 3/1975) 198–200.

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Though Reich's response is quite apt given the content of Gottwald's essay, it unknowingly overlooks the larger philosophical backdrop of Gottwald's perspective. Beate Kutschke's examination of this exchange, as well as the intellectual backgrounds of its participants, suggests a deep-seated and far-reaching epistemological difference between Gottwald and Reich, which prevents them from evaluating each other's views within the context of short printed articles.¹⁰⁷ Kutschke aligns Gottwald's work with Adorno, citing the prominence of the latter in the German avant-garde at the time. Reich, on the other hand, is associated with the tradition of American personalism, which takes as foundational an authentically free will. Adorno, as is well known, is consistently preoccupied with the possibility of freedom, frequently arguing that the will of individual subjects can be and is redirected by capitalism toward false objects of desire that thwart authentic freedom. Pop music, for Gottwald as for Adorno, is one such fetish, training the masses to enjoy their subservience. Gottwald's Adornian education forecloses Reich's belief that musicians make music for enjoyment.¹⁰⁸ For the Adornian Gottwald, Reich and his musicians have learned to love their oppression, and in doing so are complicit in the cultural sanction of industrial capitalism. For Reich, on the other hand, the presence of explicit coercion is the deciding factor; he rightly points out that there is an abundance of examples of repetitive, "mechanical" music, from gamelan to Bach, that predates industrialization. From Gottwald's perspective this observation would surely mean little, since

¹⁰⁷ Beate Kutschke, "Avantgarde-Musik der USA aus bundesdeutscher Sicht um 1970. Personalism versus Subjektphilosophie," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 61 (2004), 275–299.

¹⁰⁸ Reich succinctly presents his opinion of this line of thought in 1994: "One could say of Adorno, he invents meaningless intellectual jargon to justify the simple fact that he likes Schönberg and doesn't like Stravinsky." Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 185.

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the absence of factory labor in mid-eighteenth century Germany changes the meaning of German music from this period.

Gottwald and Reich may be ships passing in the night, but Reich's rejoinder invoking free will and desire must remain crucial to our understanding of his return to vocal composition. Just as Cavarero argues for a non-compulsive vocalic pleasure in the myth of Echo, Reich argues for a freely willed participation in the repetitive action of playing music. The vocality of Reich's music does a great deal to make this distinction between coercive repetition and pleasurable repetition legible; there is a readily perceivable difference, after all, between vocal utterances of pleasure and utterances of discomfort, oppression, or torment.

Reich's decision to add singing to *Drumming* seems to have originated almost by accident. According to the composer, "While first playing the drums during the process of composition, I found myself sometimes singing with them, using my voice to imitate the sounds they made."¹⁰⁹ Reich retained these initially spontaneous sounds, taking care to match the vocal utterances to the timbre of the percussion instruments used; the desire to blend the voices with the percussion instruments informed which voices—as well as wind instruments—to use during which sections of the piece.¹¹⁰ This creates an unusual role for the voices used in *Drumming*. Unlike American popular traditions and much of the European art music tradition, the voices in *Drumming* are not supported by the ensemble; they are not the privileged vehicle of musical expression performing with the support of a backup band or orchestra. Instead, the voices and percussion perform alongside one another, with the singers shaping their vocalizations to match the instruments they sing alongside. There is no overt hierarchy; the singers do not lead the

¹⁰⁹ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 64, 79.

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ensemble, nor does anyone serve as a conductor. Indeed from this perspective it is unclear why Gottwald presumes that the metaphorical factory work done by Steve Reich and Musicians would be capitalist factory work rather than work done in a factory in which the workers control the means and methods of production. Could not *Drumming* just as easily be a communist paradise as a capitalist hell? To speculate to the extent that Gottwald does, one must rely upon ideology—and of course taste. Instead, let us merely observe what these two scenes have in common: the working in common of distinct bodies. Though they do not perform identical roles, they perform as equals, working in concert through actions both purposeful and responsive.

Reich's interest in composing for mixed ensembles of voices and percussion instruments continued after *Drumming*, producing *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* in 1973. Here again the crucial novel component of the composition appears spontaneously as a part of Reich's characteristically improvisatory compositional practice: "In 1973, I began work on a piece that grew very spontaneously from one marimba pattern to many patterns played by other mallet instruments. While working out the marimba patterns, I found myself spontaneously singing long held tones."¹¹¹ These long tones eventually developed into an unprecedented—in Reich's music—mixture of rhythms, with the composer's characteristic motoric percussion patterns juxtaposed against processively expanding sustained harmonies. Pursued with an attention to vocality, this adoption not only of a fairly new compositional technique—Reich had used similar long-tone harmonies in *Four Organs* (1970)—but of multiple processes employed simultaneously, reveals a shift both in the general aesthetic direction of Reich's output (from minimalist to post-minimalist), and in the politics of his music as well.

¹¹¹ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 76.

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Though the initial notion to include long tone vocal parts in *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ* may have been spontaneous, the decision of exactly how to use this new vocal style took time and careful consideration, and came to be for Reich amongst the most important components of his new composition:

One of the most important aspects of this piece is the use of voices to double the electric organ and produce a new timbre that is both instrumental and vocal at the same time. The choice of two women's voices and electric organ took several months of experimentation to arrive at. My first impulse was *not* to use the electric organ because I wanted to avoid working with electronic instruments.... Finally [after experimenting with woodwinds and with a mixture of two male and two female voices], I tried only soprano and alto doubling the top two notes of the organ chords, and eliminated the men's voices. The vowel sung was "ee." The two women adjusted their tuning far more precisely, the organist and singers moved more closely together rhythmically, and the electric organ was infused with the sound of the human voice.¹¹²

Much of what motivated Reich through this process was simple pragmatism: singers and woodwind instruments have difficulty maintaining pitch when singing extremely long tones. Adding the organ and removing the male voices served both to solve the intonation problem and to increase the flexibility and precision of the ensemble, relying now on fewer performers. However, the notable interest in blending the essence of the voices with the organ undermines to some extent any reading of this piece as a performing in common in the sense outlined above for *Drumming*. No doubt the situation remains one of multiple unique performers acting in concert, but now the desired result under-emphasizes, indeed even obscures, the independent uniqueness of each performer, subordinating the singers as a component part of the organ, blending the acoustic output of the former bodies into that of the latter. In *Drumming*, the singers used syllables designed to imitate the sounds of the percussion, creating a sort of mimesis between the different timbres. As an effect, the singers and percussionists participate in a non-hierarchical

¹¹² Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 76–78. Emphasis Reich's.

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musical assemblage. In *Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ*, the voices fuse with the organ not through imitation but by producing complementary sounds. The organ and voices effectively become part of a single musical instrument, distinct from the other instrumental parts but indistinguishable—inseparable—from each other.

Music for 18 Musicians (1976) solidifies the transition from minimalism to post-minimalism, continuing the trajectory of an increasingly united and organized ensemble of vocal and instrumental performers. Reich continues to use voices and acoustic instruments in conjunction, this time entirely abandoning electronic instruments. The blending of organ and voice into a single instrument is therefore no longer a concern, but instead of returning to the singular collective action of *Drumming*, *Music for 18 Musicians* turns from the strictly bodily to the organic. Two crucial aspects of *Music for 18 Musicians* make this difference clear: a decided move away from process, and the use of the human breath as a formally regulating principle. Reich's move away from strict process is exemplified in the much more arbitrary use of harmonies, which for the first time in Reich's career change from moment to moment (if very slowly at most times). As Bernard has argued, there is a logic of sorts governing the movement from one harmony to the next, but Reich's system here lacks the clarity and simplicity of process music.¹¹³ These harmonies become the basis for smaller pieces within the larger piece, each of which follows similar compositional principles without relying on the sort of transparent process advocated for in "Music as a Gradual Process." *Music for 18 Musicians*, in other words, is much more a composition than an arrangement of musical objects, more a post-minimalist work than a minimalist one.

¹¹³ Jonathan Bernard, "Theory, Analysis, and the 'Problem' of Minimal Music," in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz Since 1945*, 275–278.

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In Reich's own comments on this piece, he comes close to the rhetoric of organicism, stressing not only the composition's relation to twelfth-century cantus firmus masses, but also the tendency of the piece to sound unchanged even while it changes:

One of the basic means of change or development in many sections of this piece is to be found in the rhythmic relationship of harmony to melody. Specifically, a melodic pattern may be repeated over and over again, but by introducing a two- or four-chord cadence underneath it, first beginning on one beat of the pattern, and then beginning on a different beat, a sense of changing accent in the melody will be heard. This play of changing harmonic rhythm against constant melodic pattern is one of the basic techniques of this piece, and one that I had never used before. Its effect, by change of accent, is to vary that which is in fact unchanging.¹¹⁴

This description, which mirrors Schenker's *Semper idem sed non eodem modo* without invoking any of his specific ideas about music, expresses a conception of composition that relies not on the surface-oriented structural transparency of minimalism—in sculpture or music—but on subtle relationships between different sections of the compositions, relationships arrived at not beforehand, through conceptual design, but through a lengthy, sensitive, and often improvisatory compositional process. In a 1976 interview with Michael Nyman, Reich highlights the distance between his method of composing *Music for 18 Musicians* and in particular the aesthetic principles laid out in Sol LeWitt's "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," but also his own statement, written with LeWitt's encouragement, "Music as a Gradual Process."¹¹⁵ Although there is a formal appearance of seriality (in the sculptural sense), Reich is at pains to distinguish the aesthetic difference between his work in 1976 and his friend LeWitt's conceptual work; the former transparently employs compositional choice based upon preference and taste, while the

¹¹⁴ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 89–90

¹¹⁵ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 91–93.

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latter presents and aesthetic in which the choices of arrangement are declared to be strictly the result of the process put in play, not of “caprice, taste, or other whimsies.”¹¹⁶

The human breath, expressed primarily in terms of singing, does not govern the form of *Music for 18 Musicians* to the same extent as does Reich’s expressed interest in formal cohesion, but it nevertheless produces an important organic effect. In the sections of the piece labeled “Pulses,” the first and final sections of the composition, Reich in fact makes use of two layers of pulsation:

The first is that of a regular rhythmic pulse in the pianos and mallet instruments that continues throughout the piece. The second is the rhythm of the human breath in the voices and wind instruments. The entire opening and closing sections plus part of all sections in between contain pulses by the voices and winds. They take a full breath and sing or play pulses of particular notes for as long as their breath will comfortably sustain them.¹¹⁷

Throughout the lengthy piece, there remains a sense of breathfulness, both reminding us that the performers breathe, and creating the impression that the piece itself breathes. Combined with the overall compositional (retaining here the sculptural distinction between composition and arrangement) form of the piece, one is left with the impression not that *Music for 18 Musicians* is a performance in common of eighteen distinct, equal bodies, but that they all fuse as one, creating a unified performing body in the composition itself. Paraphrasing another leftist continental philosopher (Deleuze), *Music for 18 Musicians* suggests a body *with* organs, each of which is a performing person.

* * *

Having examined the vocal space of some minimalist music, it is now possible to return for reflection to Fried’s original claims about minimalist sculpture. In the space of the gallery we

¹¹⁶ Quoted by Michael Nyman in Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 93.

¹¹⁷ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 87.

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are forced to reckon with the voicelessness of sculpture; unlike music, which (in these cases) consists of the production and reception of sound, and is therefore essentially an art of perceived beginnings, sculpture (again in this context) is always essentially already begun. On a fundamental level, music allows for a sort of natality that is constitutively absent from sculpture; the former comes into the world as a process of production or reproduction, while the latter remains inertly present, persistently at the convenience of the viewer. Nevertheless, Fried and others experience both modernist and minimalist sculpture in terms of intimacy and anthropomorphism. Respecting this experience as authentic does not require us to suppose that sculptures live and breathe, but it does require us to negotiate the disciplinary difference between the stasis of sculpture and the temporality of music.

To do this we can first reflect on the fact that while vocalizing serves as a site for natality, one's uniqueness and reciprocal presence do not hinge upon one's capacity to vocalize. Cavarero settles upon the voice for her philosophical explorations not because it is essential to uniqueness or natality, but because it offers one avenue (or many) for exploring uniqueness and natality that does not rely upon a visual economy. Cavarero bases much of her analysis on the work done by Emmanuel Levinas on the ethics of the face-to-face encounter, and although she ultimately is troubled by the volitional character of the gaze—one can always look away or close one's eyes, but deafening oneself is not so easy—much of her work remains sympathetic to Levinas's. Cavarero's reading of Levinas holds important insights for understanding Fried's perspectives on modernism and minimalism, as this necessarily lengthy quotation demonstrates:

Metaphysics not only constructs itself on the primacy of sight, but also decides to ignore the reciprocity that is inscribed, as a decisive relational factor, in the economy of the gaze. The metaphysical eye, starting with Plato, fixes as its model a gaze that allows for the isolation, distance, and noninvolvement of the observer. This in turn legitimates the reduction of whatever is seen to an object. Thus, Levinas is not wrong when he proposes

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the face to face of the reciprocal gaze as a fundamental alternative to the objectifying effect of metaphysical *theoria*. Symptomatically, this alternative allows him to understand differently the category of *presence*. Rather than functioning as an eternalizing quality of *being*, the presence of those who look at one another face to face is guaranteed by the empirical contingency of the context. In the reciprocal gaze, the presence of the other is always the presence of an other who is *here*, who looks at me *now*, in the unrepeatable time of a present that is inscribed in the actuality of the context. It thus cannot be transformed into a hypostasis of a determinate duration. Rather than the atemporal dimension of a lasting permanence, the face to face evokes a discontinuous becoming, characterized by the ever-new “present” of the “nows” in which the gazes intersect. This is, moreover, why Levinasian ontology of the face to face has an immediate ethical tonality. The face of the other is presented, *in the moment*, as a demand of responsibility that cannot be deferred. The ones who look at each other are not called on to respond—in general—for “man” or other fictitious entities. Rather, they are called on to respond, now, for the uniqueness of the other. The face, which is always the unrepeatable face of someone, punctually represents every time the same demand. It is enough to look at one another, to expose oneself reciprocally to the gaze. To make the eye a medium of communication. To distract it from the usual metaphysical (or scientific) orientation toward the object.¹¹⁸

Sculptures are not humans, they lack both a face and a gaze, and yet for Fried, as for many critics and lovers of art, the encounter with a plastic work of art often takes the form of the encounter with another human. Indeed “presence” plays an important role both in Cavarero’s reading of Levinas and in Fried’s criticism of minimalism. In Fried’s commentary, the gaze is of course important, but while he is troubled by the presentation of anthropomorphism in minimalist sculpture, he does not hesitate to imbue modernist sculptures with a sort of agency; modern sculptures direct his gaze and reveal to him the secrets of their structure. What modernist works do not do, however, is refuse his gaze, or threaten to gaze back at him. Fried’s modernist gaze is anything but reciprocal. The work of art may direct the viewer, but the viewer is always outside the space of the encounter looking in. When faced with minimalist sculptures, Fried finds no secrets for his gaze to penetrate. Instead, he is reminded that the work of art is not alone in the gallery; the room is also there, and so is the viewer. When Fried chastises minimalist sculpture

¹¹⁸ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*, 176–177. Emphasis Cavarero’s.

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for being “present” he expresses his own discomfort with entering into a visual economy that better reflects Levinas than Plato.

But this is not quite a complete picture. Minimalist sculpture, again, is not human, and as Colpitt and others have remarked, Fried’s commentary curiously omits the complete lack of both gestural and biomorphic anthropomorphism. Indeed it is this lack that leads Fried to an uncomfortable awareness of his own presence in the gallery space. The absence of anthropomorphic form destabilizes the gaze, robbing it of an object to examine. Thus the age-old non-reciprocity of the theorizing gaze relating to an object is replaced by a new non-reciprocity, in which the viewer has nothing to examine, and in turn experiences a vulnerability to examination before an object fundamentally incapable of examining. If reciprocity is implied at all, it would be a reciprocity of the non-unique; if the viewer is in a face to face relationship with the minimalist sculpture, it cannot but be noticed that the sculpture is not only repeatable, but easily repeatable.

It is difficult to remark upon whether or not minimalist music replicates this unusual scene, first and foremost because, as we have seen, different forms of minimalism have dramatically different relationships to reciprocity. Music in general will often refuse to duplicate the scene of minimalist sculpture, not only because of the fundamental temporality of music, but because most music is produced by performers. In Reich’s tape pieces this is not the case. The performer as a body is deferred, always presented as formerly present. Here the politics of reciprocity give way to the non-reciprocal. The listener gazes at Hamm acoustically; Hamm cannot gaze back, but instead his voice is permuted as his speech is obscured for the listening pleasure of the audience. While the vocality of *Come Out* insists upon the uniqueness of Hamm himself, the taped presentation replicates his exclusion, producing him as an object rather than a

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present equal. While minimalist sculpture puts forward, as Fried says, a literally present surrogate person, remarkable largely for its lack of distinctive features and voice, Reich presents a distinct, vocal person whose literal presence is indefinitely deferred.

Young's music, on the other hand, suggests reciprocity without equality. By linking eternity with evolutionary teleology, Young invites an exchange between listener and performer in which listening is reciprocated by the production of feelings. Young's music is in this sense communicative, communicating its identity in a way not entirely different from the way in which Cavarero understands the voice to communicate the uniqueness of the singer. However, the communication of feeling through just intonation is substantively different from the communication of the vocal ontology of uniqueness, specifically because the modes/feelings communicated are *not* unique. By being eternal and repeatable, they share more in common with the "fictitious entities" of the subject than they share with the unique singer. Further, unlike the voice which communicates essentially and necessarily, Young's music self-consciously does not communicate with everyone, but instead only with those able to understand.

If there is a piece in the minimalist repertory that approaches the conception of reciprocal action upon which Cavarero relies it is surely *Drumming* (although *In C* would surely also have a place in this discussion), but the reciprocity here is first between interacting musicians, and only second between the audience and the musician. *Drumming* is in this sense theatrical, presenting the drama of distinct humans acting in common, but unlike Fried's literalism, in which the boundaries between the work of art and the place from which it is viewed have eroded, *Drumming* keeps the fourth wall of performance intact. After *Drumming*, the relational component of Reich's music progressively dissolves, transforming into a more traditional audience/performance relationship, in which the distinctness of the performing individuals is

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minimized. Reich's music transitions from the presentation of a space of action in common (*Drumming*) to the presentation of an organic musical body.

All of this is essentially to argue that minimalist music and minimalist sculpture fundamentally diverge at the point of public space. In minimalist sculpture, the anonymity and formal simplicity of the work expands the space of artistic encounter to include not merely the work itself, but its situation and its viewer. Fried's reading of this encounter expresses discomfort in part because the terms of possession become ambiguous. With the gaze no longer unilateral, it becomes unclear who is there for whom. In minimalist music, there is no opportunity for such a reversal. First, the fundamental natality of music is a constant source of renewal, preventing the mute inertia experienced in minimalist sculpture (a muteness which perhaps mimics the viewer). Second, the listener and musician (or tape) perform fundamentally different actions in the musical context. As a result, whatever the level of musical activity, it will always outstrip the musical activity of the audience. Cage was surely thinking of this when he composed *4'33"*, as was Young when he wrote *Composition 1960 #6*, in which the performing ensemble mutely observes the audience. When critics express boredom in the face of minimalist music, they forget the essential natality of this art form.

What minimalist music surely shares with minimalist sculpture in relation to what we are considering here as the space of minimalism is an emphasis on the clarity of presentation. In both disciplines the strictest attention is paid to revealing to the audience or viewer every detail of the composition. If there are secrets to be discovered they reside in the aesthetic impact or importance of the work, not in its form. This is true even of Young's music, although he clearly does not expect every listener to have access to the information presented. In spite of this fundamental similarity of clarity, music will not admit itself into the domain of interest in Fried's

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sense of the term. This is due entirely to the temporality of music; even if all events are known in advance, indeed are predetermined and predicted in the first moments of the piece, these events still have yet to come into the world. The moment to moment natality of music forecloses an authentic connection between the space of minimalist art and the space of minimalist music.

CHAPTER 5: MINIMALISM MATTERS

In the previous chapters we discussed the role of both time (or duration) and space (or relation) in minimalist sculpture and music. Fried's perceptive if idiosyncratic critique of minimalist sculpture forces a reckoning not only with the immediate formal qualities of the work, but with the perception of the work. The space and time of minimalism, as we have observed, are closely linked. The formal refusal of conviction in favor of interest—what Fried also characterizes as the contrast between modernist presentness and minimalist presence—leads both to an observation of the theoretically eternal temporal experience of minimalist sculpture (terminated rather than concluded) and to an enhanced consciousness of the relational spatial encounter with the art object. Because both of these phenomena derive directly from the formal simplicity of minimalism, they are also therefore direct results of that quality of minimalist sculpture that occupies the central thematic position of Fried's essay: objecthood.

Fried argues that the “nonart” character Clement Greenberg associates with minimalist sculpture—what Hal Foster refers to as the “Duchampian rat”—is closely related to minimalism's quality of “presence,” a critical concept that, according to Frances Colpitt, had come to replace anthropomorphism in the critical lexicon of the 1960s as a (usually) approving description of the overall quality of a given sculpture.¹ Fried and Greenberg took a much dimmer view of presence, claiming both that it is not incompatible with anthropomorphism and that it is one of the identifying characteristics of unsuccessful art. Fried goes on to state quite explicitly that it is minimalism's presence that determines its objecthood, its non-transcendence.

Presence can be conferred by size or by the look of nonart.... The meaning in this context of [what Greenberg calls] “the condition of non-art” is what I have been calling objecthood. It is as though objecthood alone can, in the present circumstances, secure something's

¹ Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: A Critical Perspective*, 71.

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identity, if not as nonart, at least as neither painting nor sculpture; or as though a work of art—more accurately, a work of modernist painting or sculpture—were in some essential respect *not an object*.²

Fried suggests that, in the context of advanced art in the 1960s, it is precisely modernist art's transcendence of its own objecthood that makes it identifiable as successful art.

What is at stake in this conflict is whether the paintings or objects in question are experienced as paintings or as objects, and what decides their identity as *paintings* is their confronting of the demand that they hold as shapes. Otherwise they are experienced as nothing more than objects. This can be summed up by saying that modernist painting has come to find it imperative that it defeat or suspend its own objecthood, and that the crucial factor in this undertaking is shape, but shape that must belong to *painting*—it must be pictorial, not, or not merely, literal.... [Literalist art] aspires not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary to discover and project objecthood as such.³

Various forms of the concept of objecthood are prevalent in the reception of minimalist art. We have seen in the first chapter that, although reluctant to delve too deeply into the “deeper philosophical distinctions” implicit in the claim, Edward Strickland understands minimalism as characterized by a certain “muteness.”⁴ Potter, in his brief but perceptive account of plastic minimalism, indicates a general anti-transcendent aesthetic by quoting Stella—“What you see is what you see”—and Andre—“The thing ... is not supposed to be suggestive of anything other than itself.”⁵ Frances Colpitt incorporates objecthood into her fundamental definition of Minimalism in order to distinguish the proper objects of her study from the general trend in the 1960s toward coolness and geometry: “Minimalism is not used here with a lowercase *m*. It is restricted to those artists who shared a philosophical commitment to the abstract, anticompositional, material *object* in the 1960s.”⁶ Even Kenneth Baker, whose Marxist reading

² Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 152. Emphasis Fried’s.

³ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 151. Emphasis Fried’s.

⁴ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 8.

⁵ Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 7 and 9.

⁶ Frances Colpitt, *Minimal Art: The Critical Perspective*, 1. Emphasis Colpitt’s.

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of Carl Andre will be important below in challenging the concept of neutrality that is so often associated with objecthood, links a strain of minimalist sculpture with non-transcendence: “[In contrast to Europeans such as Joseph Beuys] Americans such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre, and Robert Morris, who also worked the margins of art, aimed to eliminate metaphor and make their sculpture as lucid and specific as possible. These artists tended to choose materials and forms for their matter-of-factness.”⁷

Fried’s treatment of minimalist literalism takes on a dimension of moralism well beyond the standard art-critical questions of whether or not a literalist (non-transcendent, material) sculpture presented enough art to be art. Fried takes the risk of straying away from the issue of whether literalism is good or bad art, and into the question of whether it is good or evil.

According to James Meyer, this turn toward morality is part of what makes “Art and Objecthood” such a noteworthy moment in the history of the reception of sculptural minimalism.

“Art and Objecthood” is remarkable for its moral tone (Fried speaks of “corrupted” literalism, “infectious” theater), its faith in one kind of art over another, its clear dichotomies. From the moment of its appearance, critics reviled and satirized its staunch point of view. They dismissed Fried’s text as “wrong,” “moralistic,” and so on.⁸

In spite of the early and sometimes harsh dismissals, “Art and Objecthood” has retained its currency surely in part because, as Meyer suggests, the actual arguments are far more interesting and insightful than the simple questions of good versus bad or evil. Morality, nevertheless, is an unusual subject for formalist criticism, but Meyer argues that there is more to Fried’s moralism than simple rhetorical flourishes or polemics. Fried begins and ends his essay with religious allusions, concluding with “Presentness is grace,” and beginning with an epigraph from Perry

⁷ Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstance*, 13.

⁸ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 234.

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Miller's monograph on the early American Calvinist theologian Jonathan Edwards. "If all the world," writes Miller, paraphrasing Edwards, "were annihilated ... and a new world were freshly created, though it were to exist in every particular in the same manner as this world, it would not be the same." From this Meyer argues that Fried derives a theory of modernist art as constant renewal, against the sustained threats of theater and literalism. "The Edwards epigraph implies that it is only when painting's destruction is conceivable that painting is capable – under considerable pressure – of renewal."⁹ The continued threat of an art (or nonart) that is merely literal obliges modernist art to continue, and allows the critic to bear witness to its continuation. Witness is what Fried indicates by "presentness is Grace"; the critic constantly fears for the defeat of modernism, and in this anxiety and uncertainty is only permitted insight into the true quality of modernist art in moments of presentness. "[P]resentness-as-grace," says Meyer, "is an arbitrarily conferred gift that is infrequently (if ever) experienced, and only by a lucky few."¹⁰ Whatever the source – theological, metaphysical, communicational – presentness exists over and above the mere formal characteristics of the work of art, which surely could be accessed at will rather than anxiously hoped for.

Identifying the theological component of Fried's attack on minimalism helps to explain the ardor with which he opposed much of the new work of the 1960s. By refusing to participate in an economy of artistic expression, minimalists opposed much more than an abstract expressionist idiom that had already passed into mannerism. Minimalism's radical anti-compositionality and insistent literalism recapitulates all the anti-expressivity of Dada without removing the artist as a creative agent. It presents an art of facture without touch, completed

⁹ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 236.

¹⁰ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 240.

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works that are not essentially unique. We will return to this theme shortly, to argue for a labor politics of minimalism.

To some extent, the criteria identified by Jonathan Bernard to describe the passage into minimalism away from the art of the 1950s—“minimization of chance or accident,” “emphasis upon the *surface*,” and “concentration upon the whole rather than the parts”—are understandable as literalist strategies.¹¹ The avoidance of both chance and accident obscures the role of creative facture in the artistic process—in so far as “to err is human”—relieving the art object of any explicit presentation of spontaneity or human imperfection. Minimalism’s surface orientation works in concert with its anti-compositional strategy to subvert any organicist or humanist reading of the sculpture in terms of its depth and meaning. To be sure, understanding Bernard’s criteria strictly in terms of literalism would be to misunderstand his analysis. His inclusion of David Smith and Kenneth Noland as examples of minimalist sculptors suggests a broader definition of minimalist sculpture, doing more to invoke Barbara Rose’s A B C Art than Fried’s literalism. This difference in definition reverberates in his readings of Young and Riley, whose pieces, *The Well-Tuned Piano* and *In C*, surely follow Bernard’s guidelines for the reduction of chance, but do not reduce indeterminacy to the extent that we would expect from literalist works. Instead, we can hear in these pieces a pull of the (limited) improvisatory choices of the performer(s) against the constricted form of the piece, destabilizing but leaving intact compositional form, in much the same way that Fried argues the colored stripes of Noland’s elongated diamonds challenge but do not destroy the shape of his canvases.¹² Bernard’s criteria

¹¹ Jonathan Bernard, “The Minimalist Aesthetic in the Plastic Arts and in Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* 31 no.1 (Winter, 1993), 95. Emphasis in original.

¹² Michael Fried, “Shape as Form: Frank Stella’s Irregular Polygons,” in *Art and Objecthood*, 83.

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invoke a different definition of minimalism than the one argued for by Fried—one not necessarily literal but certainly anti-expressionistic.

Nevertheless, literal compositions surely fit within these criteria, even while they are not defined by them. One aspect of literalism brought to the fore by considering its interaction with Bernard's view of minimalism is the role of form. The pieces Bernard discusses as minimalist that lie further away from a literalist sensibility are also those pieces which in Chapter 3 of this dissertation we argued as exhibiting a form of temporality quite different from that laid out by Fried in his attack on minimalist sculpture. Riley's music surely avoids both Cagean chance and Darmstadt-era opacity, but it also exhibits clear signs of compositionality in the arena of form. Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano*, following Gann's and Welch's analyses, also exhibits formal qualities suggestive of the sort of depth antithetical to a literalist sensibility.

However, much minimalist music shares the formal transparency necessary for literalist sculpture. (This is the enabling fact behind Kyle Gann's definition of minimalism, which is founded on transparency.)¹³ This is especially true for Reich's process music, but also holds well for Glass's process and process-like music, and slightly less well for Riley's *In C* and his work with tape loops, such as *A Rainbow in Curved Air*. In Riley's case, there is surely some formal compositionality, but the overall effect is of shifting melodic juxtaposition rather than melodic development, which can be reasonably associated with formal arrangement, even while there is clearly a greater deal of composition in play than we find in Reich. Young remains particularly problematic even when we set aside *The Well-Tuned Piano*, since, as we've argued above, much of his music after 1964 lacks the formal compositionality against which minimalism rebels, but

¹³ As discussed in Chapter 1. See Kyle Gann, "Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism," in *Audio Culture*, 299–303.

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also lacks the simple accessibility for which minimalism is well known. In order accurately to perceive Young's music, one must have an ear well accustomed to just intonation; such ears, argues the composer, are not commonplace.

A crucial question that arises in the discussion of literalism or objecthood is that of neutrality. If an art object is authentically literal, if it is merely an object, can it then make a statement? The reflexive response to this would surely be "no" (cf. Strickland and "muteness"). If the work of art does not exist beyond its mere and immediate physicality, then how can it be involved in metaphor or meaning? Indeed tropes of neutrality circulate throughout the minimalist literature—particularly in minimalist art criticism—suggesting a link between the literal and the neutral. I would like to argue in what follows that this is a mistake, that the lack of formal depth associated with objecthood cannot be translated into a lack of extra-objective reference or lack of legibility. Minimalism, in short, is not neutral even when it is literal.

When it comes to the question of objecthood as anticompositionality in minimalist sculpture, few artists compare to Carl Andre in his rigorous avoidance of touch or chance. Most of his work from the second half of the 1960s consists of logical arrangements of unmodified construction materials. One of his simplest works, *Lever* (1966), consists of 137 bricks laid in a row. *Equivalents I–VIII*, produced the same year, is a collection of eight separate sculptures, each consisting of 120 bricks stacked two deep, and arranged in various rectangular patterns. The identifying characteristics of Andre's minimalism extend beyond these formal devices; indeed it may be appropriate to say that, as Andre uses them, these formal devices derive from his choice of material. Even by minimalist standards, Andre eschews artistic intervention in his sculpture. Instead of shaping metal or plywood into a "specific object" and painting it to reinforce its formal unity, Andre simply gathers a large number of seemingly identical objects into one space

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and arranges them in irreducibly simple geometric patterns derived from their shape. These materials fall under the category of “found objects,” objects manufactured outside of the context of sculpture without artistic intentions. However, Andre’s found materials and his treatment of them differ in important ways from Duchamp’s famous readymades—his urinal or snow shovel, for example—both in their treatment and constitution. Duchamp took objects that many of his viewers could be expected not only to encounter, but actually use in their day-to-day lives; and in most cases Duchamp did nothing to alter these objects except to place them in a gallery and call them art. Andre, on the other hand, has adopted materials that most viewers could be expected to identify—with the exception of his one-time use of obscure naval flotation devices—but which few would actually have ever made use of. Gallery-goers surely know a brick when they see one, but how many of them are actual brick-layers?¹⁴ Andre also did some minimal amount of work to arrange these objects, doing so in a way that relied upon their own form. Bricks or metal plates are laid out in grids or straight lines, everything plumb, level, and square. Form and material exhibit a mutual dependency.

Andre’s work bears some similarity with minimalist music, most immediately in the realm of tape compositions, in which found sound sources are looped to create compositions exhibiting a form not entirely unlike Andre’s simple geometries. Reich’s *Come Out* and *It’s Gonna Rain* juxtapose short loops of recorded speech against each other in such a way as to make the formal layout transparent and predictable, while Riley’s lesser known *Music for the*

¹⁴ Also compare Andre’s brickwork and Jackie Winsor’s *Brick Square* (1971), constructed not of industrial firebricks, but of the culturally well-marked red bricks one sees, touches, and lives amongst on a daily basis, especially in northeastern cities. Instead of referring to industrial labor, Winsor’s work invokes an American domesticity, both in reference to the red brick house and to the American city.

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Gift, *Mescaline Mix*, and *You're Nogood* use tape loops in a less systematic fashion.¹⁵ Each of these pieces is composed of found acoustic objects, edited and combined to produce highly repetitive compositions. However, while Andre, Riley, and Reich all make heavy use of found, industrially produced objects, the nature of these objects remains distinct. Indeed, we find in the juxtaposition of these tape-loop pieces and Andre's repetitive brick or metal tile sculptures an implication that music fundamentally cannot participate in Andre's economy of the found object. A brick, after all, is a brick, and in any context we expect it to have essential formal characteristics and to have been produced industrially for a specific function. There may be some acoustic objects which share the former attribute (essential formal characteristics) but there are no such sounds which exhibit the latter. Sound, in other words, is not the deliberate end of an industrial process. When factory labor produces repeatable and identifiably identical sounds, it is as a byproduct, not as a product. In the case of the re-appropriation of someone else's recorded music, such as in Riley's *You're Nogood* or *Music for the Gift*, the industrial product is the tape, not the music. The recording of "You're No Good," the original song recorded by Harvey Auerne upon which *You're Nogood* is based, is an industrial good, existing in numerous identical copies, but the sound itself—even while it is identical each time the recording is played—is meant to be unique. The sounds used in Reich's and Riley's composition may have been produced, like Andre's bricks, with an idea in mind other than art (or other than the composition with which we now associate them), but they were not produced as the end product of deliberate industrial fabrication—the tapes and records were, but the sounds were not. These sounds, therefore, remain conceptually unique, perhaps as species of a broader genre of sounds

¹⁵ *You're Nogood* is a 1967 tape piece composed of looped material from "You're No Good," by The Harvey Auerne Dozen. Terry Riley, *You're Nogood*, Cortical Foundation (CD, 2001).

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(preaching, interview testimonial, popular song) but unique in themselves nonetheless. In spite of this they tend to retain the same modular character associated with the products used by Flavin and Andre. The phrase, “come out to show them,” was not uttered with the same formal intent that we can identify in the cutting of a brick, but both objects nevertheless exhibit modular coherence within their respective works.

What the material of most minimalist music shares in common with Andre’s sculpture is not its industrial production, but its relationship to the quotidian. Andre’s materials were not of the sort that one was likely to encounter on a daily basis. They were bricks, but they were firebricks, not the ubiquitous red brick so often used in urban construction. The metal was raw, not shaped for the myriad uses toward which metal is often put. Similarly, instrumental minimalism in the 1960s and early 1970s, that of Young excepted, is also composed of quasi-quotidian elements, making use of pitch material that is not only diatonic, but which avoids any of the overt signs of artistic craftsmanship associated with art music of the common practice period: there is no modulation, no harmonic motion (or even change), and no melodic development. Though surely quite far from pop melodies, the typical minimalist melodic fragment shares with much popular music is unmodulating, diatonic simplicity. Like Andre’s bricks, minimalist melodies suggest but do not replicate the modern urban landscape. Young, as suggested, stands apart in this respect, opting for musical material that manages to be both original and (in his view) eternal. The treatment and selection of material in minimalist music also stands in stark contrast to its treatment in the Darmstadt-era avant-garde. Minimalist composers—again excepting Young—identify neither the note nor the interval as the fundamental material of music, but the melodic fragment. In Reich’s music especially, these fragments are treated as basic building materials, out of which a composition is constructed, in

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much the same way that Andre adopts the brick as the basic material of sculpture, rather than isolating the component materials of the brick, such as clay or limestone.

By adopting basic materials of such simple form, minimalists affirm the metaphysical impossibility of pure matter or pure form. As Adorno argues in “Vers une musique informelle,” specific musical elements, no matter how atomic, can only be understood as formally relational.¹⁶ Minimalism’s motivic simplicity suggests the adoption of the melodic fragment as a fundamental material, stressing the arbitrary nature of the compositional designation of the pitch as the fundamental musical building block. In all cases the material is always already formally related in addition to being merely material. Minimalism’s conspicuously uncrafted melodic fragments downplay the independence of pitch, emphasizing instead a larger fundamental formal unit. Similarly, in opting for pre-formed metal plates or bricks Andre identifies an unusually large basic element of sculpture; instead of sculpting with clay or metal, Andre sculpts with clay or metal objects.

According to James Meyer, the initial critical response to Andre’s work was mixed, and in many cases confused.¹⁷ And this probably isn’t too surprising, given the extreme formal simplicity of these works; what, after all, is a critic to do with a low stack of bricks? Some critics argued that Andre meant to evoke mathematical purity; others accused Andre of rehashing the tired Dadaist disintegration of art by carting in a load of bricks and doing nothing to improve them (overlooking, it seems, the importance of the formal arrangement). And still others, in what Meyer suggests is the most enduring of the early critiques, thought of Andre’s work as

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno, “Vers une musique informelle,” in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York and London: Verso, 1992), 269–322.

¹⁷ See especially James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 189–199.

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conceptual. Conceptualism, especially in Sol LeWitt's work, has some overlap with minimalism, and Andre's work at least partially supports this reading. While most sculpture would be considered conclusively destroyed if it were every completely disassembled, Andre's works were routinely taken to pieces. It was not wholly unreasonable of critics to suppose that the idea behind the work took on more meaning than its actual assembly and material presence.

Kenneth Baker and James Meyer have argued independently that these readings—and the conceptualist reading in particular—overlook both the form and the particular and peculiar materials Andre chose for his work. Meyer looks in part to connect Andre to the Russian Constructivists that the sculptor himself credits as an influence, arguing that normally, “We take bricks for granted, we see them as components of a larger entity... But because Andre's bricks are placed on the floor in front of us as a simple pile we are forced to view them as bricks: seeing them as bricks, we see them anew. We are asked to reflect on what a brick is, where it is made, and how it is typically used.”¹⁸ Andre denaturalizes his materials, extracting them from a world where we are accustomed to ignoring them, and forcing us to reckon with their material specificity. Meyer grounds his reading in Adorno's negative dialectics, suggesting that Andre's work—and literalist minimalism generally—“explores the formal potential of the industrial object within the gallery site; its exposure of this object estranges it from the factory, rendering it visible as an industrial product.”¹⁹

Like Meyer, Baker reads Andre fundamentally as a materialist, but the main concern for Baker is not the matter itself, but its arrangement. Baker points out that “In much of his work Andre has used units of material that are small enough to be lifted and moved by hand, as if to

¹⁸ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 186–187.

¹⁹ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 187.

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stress that there is no hierarchy of position or relationship among the parts of his sculpture, and to affirm that anyone's labor would suffice to assemble his work."²⁰ Baker notes Andre's involvement with Marxism to make explicit what is suggested by Meyer: Andre's sculpture not only estranges the brick from the factory, but also estranges factory labor, not by making labor visible, but by reminding us that the labor done to build our world is done by distinct, material individuals. The labor that produces the sculpture, like the labor that produces the brick, is contradictory: it is ontologically distinct and unique, but practically anonymous, indistinguishable, requiring none of the virtuosity or genius that separate the artist from the masses.

Recalling our Chapter 4 discussion of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, we can push beyond what Baker and Meyer argue to suggest that Andre's work illuminates a similarity between mass produced objects and the cultural treatment of the human laborers that produce them. Under capitalism, laborers, like bricks, are produced to be perfectly exchangeable and identical; but also like bricks, they are always particular and unique. In Arendt's view, modernity is characterized by the predominance of labor as a mode of human existence. Almost everything everyone does is done not with a mind to distinguish oneself (to act) or to produce durable and useful object (to work), but merely to stay alive (to labor). Even objectively productive tasks, such as factory work, are not undertaken as work toward the production of an object, but as labor toward the making of a living, toward one's personal sustenance in the world; and even those goods produced by industrial labor no longer exhibit the longevity and utility of crafted work object:

²⁰ Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstance*, 42.

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[A] chair or a table is now consumed as rapidly as a dress and a dress used up almost as quickly as food. This mode of intercourse with the things of the worlds, moreover, is perfectly adequate to the way they are produced. The industrial revolution has replaced all workmanship with labor, and the result has been that the things of the modern world have become labor products whose natural fate is to be consumed, instead of work products which are to be used.²¹

Arendt looks upon this condition grimly, observing the erasure of uniqueness, and therefore of humanity. Andre, by renewing the focus on the material exchangeability both of labor and of the products of labor, and in particular by doing so in the role of an artist (that quintessentially unique worker), creates work that ought to disturb our interactions with the modern industrial world, founded as it is upon labor, and thus on the erasure of human uniqueness.

The presentation of work and labor in Andre's minimalism suggests a revision of the position of art itself within Arendt's work. For Arendt the work of art is a special—indeed ideal—example of the work object. Most objects produced by work are objects of use, either to make labor and work more efficient or to provide shelter and space in the world for human activity. Although it too belongs in the category of work objects, the work of art is identifiable by its uselessness—indeed art objects are destroyed by use, says Arendt.

[W]orks of art are the most intensely worldly of all tangible things; their durability is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes, since they are not subject to the use of living creatures, a use which, indeed, far from actualizing their own inherent purpose ... can only destroy them.²²

²¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 124.

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 167. The historical support for Arendt's view on the uselessness of art is surely Kant, who championed the disinterested appreciation of art (which was of so much importance for Greenberg). By "use" Arendt means to indicate some practical application of the art object which would betray its essential purposelessness. Thus while we might extract aesthetic enjoyment from viewing *Lever*, we would not be putting it to use. *Use* would include activities such using the component bricks in the construction of an oven, for example.

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Consequently, art objects are the most permanent of work objects (because they do not succumb to the entropy of use).²³ Labor, unlike work, produces nothing lasting. The aim of labor is not the object produced, but the sustenance of life. Classically, labor is farm labor and the laboring of slaves, producing the material and comfort necessary to sustain life (often the lives of the ruling class in addition to those of the laborers). But with the rise of industrial culture, and the concomitant ubiquity of labor, the relation between the work of art and society at large would seem to come under some strain. What minimalism suggests, and what Andre's minimalism suggests in particular, is a new connection between the art work and labor, one in which repetition and exchangeability are affirmed as human activities. But as Anna Chave points out, Andre would seem to be having his cake and eating it too. His work is constitutively reproducible, but is also sold in editions.²⁴ Thus anyone with spare time and space could produce her or his own version of *Lever* with little enough difficulty, but in spite of the aesthetic presentation of its facile reproducibility, the legal superstructure erected around Andre's work—though of course not only the legal superstructure—would prevent our hypothetical plagiarizer from producing an “authentic” copy. Andre's work then is both temporary and reproducible on the one hand *and* unique and permanent on the other—indeed even more permanent than, for example, the *Mona Lisa*, since the destruction of *Lever* could surely be undone much more easily than would be the case with the da Vinci.

²³ In outlining the place for art within her philosophical vision, Arendt is inattentive to music. It is unclear what the object-status is of a work of art that relies upon both composition and performance, and which exists as music only in temporal form. This is a question for another study. For now, we can remark that music too, in most cases, is the result of a process of definitive production, work undertaken with an end in mind, producing a definitive and unique object in the world. This is true both of composition and performance.

²⁴ Anna Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (1990), 55.

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Baker and Meyer justify their Marxist readings of Andre's work by the fact that Andre himself has expressed interest in Marxism. Marxist critiques have shown up only rarely in the literature on minimalist music, possibly in part because none of the major practitioners have shown an open interest in Marxism. We examined in the previous chapter a prominent Marxist reading of Reich—Clytus Gottwald's attack on *Drumming*—in which Reich was charged with fascism, and his repetitive ensemble pieces were equated with factory wage slavery. However, when considered alongside Andre's work, *Drumming* displays a degree of compositional touch, including the use of “resultant patterns” and a sensitivity to timbre, that strains the credibility of a purely industrial reading. Even if Gottwald's criticism could serve as a gateway to a Marxist reading of Reich's later minimalism, it would not do so in Andre's terms, which are built around a combination of rigor and anti-compositional simplicity. Only Reich's early minimalist compositions, as well as *Clapping Music* (1972), match the logical rigor of Andre's mature minimalism.

But in spite of the similarity of formal rigor that his early minimalism bears to Andre's sculpture, it is difficult to talk about Reich as a materialist. Music is not made of physical matter in the sense that sculpture is. We might circumvent this difference in part by reference to the earlier argument on musical literalism, particularly as it plays out in Chapter 3 above. The music itself may not be of tangible matter, but sounds themselves clearly function as fundamental musical stuff, and *matter* is as good a word for stuff as anything. Nevertheless, as we have observed, the matter of minimalist music, even tape-based minimalist music, is not entirely analogous to the matter of Andre's sculpture, which differs from musical material not only in its bare tactile physicality, but in its relationship to industry and capitalist labor. Even if Reich's

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tape compositions rely upon the factory production of audio tape, the acoustic material itself relies upon but is not constituted by factory production.

The source of the material used is an important distinction to draw between Andre's brick sculptures and Reich's tape pieces. Bricks are recognizable as identical copies, but they are copies without an origin or an original. The audio samples in *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out* are also copies (as surely are all audio samples), but unlike the brick, Reich's copies do have an identifiable origin; they are authentic reproductions of the voices of Brother Walter and Daniel Hamm. We argued in the previous chapter that the extensive use of repetition, eventually at the expense of semiotic coherence, coupled with the subaltern status of the recorded speakers, serves to foreground and problematize the social and economic conditions of race relations in 1960s America. The authenticity of origin—completely and crucially absent from Andre's work—is central to this reading.

Of course, much of Reich's process music from the late 1960s and early 1970s was written for live musicians or live musician and tape, and in these cases the musical material of each module was not only not found, it was original. Here the replicating economy of the factory breaks down entirely; because the material does not pre-date the composition of the piece, Reich's live music has no musical object to denaturalize. However, this does not imply that there is no materialist resonance between Reich and Andre. First, as we saw above, diatonic minimalism employs the quotidian pitch collections of popular music; these diatonic fragments, even while being very different from actual popular music, nevertheless index what most people would expect to hear on the radio. While avant-gardist composers in the Darmstadt or New York School traditions employ pitch relationships or even timbres that uninitiated audiences might hesitate to call musical, diatonic minimalism is built out of basic materials that most Western

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listeners would acknowledge as musical, even if they might disagree about the merits of their use. Process minimalism relates not to the esteemed activity of the musical specialist, but to the everyday musical activities of “normal” folk. By subjecting these otherwise more or less unremarkable melodic materials (unremarkable in their relation to diatonic musical systems) to lengthy and rigorous musical processes, Reich to some degree replicates Andre’s denaturalization of quotidian objects and activities.

Andre’s work, as we have seen, can be understood in terms of a call to acknowledge the hidden human origins (in the form of labor) of capitalist production, achieved through the use of unaltered industrial material coupled with a formal sensibility that opposes hierarchy. Reich’s live minimalist music does not have access to Andre’s industrial material, but it does make use of labor in a similar fashion. *Clapping Music*, for example, requires little specialized musical training to execute or understand, and is both performable (or more to the point, *sounds* performable) and comprehensible in structure to all but the least musically inclined. Most of Reich’s minimalist music written before *Clapping Music* exceeds Andre’s format by being not only non-virtuosic, but also, perhaps paradoxically, extremely demanding of its performers. (It surely takes skill and practice to perform Reich’s compositions, but it would not be unreasonable to expect a non-pianist to master *Piano Phase*, even while it might take some time. The same could not be said of, for example, a Chopin piano concerto.) Like unskilled wage labor, Reich’s live minimalist music is both physically demanding and technically straight-forward. Gottwald was perhaps in this respect correct to point to Reich’s music as a replication of the factory floor (*Drumming* however does not serve as the best example of this from Reich’s output), though heard alongside Andre, we are obliged to understand this aesthetic not as complicit or fascistic,

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but as critical: here, on stage before you, is the labor that produces your leisure; they are all the same, interchangeable, yet they are also identifiably unique.

There is not much to suggest though that Reich shares Andre's Marxist persuasion, and it may be prudent to stop short of saying that Reich's minimalism is an indictment of late capitalist leisure culture. However, what these two composers do share in common is an interest in making ethnic art. Andre, while discussing the moral hazard of trying to produce art that transcends culture, has said, "My art is that of the culture of my origins ... 20th century North American capitalist culture."²⁵ And when Reich wrote, in "Music as a Gradual Process," that "all music turns out to be ethnic music," he says so in the context of a logic which connects process music to the use of electronic sound equipment, that is, to the realities of modern urban life.²⁶ Both artists envision an art that connects to their time and place, and both produce art that enters into dialog with the culture of mass production and the laborers with whom these artists share a city. We saw in Chapter 1 that contemporaneous critics often agreed with this generally industrial or urban assessment. Carman Moore emphasized the machinic impressions of Reich's "strident, reiterative work," and Donal Henahan emphasized the likeness between Reich's phasing music and the disjoint regularity of the urban soundscape.²⁷

This industrial reading of process minimalism contrasts with work done by Robert Fink on the role of minimalism in twentieth-century American culture. Fink's *Repeating Ourselves*, remarkable in its diversity of approaches, argues for a resonance between minimalist music and

²⁵ James Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, 186.

²⁶ Steve Reich, *Writings on Music*, 35.

²⁷ Carman Moore, "Park Place Electronics," *Village Voice* (June 9, 1966); and Donal Henahan, "Steve Reich Presents a Program of Pulse Music at Guggenheim," *New York Times* (May 9, 1970), 15.

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such disparate cultural practices as disco music, television advertising, the post-WWII baroque revival, and the Suzuki violin method. It is unnecessary to address each of these arguments here; the breadth of Fink's claims would take us far afield of our current attentions. Further, the primary musical objects of Fink's inquiry are most often what we are here referring to as postminimalist, placing much of what he argues outside the musical scope of this dissertation as well. However, his comments on minimalism and advertising culture require some scrutiny, both because they contrast at least partially with our current attention to industrial fabrication, and because some of the distinctions he draws through advertising within minimalist musical practice will help refine our own argument.

Fink's reading of minimalist music in terms of advertising culture is an act of recuperation. He begins by quoting Elliott Carter's disparaging identification of minimalist repetition with mass-market advertising: "About one minute of minimalism is a lot, because it is all the same. Minimalists are not aware of the larger dimensions of life. One also hears constant repetition in the speeches of Hitler and in advertising."²⁸ (Nazi propaganda will resurface below, though not in connection to advertising.) Like Gottwald, Carter hears in minimalist repetition an unforgivable replication of the insidious forces of capitalism, although where Gottwald identified the factory, Carter finds the inexorable repetition of advertisements. But instead of rejecting Carter's association, Fink expands upon it, while at the same time shedding Carter's moralism.

For Fink, unlike for Carter, the connection between minimalism and advertising is not one of replication or moral complicity, but of cohabitation: "Minimalism is not simply an artistic translation of the language of advertising; it is an artistic exploration ... of how 'the language of

²⁸ Quoted in Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 63. Originally published in Michael Walsh, "The Heart Is Back in the Game," *Time* (September 20th, 1982): 60.

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advertising is reflected in us.”²⁹ Fink’s thesis relies upon a series of diverse observations, from the hypnotic production of desiring experienced in an evening’s television viewing or a stroll through the supermarket, to elaborately planned multi-media ad campaigns. The minimalist compositions Fink attaches to these phenomena are identifiable by their broad plateaus of repetition, but also by the smoothness of their transitions between their plateaus and their overall diversity—not so diverse as Carter’s music, to be sure, but more diverse than would be possible through a single process. The reasons for this are clear enough (no matter the repetitiveness of advertising, there remains a requisite diversity, on account of the diversity of products, the need to operate in different media, and the basic fact that advertisement is always embedded in content, such as television shows or magazine articles), but the musical repercussion is that the objects of Fink’s analysis—with the exception of Riley’s *In C*—tend to date from the last quarter of the twentieth century. Most early minimalism eschews the smoothness of transition and divergence from strict process that enables Fink’s comparison to advertisement. Fink is interested in postminimalism rather than minimalism. Discussing Reich’s *Octet/Eight Lines* (1979), Fink emphasizes the importance both of the diversity of formal sections and the smoothness of transition between them: “Reich, like a good 1970s TV producer, worked diligently to create that sense of flow, to smooth over the interruptions in his programming sequence.”³⁰

There is clearly a great distance between the pieces under discussion by Fink and Andre’s minimalism, and similarly between Reich’s strict process minimalism and his later *Octet*. Because of this, Fink’s commercial reading of minimalist music does not contradict our

²⁹ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 116.

³⁰ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 151.

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industrial reading. Fink does, however, explicitly contradict any reading of minimalist music in terms of industrial production: “It would be a serious epistemological misreading to see the repeated modules of minimalist process music as analogous to serial art, and thereby to the endless series of identical, material commodity-objects rolling off an assembly line.”³¹ This is surely true, just as Carter’s direct analogy between minimalism and advertising is a misreading. What we are arguing for her, however, is not an identity but a resonance. It should be clear that early process minimalism, which lacks the smooth transitions and harmonic diversity necessary for Fink’s reading of Reich’s *Octet*, fits poorly into Fink’s advertisement-based argument; instead, it seems useful to consider early process minimalism as, to borrow Fink’s expression, “an artistic exploration” of the cultural impact of industrial labor.

To conclude his remarks on *Octet/Eight Lines* and *In C*, Fink contrasts them with Louis Andriessen’s *Hoketus* (1975–1977), an early work by “an aggressively Marxist composer whose embrace of repetitive music was part of a polemical project to rescue it from the taint of advertising.”³² Fink points out many of the same features we would expect from early process minimalism—in particular Glass’s work from the late 1960: “Andriessen did absolutely nothing to soften the edges of his plateaus,” *Hoketus* is “Rhythmically complex” and “unremittingly loud.”³³ Of greatest importance are the disjunctive shifts between plateaus in *Hoketus*. While *Octet/Eight Lines* slips with some grace from one plateau to the next, *Hoketus* abruptly changes pitch and rhythmic collections without preamble of any sort. But instead of reading this as a

³¹ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 81.

³² Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 153.

³³ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 154. Fink also includes “fiercely dissonant”; the chromatic dissonances of *Hoketus* surely exceed the diatonic dissonances of early process minimalism.

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disruption of the repetitive flow, forcing the listener out of the entrained low attention level

crucial to Fink's advertising-based reading of minimalism, Fink argues that

it is Andriessen's pattern of clearly etched static plateaus separated by abrupt melodic jolts that most closely resembles the best working model ever proposed within the advertising world for how repetition actually motivates a consumer to buy.... What better cultural analogue to the musical structures we have just been discussing? Listeners traverse extended pitch plateaus, stretches of repetitive musical flow where nothing much seems to be happening, no tonal arguments are being made, but where they are actually learning without involvement, having the salience of certain melodic possibilities raised through gradual process. Then, in a musical version of what [advertising researcher Herbert] Krugman called the "behavior-choice situation," they encounter a quick rush of desiring-production, a sudden linear ascent that catalyzes accumulated melodic tensions they didn't even know they were feeling.³⁴

One ought to take note, however, of the different modes of agency in these two quite different moments. The customer who suddenly finds her- or himself purchasing goods without knowing why is the (perhaps unwitting) instigator of this disjunction. The listener for *Hoketus*, on the other hand, has no such agency—though perhaps more agency than Fink's "learning without involvement" implies. Fink is right to identify disjunctive moments in both of these processes, but it is not at all clear why—especially given the dramatically different time scale—they should be understood as equivalent or even analogous.

The implication of this reading is a regrettable blunting of Fink's interpretive thesis. If Reich's (post)minimalism resembles advertising for its *smoothness* of transition from plateau to plateau, and *Hoketus* resembles advertising for its *abruptness* of transition, then is the only avenue for shunning advertising culture in music a complete *avoidance* of repetition? Though Fink is quite adamant about his appreciation of Andriessen's music, he argues that the composer essentially fails in his Marxist project: "But in transposing the American pattern of static,

³⁴ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 156–157.

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process-driven plateaus in ascending linear sequence into his overtly modernist idiom, Andriessen incorporated, willy-nilly, the entire cultural formation he sought to banish.”³⁵ To some extent this is surely true; if Fink is right to associate all late-capitalist repetition with advertising, then Andriessen is forced, by the ubiquity of capitalism, to incorporate advertising in order to comment upon it. It is not at all apparent why the incorporation of repetition must be understood as complicity in advertising culture. It should also be clear that the fact that all three of the pieces Fink considers contain some sort of gradually ascending linear pattern built out of long stretches of repetition does not mean that the aesthetic implications of these three pieces are identical. In both *In C* and *Octet/Eight Lines*, the linear ascents identified by Fink are obscured by other important musical materials. In *In C* the aleatory overlapping of parts brings earlier and later moments in the ascent temporarily into coexistence, and indeed coexistence with immediately subsequent melodic developments. In *Octet/Eight Lines*, the identified ascent coexists with the much more active syncopated figures that at the very least serve to mask the changes in the harmonies of the violins which constitute Fink’s ascent. Fink’s isolation of only the violin part of the undulating harmonies of Reich’s *Octet* also ignores the occasional expansion of slow violin line downward in pitch space, accomplished by the addition of the lower strings. All of these facts, of which Fink is surely aware, starkly contrast with *Hocketus*’s naked stepwise ascent, which, unlike the examples from Riley and Reich, serves a transparently climactic function. Fink may be correct about the low-attention listener not perceiving this upward motion until it has reached its retrospectively inevitable climax (surely this depends upon the listener), but unlike both *In C* and *Octet/Eight Lines*, *Hocketus* does exhibit a climax,

³⁵ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 154.

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unadorned and unambiguous. It seems as though it is merely the coincident use of repetition that suggests to Fink that Andriessen's work implicates the world of advertising, but if we understand *Hoketus* as a descendant of minimalism, rather than *postminimalism* (with which it was at any rate contemporaneous), then Andriessen's repetitive gestures surely do more to recall the incessant, unnuanced realm of compulsory factory labor than the sophisticated machinations of the ad executive.

What I would like to suggest then is that Fink's reading of *Hoketus* is based too heavily upon a homogeneous reading of minimalism generally. By not observing the important formal and aesthetic differences between Reich the minimalist and Reich the postminimalist, Fink suggests that *Hoketus* tells an allegory of the hypnotized consumer wandering into a sale, a reading dependent not on the minimalist practice from which Andriessen borrows, but on the postminimalist practice analyzed by Fink. Climax, such as is fairly clearly portrayed not only by the completion of the linear ascent in *Hoketus*, but also by the brief metrical regularity put in place just prior to the climax, would be an odd enough gesture for an advertising allegory (when the allegorist is a Marxist). The advertising allegory also does nothing to explain the turn from a chordal rhythmic process to the halting monophonic rambling that follows the climax. *Hoketus* seems much more legible in the context of the cold but inhuman calculations of the factory, which are eventually broken apart by the destruction either of the factory or the worker, whose intense, processive struggle comes to a climactic end one way or another. In this respect *Hoketus* better recalls the cultural politics of minimalism rather than postminimalism, although Andriessen's piece modifies the model with the addition of a climax and the concomitant possibility of a much more political—even ideological—reading.

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What both Fink's and my readings of repetitive music have in common is an explicit challenge to the notion that minimal and postminimal music is neutral or anti-metaphorical. To conclude this chapter, I would like to extend this anti-neutral reading of minimalism to take into account an article dedicated to overthrowing the orthodox neutral reading of minimalist sculpture: Anna Chave's "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power." Doing so will occasion a revision of the account of Reich and Carl Andre found above. Indeed, the overlap of domestic and professional activities located within industrial labor make a feminist revision essential. We saw in Chapter 3 how some minimalism sits in an awkward relation to "masculine" production and "feminine" reproduction. The disavowal of the coherent and complete work of art (which we now know is not a characteristic that all minimalist music shares) rejects, or at least problematizes, outdated conceptions of artistic virility. In the cases of Andre and Reich, we can observe this disavowal extended further into the political/cultural climate of late capitalism. Robert Morris alters the role of the masculine artist to be he who presents—or makes present—the autonomous object, rather than he who creates the organic totality of the inspired work of art. Andre extends the domain of minimalism from the late modern into the industrial, advancing not so much chronologically as politically. Andre's role for the artist is not so much a mere presenter of an object, but an arranger of objects. Reich, as we've argued above, resonates interestingly (but not identically) with Andre.

In the Arendtian terms that have from time to time guided this dissertation, Andre's work—and by extension Reich's as well—must take on a challenging position with respect to the human condition. Sculptures such as Andre's *Equivalents* series or compositions such as Reich's *Piano Phase*, which manage to depend both upon vital human activity and a sort of anti-creative repetition (meant in an affirmative sense), affirm laborious repetition without romanticizing it.

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Industrial repetitive minimalism, whether in sculpture or music, eschews the bathetic idolatry of populism while affirming the laborer. This is impossible within Arendt's terms. Within the philosophy that has aided us in distinguishing between work and labor, Andre's and Reich's work can only be read as an affirmation of the animal at the expense of the unique human. Such a reading is understandably unsatisfying.

In Andre's case, it is first of all the insistence of his material that prevents his work from falling into the faceless homogeneity of Arendt's *animal laborans*. As both Meyer and Baker observe, Andre's work is not conceptual, in spite of its apparently Platonic geometrical rigor and ease of assembly. Reich too insists upon the anti-conceptuality of his work, as we saw in Chapter 4; indeed it is difficult to imagine authentically conceptual music that relies upon bodies for performance. A subplot that emerges from looking at Chave's feminist critique of minimalism is a recuperation by a certain strain of minimalism of unskilled factory work for masculinity. In what follows, we will use Chave's feminist reading of minimalist sculpture both to recuperate and deeply problematize Andre's and Reich's minimalism.

Chave's initial critique of minimalism addresses similar concerns to those engaged above. Why has it so often been the case that minimalism has been accepted as neutral, non-referential, and anti-metaphorical? Why, for example, can Kenneth Baker identify Carl Andre's work as the acme of anti-metaphorical sculpture and in the same chapter discuss the implications of its industrial material?³⁶ Additionally, if minimalism is not the pure, neutral object it is often supposed to be, what modality characterizes its use of allusion or referential material? Is minimalism complicit or critical?

³⁶ "No artist rejected metaphor more explicitly than Carl Andre." Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism*, 41.

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Chave, as we will see momentarily, draws on a number of minimalist works to argue for minimalism's implication in the dominant American structures of capitalism and patriarchy, but while we proceed to examine this argument, it is important to bear in mind the proposition laid out in the beginning of Chave's second article on minimalism: "Where the identity of the Minimalist movement is concerned, there can be no indelible ink and no orthodoxy, however, for there have been all along not one but multiple Minimalisms, different discursive configurations describing differing movements."³⁷ Thus, exceptions to the observations laid out below—and there are many, both in music and in sculpture, several of which are mentioned explicitly in Chave's own work—should be understood not as contradictions but as vital moments in which Chave's argument can enter into dialog with other manifestations of minimalism.

Because she is committed to the diversity of minimalism, Chave's feminist critique proceeds through example, finding in each case a different manifestation of what she terms the "rhetoric of power" in minimalism. Some of these examples are fairly straight forward: explicit phallic imagery is presented in the above-mentioned *Lever* by Carl Andre, and in Dan Flavin's *The Diagonal of May 25, 1963 (to Robert Rosenblum)*, which consists of a cool-white fluorescent light, arranged on the wall at a forty-five degree angle, referred to by the artist as "the diagonal of personal ecstasy."³⁸ Chave also cites Robert Morris's untitled sculpture from 1967, a wire mesh structure shaped in a closed off pen, "with its steel materials reminiscent of chain-link

³⁷ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (March, 2000), 149.

³⁸ Quoted in Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 45. Chave quotes Andre: "Most sculpture is priapic with the male organ in the air. In my work, Priapus is down on the floor." (46) Images of the two works in question are available in the same article, on pages 50 and 49, respectively.

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fences, [that] evokes not corporate, but carceral images, of discipline and punishment, that intrude aggressively on the viewers' sensibilities."³⁹

Chave's most extensive comments are directed at Frank Stella's black paintings of 1958 and 1959. Instead of adopting the orthodoxy of Stella's most famous comment on these paintings—"What you see is what you see"—Chave attends closely to the dark titles Stella gave to these pieces. Referencing Nazism (*Die Fahne Hoch, Arbeit Macht Frei*) and other politically or socially compromised situations (*Arundel Castle*, "an apartment building in the Bedford-Stuyvesant ghetto of Brooklyn," and *Bethlehem's Hospital*)⁴⁰, the titles of Stella's Black Paintings belie the positivist simplicity that has been so important to their critical reception. But instead of using this evidence hastily to dismiss the neutrality of minimalism, Chave argues for a nuanced and complicated reading, suggesting that the dark and even violent titles interact with the objecthood of the paintings to create thick and contradictory layers of meaning. Chave then uses the conflict between title and objecthood to return to form, where she observes a resonance between Stella's painting and the geometric order of Albert Speer's architecture and the thin pinstripes of the American business suit.

As we will shortly see, linking minimalist sculptural practice to extra-sculptural or even extra-artistic cultural practices earned Chave some pointed criticism. When Chave links Stella's black stripes to corporate pinstripes, she is not making the simple claim that any use of thin straight lines slips a work of art directly into the language of corporate domination. Instead, she argues that the precision and coldness of these paintings, in conjunction with their grimly

³⁹ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 56. An image of the Morris work in question can be found on page 45.

⁴⁰ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 49.

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allusive titles, suggest the same sort of faux-neutrality that characterizes corporate culture. For Chave, a great deal of minimalist plastic art replicates many of the same tropes of masculinity and authoritarianism that have characterized much of European art history, not through the naked bravura of abstract expressionism, but by internalizing cultural propositions of the natural dominance of masculinity. Minimalism's commingling of cool and aggressive formal characteristics—its complete rejection of expressivity on the one hand and the severity of its geometric or even industrial rigor on the other—produce a quintessentially late-modern rhetoric of power.

For Chave, minimalism's masculinity is in part a product of its unprecedented engagement with the tools of modern facture. "By manufacturing objects with common industrial and commercial materials in a restricted vocabulary of geometric shapes, Judd and the other minimalist artists availed themselves of the cultural authority of the markers of industry and technology."⁴¹ As Chave relates, many critics overlooked the latently authoritative quality of minimalist materiality, opting, as we have seen for example in Fried's case, to read the situation in terms of its neutrality or objecthood. Chave asserts that the neutral project of minimalism masks something much more sinister:

From this perspective, minimalism can be seen as replicating—and at times, perhaps, as implicating—"those systems of mediation which have (over)determined our history: Money, the Phallus, and the Concept as privileged operators of meaning." The perceived neutrality of Minimalist objects might also be explained, however, by the fact that the qualities or values they exemplify—unfeelingness and a will to control or dominate—are transparent by their very ubiquity. With closer scrutiny, in short, the blank face of Minimalism may come into focus as the face of capital, the face of authority, the face of the father.⁴²

⁴¹ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 44.

⁴² Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 51. Chave quotes from Alice Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Women in Modernity*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985),

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Part of Chave's project is to address why so many outsider responses to minimalism have been so different from the orthodox critical readings of minimalism as neutral. (She begins her essay, for example, with an anecdote of two young women kicking and then kissing a Judd sculpture while the museum guard looks on indifferently.) Part of her provisional conclusion is that "what disturbs viewers most about Minimalist art may be what disturbs them about their own lives and times, as the face it projects is the society's blankest, steeliest face; the impersonal face of technology, industry, and commerce; the unyielding face of the father: a face that is usually far more attractively masked."⁴³

To understand the specificity of what Chave refers to as minimalism's "rhetoric of power," we must recall the argument put forth by Hal Foster in his canonical article, "The Crux of Minimalism," discussed in an earlier chapter. Foster, who plays an institutional role in the neutralizing reception of minimalism against which Chave argues, seeks to position minimalist art as both the conclusion of modernism and the inception of postmodernism. It therefore must demonstrate both the reductive formal character called for by Clement Greenberg, and the death of the author (attributed to Roland Barthes, but, as we saw, perhaps without perfect accuracy). Although Foster undertakes his project with intentions both politically and artistically progressive (*The Return of the Real*, in which "The Crux of Minimalism" appears, begins with a chapter associating neo-expressionism and Reaganism, suggesting the moral vacancy of both, and also recalling Makis Solomos's reading of postmodern music, discussed in a previous chapter), Chave identifies in this postmodern orthodoxy a disavowed masculine authority that feminists have become accustomed to spotting in otherwise progressive humanist projects.

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⁴³ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," 55.

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Chave borrows a concise expression from Craig Owens to describe the death of authorship attributed to minimalism: “Authoritarianism masquerading as anti-authoritarianism.”⁴⁴

Within the context of this masquerade, the claims for impersonality, authorlessness, or neutrality made on behalf of minimalism recall and can be associated with the ubiquitous “normality” of white, heterosexual, cis-gendered maleness, and in turn with the authoritative economic and political position most commonly filled by such individuals. This is a much different claim than the far stronger one many of Chave’s critics attribute to her. Chave does not, as Edward Strickland claims, demand “some retroactive disavowal of Nazism” from Stella, nor does she compare the painter “to nihilistic teenagers sporting Nazi regalia.”⁴⁵ Strickland also overreads Chave’s more general association of minimalist austerity and geometry; while Chave understands minimalism as tapping into the same mute authority instrumentalized by Albert Speer to much different ends, she surely stops well short of “prosecutorially [allying] much of it [minimalism] to Nazi architecture.”⁴⁶ Meyer accuses Chave of invoking Nazism ahistorically, a charge with Chave succinctly rebuts: “[M]y references to Albert Speer are not ‘stunningly ahistorical,’ but are linked to Tony Smith’s and Frank Stella’s interest in him.”⁴⁷ Asserting Nazi associations is surely an inflammatory proposition, but Chave is careful to insist that this is not a simple question of mimicry, representation, or advocacy. Instead, minimalism is seen to be

⁴⁴ Quoted in Anna Chave, “Minimalism and Biography,” 158. Originally published in Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 149.

⁴⁵ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 104.

⁴⁶ Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins*, 266.

⁴⁷ Anna Chave, review of James Meyer, *Art and Polemics in the Sixties*, *Tate: The Art Magazine* 6, (Autumn 2001), 73.

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accessing the same mute, ostensibly neutral vocabulary that made Speer's work so fitting to its gruesome occasion.

Before returning to the dual question of Andre and Reich, we do well to pause briefly and contemplate the minimalist composer most readily associated with authoritarianism: La Monte Young. In the previous chapter we saw that Young has been, especially since 1964, ardently attentive to precise control, and further that his insistence on controlling the output of the Theater of Eternal Music has earned him some quite public criticisms, including a satirical comparison to Pythagoras, a figure not known for his democratic spirit. Clearly, Young's minimalist output is well understood in terms of dictatorial control, in which the artist has complete authority over the product. But this is a much different thing from what Chave is arguing for. Young's is a different sort of minimalist authority: not the cold geometry of right angles and serial repetition, but an ancient geometry of complex and (for many) indecipherable ratios. It is not a modern language, and certainly not one of advanced capitalism. If Young masks his authoritarianism in a cloak of anti-authoritarianism, it is with the rhetoric of tradition, not modernity or capitalism.

The scale, precision, and mysticism of Young's minimalism bear little relation to Chave's rhetoric of power; Reich's process music, on the other hand, does have a suggestive correspondence. Where Young's music relies on ancient principles, Reich's refers to industrial repetition. Where Young's requires the honed expertise of a disciplined singer, Reich's deploys rudimentary techniques pushed to the limits of endurance and attention. What the two minimalisms do have in common, and which they shared on most accounts with Riley and Glass as well, is volume. Though Reich was not performed as loudly as was Young, he and many of his contemporaries did prefer a loudly amplified sound, one easily associable with force and control. According to Craig Haze, Riley considered a loud volume to be a useful tool against the

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anxiety of audience indifference, supposing that if he played loudly enough, people would feel compelled to stay. “When Terry performs, he uses a fairly large sound system capable of producing relatively high sound levels. He has half jokingly said on occasion that he plays as loud as he does in order to keep people in their seats, for fear, I suppose, that if the amplitude of the music was less intimidating, he would lose control, and the audience would get up and leave.”⁴⁸ An early performance of Reich’s *Four Organs* was reportedly received by, amongst other things, a satirical plea for relief, with the promise of a confession offered in exchange, as if the performers were practicing an enhanced interrogation rather than music.⁴⁹

The loudness of minimalism, especially as Riley allegedly characterized it, may operate at least in part similarly to the use of industrial materials in minimalist sculpture. Chave suggests that “Flavin’s dependence on technological artifacts for his work may evince the sense of impotence visited on the once sovereign, universal (read: male) subject by the ascendancy of technology.”⁵⁰ This reading of minimalist materiality is based in part on Adorno’s reading of the rise of late capitalism, in which the exponential expansion of technology and the dissolution of the natural world disenfranchises the subject of capitalism, leaving him—in the rhetorical case of most minimalist sculpture—frustrated, never able to achieve the mastery that is part and parcel with being “manly.” In an endnote designed in part to address the many and misdirected criticisms of “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” Chave expands upon this point:

[“Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power”] suggests that the insistent visual rhetoric of power that typifies the art of the Minimalist canon, and which is suggestively, subtly, or constructively deployed by some of its members in certain works than in others, may be understood as a form of decompensation.... Flavin’s ... white fluorescent tube ... was

⁴⁸ Craig Haze, “Terry Is a Solo Act,” in *Music with Roots in the Aether*, Robert Ashley ed., (Musiktexte: Cologne, 2000), 201.

⁴⁹ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, 71.

⁵⁰ Anna Chave, “Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power,” 45.

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subject to burning out and having its plugged pulled, after all, and Andre's *Lever* ... comprises at best an atomized phallus, with the integrity of the line of unjoined bricks vulnerable to the least nudge of a passing foot.⁵¹

Musical minimalism, especially in Reich's and Glass's cases, is similarly phallic in this atomized sense. Insistent, powerful, and uniformly so on both counts, process minimalism deals not in the humanistic masculinity of Susan McClary's Beethoven, where the narrative rises to climax before falling into relaxation, but instead in the impossible masculinity of late modernism, always strong, always perfect, unbending and impervious. And at the same time, each of these live process compositions, especially those of a single timbre and a single line, present a constant risk of disarray (a fact beautifully exposed by Rzewski's *Les Moutons de Panurge*, in which performers are not only expected but permitted to make mistakes).

Reading minimalist music in this way requires us first to acknowledge that masculinity in American society underwent significant changes as the 1960s approached. These changes are excellently detailed, with markedly different agendas in each case, in Peter Stearns's *American Cool* and in Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America*.⁵² Stearns, a historian, argues that the trajectory of American emotional culture from the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century traces a steady abandonment of more or less Victorian sensibilities in favor of what he calls the American cool. By the middle of the twentieth century, new standards of behavior had come into place which "altered the ways in which many Americans responded to other people's emotions, creating such a significant bias against strong emotional expressions that it was often the emotional individual, not the object of his or her emotion, who was seen as requiring

⁵¹ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and Biography," 162, fn 57.

⁵² Peter Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994); Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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remediation.”⁵³ Increasingly, normative emotional behavior consisted in self reliance and emotional isolation, with a particular emphasis on self control. According to Stearns, though these changes took effect for men and women, it was men from whom the greatest degree of isolation was expected, especially when it came to emotional interactions.

[A]n important gap also opened between men and women in their respective interpretations of the new emotional culture. Men most clearly moved toward a distaste for emotional exchange on the grounds that individuals should exert self-control, while many women preferred to seek and provide an audience for the verbal venting of intense sentiments. Here the quarrel was not about the need to control emotions but about the role of others in facilitating this process.... Differences in expectations about support from others added to this new, subtle but potentially bitter gender gap. By the 1960s, women’s claims of men’s excessive coldness become commonplace, both within and without the growing feminist movement; and women were echoed by many in the small band of “men’s liberationists.” Men, so the argument went, were too rigidly closed to their own emotions and too intolerant of others’ needs for emotional expression; women were no more emotional in fact, but they were more aware and certainly more mutually supportive. Aside from the liberationist wing, men largely seemed to ignore these jeremiads, and polls in the 1970s and 1980s reveal men’s strong belief that women were too emotional and too dependent on an audience for their emotional experiences. This was in fact one of the chief grievances men manifested against women, so the difference was far from trivial.⁵⁴

Stearns’s narrative establishes a wide-spread cultural ground for the autonomous rigor of minimalist sculpture and process-oriented minimalist music. Like so many islands in the sea, these pieces and sculptures rely only upon their own formal processes, denying any animistic expression. (Recall Michael Fried’s unease with minimalism’s refusal to reveal its artistic truth through presentness.) Expressionless art is not the sole provenance of minimalism, however; Cage’s music, for example, presents a similar degree of autonomous expressionlessness. Michael Kimmel’s work will take us the rest of the way to minimalism. For Kimmel, who regrettably does not directly address Stearns’s work, The development of modern masculinity is a story of

⁵³ Peter Stearns, *American Cool*, 230.

⁵⁴ Peter Stearns, *American Cool*, 248–249.

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lost narratives and impossible heroes. Kimmel modifies Betty Friedan's famous expression, characterizing the normative masculinity many men felt compelled to pursue as the "masculine mystique." By the 1960s—the decade in which Stearns's American cool finally came to fruition—the masculine mystique had come to appear more and more unattainable and unrealistic.

In the 1960s the "masculine mystique"—that impossible synthesis of sober, responsible breadwinner, imperviously stoic master of his fate, and swashbuckling hero—was finally exposed as a fraud. The constant search for some masculine terra firma upon which to ground a stable identity has never provided firm footing for Self-Made Men; by the 1960s gradual erosion and uneasy footing had become a landslide. All the marginalized groups whose suppression had been thought to be necessary for men to build secure identities began to rebel.⁵⁵

Kimmel's reading of the rise of American cool masculinity coincides with an understanding of the psychological stress of idealism, particularly as it intersects with the decreased autonomy of the American laborer and the increased liberation of the traditionally oppressed. Lacking both the convenience of a downward social comparison and the autonomy allegedly associated with capitalism but which had increasingly attenuated in the middle class with the rising ubiquity of labor, the mythic autonomous white male now experienced manhood in the same terms of impotence used by Chave to describe the minimalist rhetoric of power.

Chave's argument suggests an awareness that the omnipotence and autonomy of the new masculinity is an impossible enterprise, that holding this facade in place is done at the constant risk of cracks appearing in the surface. Musical process minimalism follows suit, being obsessively consistent, but also, excepting Reich's tape compositions, constantly in danger of falling apart. The self-professed torture victim at that early performance of *Four Organs*

⁵⁵ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 173–174.

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correctly identifies the best example of this expression of masculinity in minimalist music. The five performers of *Four Organs* make up the largest ensemble Reich had deployed to that point, but unlike his later ensemble pieces, *Four Organs* is consistently exposed. The piece begins in an irregular meter and transitions into expanding measure lengths, making it difficult for performers to rely upon groove. Mistakes would be difficult to correct or ignore. Like Andre's bricks, a slight nudge could bring the edifice into disarray. And as suggested above, successful performance of Reich's work is unlikely to earn a musician the title of *virtuoso*. Instead, the diligent performer succeeds in performing the assigned task; they are, to some extent, normal musicians: admired for their hard work and consistency, not for their transcendence.

In contrast, Terry Riley's *In C*—identified by Robert Fink as the essential example of minimalist other-directedness⁵⁶—retains all the cool of Stearns's new American emotional culture without the anxiety identified by Kimmel. The crucial difference here is that while in *Four Organs* the players must attend to each other in order to stay perfectly in line, in *In C* mutual attention enables adaptability and personal choice. It is much easier to hear *In C* as a collection of distinct performers whose capacity for musical expression—which is not necessarily to say emotional expression—depends on their mutual receptivity. *Four Organs* on the other hand, and process minimalism more generally, tends to obscure the capacity of the individual to make useful and socially permissible choice. The individual is surely still present, but bereft of social self-determination, listening out of fear of making a mistake, not in order to generate a new and unique musical structure. In *Four Organs*, the performers are implicitly vulnerable; in *In C*, performers can drop out and re-enter at their leisure, since no single player is

⁵⁶ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves*, 89.

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uniquely responsible for any given melodic utterance. The approach of postminimalism, first heard in *Drumming* and fully developed in *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, moves Reich closer to Riley's safety in diversity; the regular rhythms and denser textures direct attention to the totality of the (organic) composition, rather than the exposed actions of a few intent performers. Glass's early post-minimalist efforts, such as *Music in Twelve Parts* and *Music with Changing Parts*, also exemplify this change when individual performers are permitted to drop out and return as their stamina permits.

One of the fruitful results of exploring Chave's minimalist rhetoric of power within the context of minimalist music is that it keeps the diversity of minimalisms intact. The frantic repetition of process minimalism references not only the anxious impotence of middle-class white masculinity, but also the emotionally cool sensibility of much of the 1960s avant-garde. Fink's warning, cited above, against too strong an insistence on the divergence of counter-culture and advertising culture is well heeded here: we can see in Stearns and minimalism alike a cultural preference for emotional stillness and control. Young's minimalism is similarly cool—recall his insistence that he is not self-expressive, but instead a conduit for the expression of timeless musical ideas—but instead of running up against the crisis of the loss of heroic masculinity Kimmel associates with the 1960s, Young turned to the East and to the past, establishing himself as a guru and a master of musical materials.

* * *

The radical novelty of minimalism, in both sculpture and music, coupled the tendency of artists in both disciplines to avoid the standard cultural markers of their artistic disciplines, made minimalism a difficult occurrence to receive critically. It is little wonder that sculpture and music alike were misunderstood as blank, nihilistic, conceptual, or anti-artistic; most of the elements

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critics had come to expect in a work of sculpture or music had been omitted. Instead of development, complexity, or indeterminacy, minimalist music presented repetition and drones. Minimalist sculpture adopted strategies that circumvented the need for compositional balance or artistic touch. Static and neutral is surely how these works of art seem in comparison to most of their predecessors.

The use of culturally marked materials, though—whether it be bricks or bulbs, or speech, song, or even diatonic melodic fragments—prevents neutrality, even if the cultural marking of these materials is difficult to see. Minimalism's markings are not the colorful reproductions of comic book iconography we find in Roy Lichtenstein's work, or the politically charged songs used as the basis for Rzewski's *Four North American Ballads*. Instead the minimalism of Andre and Reich hides its cultural allusions in plain sight. The forms are uniform, avoiding the narrative arc so often associated with socially allusive work (cf. *Hoketus*), but they are also aggressive and rigid. Where Andre has coarse, solid brick, Reich has the amplified and implacable walls of sound in *Piano Phase* and *Four Organs*. These pieces and sculptures feature a strength and aggressiveness that "static" and "neutral" do not comprehend.

But it is repetition that brings the work of Andre and Reich into the arena of the politics of mid-twentieth-century masculinity. By repeating his bricks and doing so through a formal scheme that depends upon the form of the material itself, Andre foregrounds the contradiction inherent in industrial reproducibility: the reproduced object is both identical to every other such object and individually unique, composed of both the same material out of which every other such object is composed *and* composed only of the unique material that makes up its own substance. Because Andre also arranges his materials, and does so in an algorithmic, easily repeatable way, we can see a suggestion that the contradiction implicit in reproducible materials

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is equally inherent in the labor that produces them. As Arendt says, these laborers are indistinct, but as Cavarero says, they are also unique. Reich's music replicates this economy but with a different emphasis. As a temporal art form, music does not deal in the end-products of industrial fabrication. Instead, we have only the physically demanding reality of the labor itself. And this is not the simple brick-laying labor of Andre's work, but the arduous repetitive labor of the factory. Like the underground laborers of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, Reich's musicians focus intently to operate their machinery with precision. The music characteristically avoids the personal touch often expected from musicians. The performance is a feat of hard work and concentration, not of inspiration, genius, or sensitivity. Live performance underlines this particular component of Reich's music. The acoustic effect is a precise, almost machinic musical object; the visual effect consists of the performing bodies of so many unique beings. It is the music of labor, not of work. The powerful and aggressive visual and acoustic rhetoric of minimalism affirms that this is not merely a presentation of labor, but an assertion of the authority of labor, rescued from the nineteenth-century association of labor with inferiority. The affirmation implicit in Reich's music should deter misunderstandings such as Gottwald's; in process minimalism labor is figured as vital, not as derogated.

Chave reminds us though that this work is not simply a rose colored affirmation of the laborer. The cultural markers of aggression pointed to above can successfully pass unnoticed under the watchful gaze of many a critic because of the presumed universality and false neutrality of the masculine subject position. The minimalism of Andre and Reich may be a labor-oriented minimalism, but it is undertaken in a cultural climate during which masculinity, anxiety, and labor were coming to a crisis. The finally entrenched cultural practice of American cool shifts American masculinity away from the defiant expressivity of the New York School of

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painting (or of the Viennese School of post-tonal composition), toward complete stoicism and impervious rigidity; in the climate of cool personal expression becomes taboo amongst men. The new American man neither cried nor cried out in frustration or defiance. But as we've seen from Michael Kimmel, the facade of coolness has cracks in it. Masculinity is personally unmaintainable, fragile. Chave points to the want of mortar in Andre's sculpture, making them vulnerable to a passing foot. Reich's precise compositions require constant focus lest they slip out of step. For all the outward strength, this is a minimalism in constant danger of collapse.

The narrative of this chapter began with Michael Fried's comments on the literal quality of minimalist sculpture, and it is perhaps with a return to Fried that we would best conclude. When Fried decided on the theater as the governing metaphor for his attack on minimalist sculpture, he implicitly brought along with it issues of temporality, relationality, and materiality. We have seen in previous chapters how the first two of these themes can be developed within the context of minimalist music, and we have now seen an exploration of what the material corporeality of minimalist sculpture might imply for minimalist music. Far from the non-allusive neutrality Fried implied by invoking "objecthood," we find in minimalist music as in minimalist sculpture the potential for reference and allusion. We have not been exhaustive in this survey (or in the surveys in the previous chapters). It should particularly be emphasized that the claims made here about Reich and Andre extend very poorly, or perhaps not at all, to Young, Riley, Truitt, or LeWitt. This result lies well within the intent of this dissertation to elaborate upon the differences within the field of minimalism.

* * *

This dissertation began with a project that, now much changed, has become Chapter 5. Concerned by the aesthetic and formal incongruities between La Monte Young and Steve Reich,

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I turned to Anna Chave's art criticism with the intention of developing a theory of authentic minimalist music rooted in minimalist sculpture. But while the underlining impulse to develop a more critical view of minimalist music has been retained, several of the categorical presumptions about authenticity or truth of minimalism have been shed. My initial analysis relied upon the suppositions that minimalist sculpture could be accurately—or worse, correctly—encapsulated within a single critical model, and that that model would in turn help to identify authenticity in minimalist music. As I became better acquainted with the reception of minimalist music and art, it became clear that the inconsistencies of definition within the secondary literature were the result not only of differences in reasoning from one author to the next, but often fundamentally of an understanding—almost certainly adopted prior to the act of analysis—of what minimalism is, and what compositions, sculptures, and paintings constituted the minimalist field. With no consistency of definition even within the field of minimalist sculptural criticism, the task of defining minimalist music through recourse to sculptural practice becomes both impossible and pointless.

But what appears at first to be an impasse instead serves to enable a variety of united approaches to exploring minimalist music anew. If definitions of minimalism are arbitrary and mutable, then conducting a critical reading of minimalist music based upon a particular definition of minimalist sculpture grants us no new gains. But when attention is shifted from what minimalist sculpture is to what minimalist sculptural criticism does, we find the beginnings of a critical approach. This ultimately is the justification for adopting Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" as the centerpiece for an understanding of minimalist sculptural criticism, in spite of the ethical compulsion to incorporate the issue of gender into my analysis. Fried's criticism can hardly be justified as "true," least of all to the artists themselves, who could not be expected

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to endorse an essay written at their expense. “Art and Objecthood” also does not, as we have seen, demonstrate any particular awareness of the role of gender in art reception. What “Art and Objecthood” has been is useful, to opponents and admirers of minimalism alike, and it has continued to be useful here. But while Fried’s polemic was meant to unify minimalist sculpture as a coherent threat to modernist art, here it is used to divide minimalist music, with the intent of uncovering the internal differences concealed by sharing the name “minimalist” in common. For while Fried’s theory of theatricality serves a homogenizing purpose, it carries within it a variety of arguments, each of which can be worked at and used as a lens for scrutinizing minimalism generally. The result is not either coherence or partition, but dispersion, as the works of each of the canonical minimalists reacts differently to each mode of analysis.

Fried’s theory of theatricality is a corporeal theory, and where there are bodies there is gender. And the subject of gender, excepting of course much of the feminist work done on the subject, as well as work inspired by feminism, has historically drawn people to consider differences only between categories, and similarities within. Work done by academic feminists concerned with dismantling the essentialist tradition of thinking gender as biology and biology as destiny, has provided an ethical example to follow in facing the stylistic categories we inherit from (even very recent) music history. Because of what feminism has to teach us about the role of difference in gender, students of music can pry at the differences within minimalism without expecting either to find an underlying similarity, or that the house will come crumbling down if there turns out to be no foundation to find. Even while we may find little enough in common between Reich and Young, they both remain equally minimalist. It is my hope, furthermore, that scholarly attention to difference outside the domain of gender—or more accurately, within

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domains not physically constituted by gendered bodies—will participate in the process of training minds to think gender more ethically, as part of an aesthetic education in difference.

Like many musicians of my generation, I was first introduced to minimalist music in a college survey course. The presentation of minimalism focused on three things: repetition, simplicity, and a return to consonance (or a turn away from dissonance). La Monte Young, perhaps owing to the technical difficulty of presenting his music faithfully in a short span of time, was not included. Riley received some attention. The bulk of the lesson covered Reich and Glass, making little distinction between early and late work, and happily referring to all of it equally as minimalist. It was Reich whose music captured my affection; *It's Gonna Rain*, *Four Organs*, and *Music for Eighteen Musicians* quickly took their places amongst my favorite compositions. At the time, the idea that each of these pieces was called minimalist troubled me very little, since the similarities between these pieces overwhelmed not only their differences from other compositions with which I was familiar, but my interest in listening closely for differences as well. I heard repetition, simplicity (even predictability), and consonance (relative to contemporaneous composition).

Through the course of this dissertation it has been made clear that I no longer find these three pieces to have very much in common. With the fiftieth anniversary of many of the first minimalist compositions fast approaching, the shock—or even scandal—of their original treatment of consonance and repetition has long since worn off. That which bound them together against the perceived institutional bulwark of 1960s advanced music—the shock of a “serious” composer writing process-driven, simple music instead of working with either indeterminacy or overdeterminacy—no longer carries the cultural weight it once did. The stylistic terminology we inherit from early minimalist criticism has therefore become slightly misleading; distinguishing

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between the new simplicity explored in New York City in the 1960s and '70s and the finely-wrought intricacies associated with Darmstadt does more to define what minimalism isn't than what it is, and yet we are left with the impression that minimalism can and should be defined positively, as what it is, by what all minimalist compositions must have in common. The implication of positivity is strategically useful for an undergraduate survey course, but it dissolves under scrutiny. Now, especially after listing with the corporeality of minimalist sculpture in mind, *Music for Eighteen Musicians* sounds lush, complex, and above all organic. Process, initially understood as mechanical, now sounds biological. Thinking the time of *Four Organs* gives voice to the anxiety induced by the composition, as mensural determinacy fades and a sense of linear verticality arises. And the body-political depth of *It's Gonna Rain* make a purely process-driven listening feel inexcusably cruel.

And this ultimately has been the directing conception of this dissertation, that minimalism, like most retroactively organized bodies, is not organized after all. There are likely to be connections between one example of minimalism and another—the foundational example of comparing minimalist sculpture to music is merely the most general example of this principle—but these connections will serve as well to illuminate difference as to reinforce similarity.

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