

# Musical Minimalism: Is It a Misnomer?

## Müzikal Minimalizm: Bir Yanıltıcı Ad Mı?

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### Abstract

Whether the term 'minimal' is appropriate for the music to which it refers to has been a subject of debate among scholars and composers. Many alternative terms were suggested as substitutions or complements. Consequently, the extent to which minimalist music is minimal has been discussed. Most of the previous studies on the distinctive qualities of minimal music and whether the term is misleading provided either a discussion of the alternative terminology or a comparison of minimal art and music; on the other hand, this essay aims to investigate the ways in which minimal music is 'minimal' with a broader view from the perspectives of different disciplines, which is necessary.

First, previous studies on understanding why such music and art are considered 'minimal' are reviewed and compared. To establish a broader perspective for accuracy, the focus is not limited to the period between the 1960s and 1980s, when minimalist music appeared, developed, and flourished. Sociocultural dynamics surrounding this art and music are also considered since they reflect in the surface qualities of the works; hence a two-way relationship. However, the related sociocultural aspects are only briefly mentioned since they are not in the main scope of this study. Second, the first known publication in which the term is used in a distinctive musical context is presented and discussed in addition to the other starting points suggested by scholars; moreover, the spectrum is broadened with the first publication in which the term was used in the arts due to the reason that there is a direct relationship between the two. Third, a comparison and discussion of minimal art and minimal music is provided regarding the main question of whether minimal music is a misnomer by choosing two representative works from each discipline. Fourth, alternative terminology is discussed in an attempt to provide an answer to the fundamental question, the objective of the paper.

At the end of the historical, theoretical and aesthetic enquiry, it is proposed that the term 'minimal' is not completely inaccurate to denote this music; however, regarding minimalist music as the 'emancipation of repetition' provides more insight into evaluating its importance in Western art music.

**Keywords:** Minimalist Music, Minimalism, Minimalist Art, 20th Century Music, Repetitive Music

## Özet

'Minimal' teriminin atfedildiği müzik için uygun olup olmadığı besteciler ve araştırmacılar arasında uzun zaman boyunca tartışma konusu olmuştur. Tamamlayıcı olmaları veya 'minimalizm'in yerini almaları gibi çeşitli amaçlar ile bu terim yerine birçok alternatif önerilmiştir. Bu kavramsal tartışmalar beraberinde, ilgili müziğin hangi bakımlardan 'minimal' olduğunun bir sorgulamasını getirmiştir. Müzikal minimalizmin ayırt edici özellikleri üzerine yapılmış olan önceki çalışmaların birçoğu ya alternatif terminolojinin bir kritiğini ya da minimal müzik ile minimal sanatın bir karşılaştırmasını sunmaktadır. Ancak, bu çalışma, müzikal minimalizmin hangi yönlerden minimal olduğunu çokdisipliner bir yöntemle irdelemektir ki bu, elzemdir.

Öncelikle, bu müzik ve sanatın neden 'minimal' olarak değerlendirildiği üzerine yapılmış olan çalışmalar incelenmiş ve birbirleriyle karşılaştırılmıştır. Doğruluk açısından daha geniş bir bakış açısı elde edebilmek için, odak noktası bu müziğin ortaya çıktığı, geliştiği ve yaygınlaştığı 1960'lar ve 1980'ler arasındaki dönemle sınırlı tutulmamış, 19. yy. müziğinden günümüze kadar olan geniş bir zaman aralığını ele almak tercih edilmiştir. Ayrıca, bu müziği ve sanatı çevreleyen sosyokültürel dinamikler de dikkate alınmıştır çünkü ilgili eserlerin yüzeysel özelliklerine doğrudan yansımaktadırlar. Ancak, ilgili sosyokültürel dinamikler çalışmanın ana odak noktasında yer almadıklarından dolayı sadece gerekli görülen yerlerde, kısaca değinilmişlerdir. İkincil olarak, terimin spesifik bir müzikal bağlamda kullanıldığı bilinen ilk yayın sunulmuş ve akademisyenler tarafından önerilen diğer başlangıç noktaları ile birlikte tartışılmıştır; ayrıca, müzikal minimalizm ile arasında doğrudan bir ilişki olması nedeniyle terimin sanatta ilk kez kullanıldığı varsayılan metne de yer verilmiştir. Üçüncül olarak, bu çalışmanın ana sorusu olan 'müzikal minimalizmin bir hatalı adlandırma olup olmadığı'na cevaplamaya yönelik, müzikte minimalizm ve sanatta minimalizm, bu iki disiplinden birer temsili eserin seçilmesi yöntemi ile tartışılmıştır. Dördüncül olarak, alternatif terminoloji, çalışmanın ana sorusuna yönelik bir cevap bulabilmek adına tartışılmıştır.

Tarihsel, teorik ve estetik incelemenin sonunda, 'minimal' teriminin bu müziği ifade etmek için tamamen yanlış olmadığı, ancak minimalist müziği 'tekrarın özgürleşmesi' olarak görmenin, bu müziğin Batı sanat müziğindeki önemini değerlendirmede daha isabetli bir yaklaşım olacağı sonucuna varılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Minimalist Müzik, Minimalizm, Minimalist Sanat, 20. Yüzyıl Müziği, Tekrarıcı Müzik

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The music that appeared in the US at the beginning of the 1960s has changed the course of music history: new stylistic preferences on the surface level and conceptual perspectives on the aesthetic level have brought new means of expression into art music, or in some cases, a 'non-expression'. On the other hand, performing these works at art galleries before their wider acceptance by opera houses, concert halls and academia, contributed to a dynamic change in the sociocultural interactions between the works, their creators, and the audience. In other words, the conventions of the art music listener have been challenged and changed, subsequently, many non-classical and non-Western musical works were invited to this new art music, which has strong avant-garde roots. It is a matter of question whether minimal music still continues. Furthermore, many composers would respond to this question by saying 'Thankfully it does not' due to the historical anxiety surrounding the term since "It is the word itself which seems to have become the lightning rod for composers's annoyance" (Bernard, 2003, p. 113). Many alternative words were suggested to name this music but Michael Nyman's half-serious, rather humorous categorisation has remained the dominant: 'minimal music' (Nyman, 1968). An enquiry into the relevance of the term 'minimal' in signifying the musical and extra-musical qualities it denotes is necessary for mainly two interconnected reasons. Firstly, some of the composers were not happy with the label 'minimal' attributed to their music due to, but not limited to, the misleading, downgrading or even pejorative use and implications of the term. Philip Glass, for instance, preferred to limit the term 'minimal' for his early works (Page, 1980), namely *Music in Similar Motion* (1969), since his works after the 1970s are more complex in terms of sections, subsequently sonority, and then, consequently harmonic motion. Secondly, the term 'minimal', or its misinterpretations, in addition to causing anxiety, couraged the idea that minimalism is a musical device as if it could be employed when desired and could be left when it is not wanted (Bernard, 2003). This aspect of the term is identified and categorised by Johnson (1994) as *minimalism as a technique*; in other words, a compositional device. While this is not invalid, such a perspective is, in the end, likely to make musicians disregard the new sense of tonality minimalism brought (Bernard, 2003), which has affected contemporary classical music at large.

Many other terms are suggested as counterparts or complements; Nickleson (2023) claimed that the history of minimalism could be regarded as the 'battle of homonyms'. Warburton (1988) surveyed some of them to provide a ground for prospective researchers in the field whilst not giving attention to minimal art. To understand in what ways this music is minimal and what it has brought to both on technical and extra-musical levels, whether it still continues or not, what its connection is with sociocultural changes during the 1960s and what the resulting repercussions are, minimal art must be taken into consideration since it was where the term originated. Furthermore, the four protagonists (Riley, Young, Reich and Glass) were all in collaboration with minimalist artists, art galleries and museums, where this music flourished at in addition to New York City lofts. Bernard (1993) surveyed minimalist music and minimalist art together and stated that the term 'minimal' is not completely inappropriate for this music, which I agree with. In one of the recent publications on musical minimalism, *Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Post-minimalist Music* (2013), Potter suggests two alternative minimalism in a successful attempt to 'mapping early minimalism', which provides an important insight on the divergent but also connected sides of this music. Potter suggested a cultural-other one and a more conventional one. The prior could be associated with *Fluxus* whilst the second is a return to basics, hence an 'antidote to modernism' (Potter, 2019). Regarding sociocultural connections between the minimal music, composer, audience and society at large, Mertens (2007), who favoured the term *repetitive music* and used it interchangeably with *American minimal music*, benefited from Adorno and also stated that American minimalist music's employment of non-Western musical sources is a sort of cultural imperialism and a reflection of the idea of Western superiority, which is a deduction I do not agree with.

While I do not consider this music, even the earlier, Fluxus-like works such as *Trio for Strings* (Young, 1958), not as a divergent path from Western art music, in other words, the so-called classical music, it is a superficial approach to consider this multi-cultural hybrid as a cultural superiority's approach to the non-Western music. Musical minimalism caused (it actually still does) great anxiety and it has never been the superiority even in Western culture albeit it is not viable to classify cultures as 'Western' and 'Eastern' in today's highly globalised world. Rather, I regard the emergence of the aesthetic and technique of minimal music as an ultimate outcome of, mainly, Cage's and Satie's ideas on structure, repetition, non-Western music and sound. In *Vexations* (1893), Satie employed enormous times of repetition, hence a demand for a new kind of listening since the music removed the conventional expectations such as a prediction to hear the *perfect authentic cadence* at the end of the section or work. Cage in his speech *Satie's Defence* (1948) discussed the way how Satie structured his works by separating the musical units by considering the time they fill in, rather than the harmonic goals as it was in Beethoven, according to Cage. Cage had been creating under the conscious influence of non-Western music, which is one of the many things he had included in his creative process and intellectual mind before Philip Glass came up with the idea of employing Indian *tala* or before Steve Reich's fascination with African drumming. As noted by Gann (2010), 'Cage has often been cited as having anticipated minimalism, or even *postminimalism* and *new age*', giving Cage's *Dream* (1948) and *In a Landscape* (1948) as examples.

Most of the aforementioned publications provided highly beneficial insights not only on minimal music but also on minimal art, the interaction of this music with music at large, and its sociocultural dynamics and repercussions. However, none of them discussed the appropriateness of the term 'minimal' considering the music it represents by comparing it with the alternative terminology on both music-theoretical and conceptual ground while broadening the spectrum with minimal art. It is, on the other hand, not to suggest discarding the term 'minimal' or replacing it with other, since now there is *post-minimal music*, but to revisit the near history and understand it from today's perspective. Such an insight, I believe, is beneficial for understanding post-minimalism as well. Borrowing from Schoenberg, I suggest a concept to understand minimalism concerning its repercussions today. I claim it is the *emancipation of repetition*, which will be explained and discussed in this essay. Furthermore, it is identified that the surface qualities of minimal music, such as the elimination of harmonic progression in some important works, namely in *Music in Contrary Motion* (Glass, 1969) or the presence of even *monophony*, for instance, in *Strung Out* (Glass, 1967), are of no means without considering the psycho-acoustic effects and underlying conceptual and aesthetic ideas, all of which consequently make a conventional analysis almost impossible. The so-called simplicity in terms of the 'object' to be comprehended in some minimalist sculpture -since it is not possible and viable to ex-

pect all minimal sculpture to have the same qualities- differs from the so-called simplicity of, especially, early minimal music. Moreover, when the 'material' used in minimal art is daily objects, or even fabricated ones, 'material' in minimal music, which produces the sounds or which is to produce the sounds on, could be rather alien. Swinging microphones as the main sound source in *Pendulum Music* (Reich, 1968) can be given as an example. At the end, to provide an answer to the initial question of whether 'minimal music' is a misnomer, a definite answer is avoided since it is not first possible and second, not viable; as Gann (2016, p. 41) pointed out: "No new musical term is ever introduced without controversy, and there are always those who protest that the mapping of a word to a variety of musical practices is never literal enough. This cannot be helped". Instead, the possible reasons why this music could or could not be minimal are questioned. If its meanings are extended or interpreted in such a way as to disassociate it, deliberately or not, from the music with which it is associated, then, this would damage both the term and the music. Eventually, anxiety would arise which would prevent its meaning and aesthetic from being comprehended.

## 2. MINIMALISM AS A SUCCESSFUL BOREDOM: THE CONTROVERSIAL ORIGIN

In 2018 *The Spectator* proudly declared Michael Nyman the originator of the term 'minimal music', addressing Nyman's 1968 column in the magazine. Nyman used the phrase for the music of Henning Christiansen:

"I also deduced a recipe for the successful 'minimal-music' happening from the entertainment presented by Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik at the ICA. Simple idea, straightforward structure, intellectual control, theatrical presence and intensity in presentation. These all contributed to Paik's spellbinding performance of *Springen* by Henning Christiansen, a hypnotic ten-minute piece which consisted of nothing but a series of parabolas traced by the fingers, arm and eyes of the performer in ever-widening arcs." (Nyman, 1968).

Nyman refers to the branch of minimal music that is relatively close to Fluxus. At this point, it should be noted that Potter (2013) divides early minimal music into two with a blunt line: the radical one and the conservative one. Potter regarded the prior as a cultural 'other' and considered the latter a return to the basics, hence the "major antidote to modernism" (Potter, 2019, p. 1).

On the other hand, Strickland in his article *Minimalism: T* (1992) claimed that Nyman did not originate the term, addressing Johnson of the *Village Voice* magazine as the originator, who is claimed to be the author who first used the term 'minimalism' to depict 'music as a movement or shared style' probably in 1972 (Strickland, 1992). However, I do not agree with Nyman's estimation. In the aforementioned article Strickland cites Warburton's seminal paper *A Working Terminology for Minimal Music* (1988, p. 141) in which Warburton stated that "If Nyman did first use the term, it was probably during his time as music critic of *The Spectator*, prior to the publication of *Experimental Music* in 1974". Therefore, there is an ambiguity in both Warburton's and Strickland's texts on the occasion when Nyman used the word 'minimalism' in his column in *The Spectator*. Since *The Spectator* on its Web site shed light on the issue and shared both the year and the text itself, Nyman is considered the originator in this essay.

On the other hand, it was not the first proud announcement. The BBC announced Nyman as the originator thirty-five years ago before *The Spectator*'s update, during an interview on the Radio 3's *Music in Our Time* programme, but Nyman refused being the originator (Warburton, 1988). It might be due to the common rejection of the term. For instance, in 1977 Joan La Barbara expressed that the term was "laughable to describe such rich and complex music" (Strickland, 1992, p. 117); and in an interview with Tim Page, Glass said it was a misnomer with a strong refusal (Page, 1980). While the term's initial use in music was in a relatively pejorative sense, in visual arts, where the term was borrowed from (Potter, 2019), Richard Wollheim made an important definition in his seminal essay *Minimal Art* (1965).

## 3. A COMPARISON: MINIMAL ART AND MINIMAL MUSIC

In 1965, two important papers were published: Barbara Rose's *ABC Art* and Richard Wollheim's *Minimal Art*. Rose takes a historical perspective on abstract expressionism and minimal art, by going back to Duchamp's *ready-mades* and Malevich's 'black squares' whilst underlining the great influence of Cage on composers and dancers. Likewise, Gann (2010) wrote that some of Cage's early works, namely

Dream (1948) and In a Landscape (1948) are often cited as the works which anticipated minimal music and *new age* music. While Battcock, the editor of the seminal anthology *Minimal Art* (1968), refrains from citing Wollheim as the first critic who used the adjective 'minimal' in an art context to classify a group of works and states that Wollheim may well have been the first, Arthur Danto (2003) wrote without a doubt that Wollheim coined the term 'minimal art'. Wollheim, just like Rose, went back to Duchamp and not only surveyed the art of the time and where it began and ended, but also examined the anxiety and panic created by these works. Wollheim stated that the artist's ideas and decisions expressed through common objects were more important than the physical labour; thus, these works had a 'minimal art content'.

There are significant differences between minimal art and music. Although it would not be incongruent considering that neither minimalist or considered-to-be minimalist artists nor musicians created in the same aesthetic and stylistic manners; common patterns are beneficial to determine differences and distinctions between these two.

One may claim that minimalist music was a reaction to *serialist* works. However, it is not a viable approach if one considers that La Monte Young's *Trio for Strings* (1958) which is composed with a serialist technique, is addressed as the 'fountainhead of the minimalist music' by Strickland (Grimshaw, 2012). On the other hand, the aforementioned approach gains sense regarding the sociocultural interactions since the communication between the composer, interpreter, works and audience was different from the academically-oriented serialist music. Minimalist music had been played in lofts and museums whilst serialist works were adored by the academia until the academic interest in musical minimalism increased around the end of the 1970s and these works found a place in the concert halls and opera houses. One of the reasons for the lack of interest in academia towards musical minimalism was that the analysis of it was not likely, especially when the earlier works are considered, which foregrounded the surface activity over the other components. Thus, a *Schenkerian* approach was not helpful in analysing such works because of the lack of hierarchical structures. The term 'minimal', in this regard, could seem meaningful to point out the minimal employment of compositional materials and layers in the works; on the other hand, an etude to improve technique could also be regarded as 'minimal' if the lack of multiple layers is to make a distinction. As Robert Fink discussed, if Suzuki had played one of his practising sessions in which the same exercise was to be played 10.000 times, at one of the lofts of lower Manhattan, then, it would have been considered one of the minimalist works (Potter, 2013). Therefore, there is an aesthetic idiom in minimalist repetition that differs it from any other repetition found not just in Suzuki's exercises, but also in many child songs. The significant employment of repetition and the emphasis on the surface level could be illustrated by giving Carl Andre's *Lever* (1966) as an example.

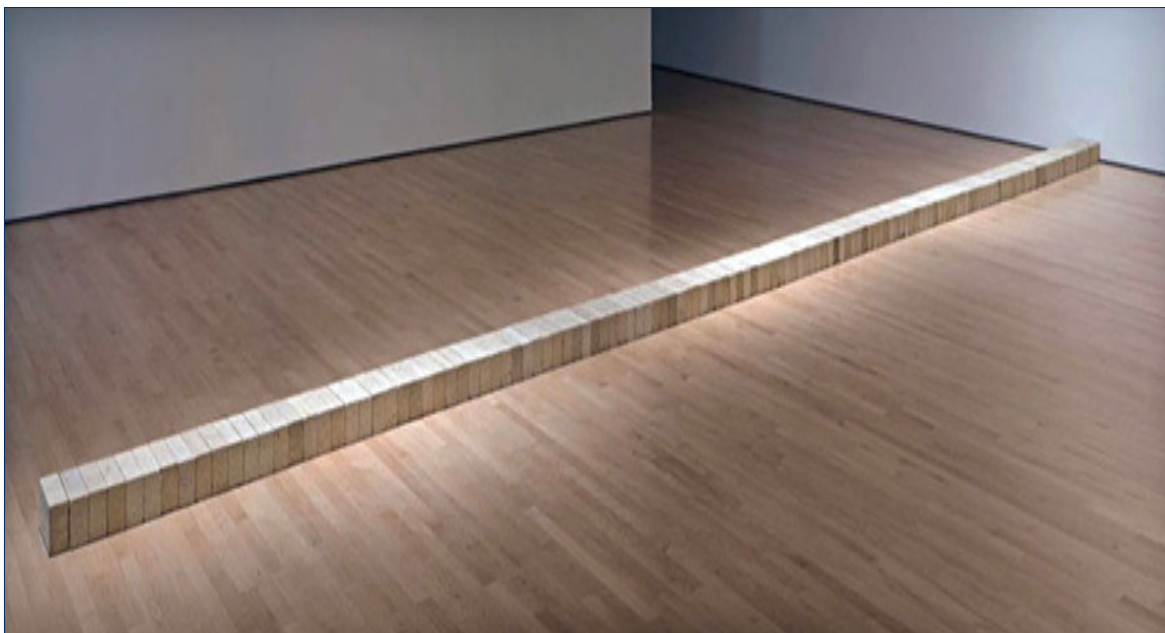


Figure 1: Andre, Lever, 1969

In *Lever*, the artwork is created mainly by repetition on the technical level. There are no underlying or overlying layers. Any brick can substitute for each other. Furthermore, laying the artwork down on the ground instead of keeping it on a literally higher position than the spectator is a sign of the changes in the sociocultural relationship between the artwork, artist, and audience. In music, on the other hand, whilst the repetition became one of the most important compositional procedures in minimal music during the 1970s, the musical material being repeated usually could not be changed internally without changing the work hence an internal order but usually on the surface level, which ultimately leads to psycho-acoustic consequences. As Warburton (1988) stated, 'It soon becomes impossible for the listener to remember exactly where he/she is in the linear additive process; barlines function only to coordinate performers'. Glenn Branca, one of the few composers who proudly claimed himself as 'minimalist', provided an insight from the composer's perspective by telling that there is one, the music which was written down and two, the music which was not composed but created itself while the composed music was continuing (Nickleson, 2023). In *Music in Similar Motion* (Glass, 1969), the texture-on-score remains the same, while extreme repetition creates psycho-acoustic effects; however, there is organisation as opposed to Andre's *Lever*'s emphasis on the finished artwork, the ultimate form. In *Music in Similar Motion*, on the other hand, the process creates the whole, if there is one since Philip Glass names the form in *Music in Similar Motion* 'open':

"I now had two systems: a closed system and an open system. 'Music in Contrary Motion' represented the closed system, in which the compositional process reached a point where it was unable to offer any new musical development. This is like having a table filled with glasses and at a certain point, there would be no room for any more glasses. The open system, represented by 'Music in Similar Motion' would be like adding a new table when the first table is filled." (Glass, 2015, p. 241)

Since the form is open and the surface level activity is to get psycho-acoustic effects to offer an experience, there is a significant difference between the emphasis on the repetition happening on the surface level in minimalist music and art: while in the former it is usually to transcend the listener, as if they are doing meditation or experiencing hallucinogens, especially in the case of Riley, who expressed that his aim before writing *In C* (1964) was to get a drug-like experience on the mind and soul with music (Potter, 2000), in the latter it is to foreground the whole but not the act of composition. In the following example, *Music in Contrary Motion* (Glass, 1969), which is chosen because it reflects the minimalist aesthetic well (Johnson, 1994), the organisation shows that the inner parts can not substitute for each other. On the other hand, due to extreme repetition, it is hard to determine each motive individually by ear during the flow of music.



Figure 2: The 'cells' from the first motive of *Music in Contrary Motion*, transcribed and grouped by Torun for this essay

Figure 2 shows the four cells which the first of twenty-three motives consists of. The cell 'b4' is derived from 'a4'. Likewise, 'y5' is derived from 'z5' hence the same colours. The numbers are to indicate the number of tones each cell contains. According to this system, the first motive is 'a4 z5 y5 b4 y5 z5'. Thus, the second half of the motive, 'b4 y5 z5', is derived from the first half. Furthermore, as illustrated below in figure three, each part is the inversion of the other.

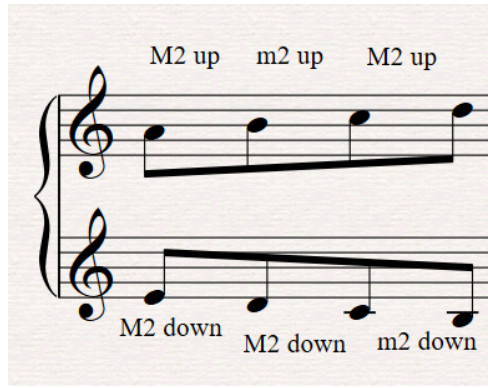


Figure 3: fragment from Music in Contrary Motion

An analysis of the first four motives reveals that there is a strict organization amongst the constituent parts, as opposed to, for instance, Andre's *Lever* or *Untitled* (Judd, 1969).

Motive 1: a4 z5 y5 b4 y5 z5

Motive 2: a4 b4 y5 b4 a4 z5

Motive 3: a4 b4 a4 z5 y5 b4 a4 b4 y5 z5

After the third motive, new cells are employed.

Motive 4: a4 b4 c3 d3 a4 z5 y5 b4 a4 e3 f3 b4 y5 z5

The complete analysis is not presented here as it is not within the scope of this paper; however, a complete analysis of the work by the author is due. To conclude, a comparison of Andre's *Lever* and Glass's *Music in Contrary Motion*, two of which are the representatives of minimalist art and minimalist music respectively, reveals that the employment of extreme repetition on the surface activity is of different purposes and creates different consequences: in the former, there is no illusion directly results from the artwork itself whilst in the latter the music itself is to create psycho-acoustic effects. Furthermore, the 'basic unit' is uninteresting, even fabricated in *Lever* whilst *Music in Contrary Motion* (and many other works of Glass from the same era) is written to be played on an electric keyboard; thus, the 'basic unit' is to be realised not on an 'ordinary' instrument albeit the basic unit itself is as simple and ordinary as it could be. One may argue that some minimal art, for instance, *Intersection II* (1992) by Richard Serra or *Bodyspacemotionthings* (2009) by Robert Morris invites the audience to an experience and completes themselves in the perception of the spectators' experience and comprehension, similar to how *Music in Contrary Motion* or Steve Reich's *processes* demand. This claim would be partly correct; however, there is an important distinction: in the aforementioned visual artworks, the artwork itself is static, not literally, but in the spectator's perception, until the spectators engage with the artwork. On the other hand, in *Music in Contrary Motion* or *Piano Phase* (Reich, 1967), the material of the work is in interaction with itself, regardless of the spectators' involvement.

#### 4. ALTERNATIVE TERMINOLOGY

Rejecting the term 'minimal music', Glass stated that his music consisted of repetitive structures (Page, 1980) hence repetitive music. Reich, on the other hand, wrote that his music consisted of audible 'processes' (Reich, 1968) hence *process music*. At this point, Reich strongly emphasises that these processes are audible, distancing his manner from John Cage, who had also employed similar methods; but the processes were not audible in Cage's composing procedure since the aim was to exclude the ego and personal musical experiences and tastes from the outcome. Thus, Cage resorted to chance methods, namely *I Ching* and also modified them. In Reich, on the other hand, the 'processes' were fully audible, the music was the 'process' and the 'process' was the music. Reich stated that 'process music' is free from subjective feelings; the creation of this music reminisces about "Pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest. Turning over an hourglass and watching the sand slowly run through to the bottom." (Reich, 1968, p. 304). 'Repetitive' and 'process' music aside, the desired feelings to awaken in listeners and Terry

Riley's and La Monte Young's spiritual beliefs in addition to their admiration for hallucinogens (Potter, 2000) led to the rise of another term: *trance music*. Riley stated that while composing *In C* (1964), he aimed to capture the mood that drugs and spiritual beliefs created in him, a sense of transport (Potter, 2000). Thus, the term 'trance music' is directly connected with *shamanism* and the admiration of hallucinogens. However, the creative process in this music and the emotional-situational changes that occur -or are intended to be occurred- in the listener can not be explained solely by spiritual beliefs or drugs; on the other hand, their influence can not be denied. Another alternative suggested for 'minimal music' is *solid-state music*. Especially in early minimalist music, which Beirens labelled 'core minimalist repertoire' (Beirens, 2013), the term solid-state music can be used to indicate the absence of a definable progression regarding overall form albeit the surface activity and texture are repetitious in self-contained blocks (Warburton, 1988). *Pulse music*, which is another alternative, is to underline the rock-like pulse in this music. These alternative terms are adequate in many respects and deficient in others. Furthermore, they are interconnected. Therefore, they complement each other. 'Repetitive music' refers to something that almost all minimal music have in common and this is an objective feature: repetitive motives. An exception could be Young's works which largely benefit from sustained sounds. These repeated motives can be conventional sounds which can be produced by many conventional instruments, or a phrase clipped from a speech recording, as it is in Reich's *It's Gonna Rain* (1965). Although the 'thing' repeated, how much time it lasts, or the context of repetition may change; the most distinctive feature that separates minimal music from its predecessors is its extreme repetition. One may trace it back to Satie's *Vexations* (1893) which contains 840 times of literal repetition (Orledge, 1998). Thus, borrowing from Schoenberg, who wrote the phrase 'emancipation of the dissonance' for a musical style in which dissonances are treated as consonances and renounce a tonal centre (Schoenberg, 1950), minimalist music could be regarded as the emancipation of repetition. Extended repetition had, of course, existed in music before the rising of American minimalism in the 1960s but the function of it was not the main element of music. Afterwards, throughout the changes in minimalist works, repetition returned to its previous, rather less-prominent position but its character has remained as an 'artefact' not just in minimalist or postminimalist works, but art music at large. This effect is also connected with the parallel motion between art music and rock music, especially punk rock after the 1960s. Steve Reich's admiration for Radiohead and Glass's close musical relationship with David Bowie can be given as examples. The excerpt below from Ferdinando Carulli's *24 Preludes No.23* (1817) is a great example of repetition accompanied by tonal stasis in tonal music. Roman numerals are written to provide a functional analysis; however, one may perfectly regard this section as only in one harmony: E minor tonic.

The image displays a musical score for Ferdinando Carulli's *24 Preludes No. 23* (1817). The score is written in treble clef, 4/4 time, and G major. It consists of three staves of music, each with a Roman numeral chord analysis below it. The first staff (measures 1-6) has chords: I, I<sup>6</sup>, IV, V, VI, I<sup>6</sup>. The second staff (measures 7-10) has chords: IV, V, I, I. The third staff (measures 11-14) has chords: I, I, I, I. The music features a repetitive eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.



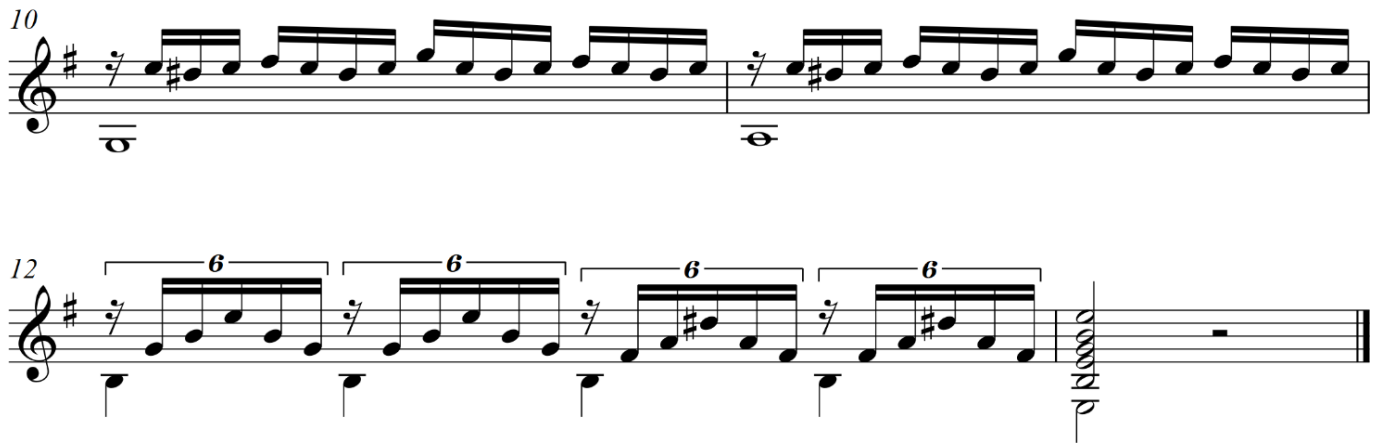


Figure 4: Carulli, 24 Preludes No.23, measures 14-26, 1817, transcribed by Torun

The melody on the bass in the first four measures in figure four is expanded in the remaining measures. There is both literal repetition and mere variation on the upper voices; the idea continues for 13 measures and closes the prelude; the basic material is very clear and ordinary. Repetition here has a functional role regarding the global development of the work; it is to close the prelude by strongly emphasising the tonic harmony. It is a very close example of minimalist music and illustrates the difference between repetition especially in the early minimalist works and repetition from the other periods of Western art music. The repeated motive here is of aesthetic concern but not as the primary, similar to what Johnson categorised as *minimalism as technique* (Johnson, 1994); furthermore, it has a tonal function in a diatonic system.

Similarly to the presence of dissonance before Schoenberg's 'emancipation', repetition had existed before its liberation by American minimalism. One may propose that this deduction is not relevant to the works of La Monte Young, Eliane Radigue, or Glenn Branca, which mainly rely on the expansion of sounds. On the other hand, these works could be regarded as the constant repetition of the frequencies. To assess the other alternative terminology, pulse is not relevant to be seen as the main contribution and feature of minimalism since it was one of the main elements of many works for decades, namely, Ravel's *Bolero* (1928). Thus, speaking of the emancipation of pulse thanks to minimalism is not realistic. Likewise, solid-state music could be applied to some works of Morton Feldman, whose control of time in the works was not steady and thus, far different from minimalism and even antithetical to it (Bernard, 2003). Process music excludes the works like *In C*, which are partly indeterminate and also works like *Trio for Strings*, which follows a serialist technique. Trance music is a subjective definition, one could experience a transcendence by listening to W.A. Mozart; furthermore, an admiration towards drugs is not minimalism-specific. However, attributing a principle role to repetition and liberating it from tonal, melodic and formal relationships but rather forming these connections by repetition while avoiding a hierarchical context is minimalism-specific, regarding Western art music. On top of that, it is the both primary and most important contribution of it to art music at large, which later led to a new sense of tonality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Minimalist music has undergone so much 'labelling' and brought new perspectives to art music. A discussion of the alternative terminology and the relationship between minimal art and music suggests that first, the term is not totally inaccurate to refer to this music and second, evaluating it as the emancipation of repetition is beneficial to assess its significance in the course of music history. In what way is this music minimal? Not in terms of duration. Although it is an extreme example, Glass's open form allows the music to continue indefinitely; almost all early minimalist music are of long length. This quality can be traced back to Satie's *Vexations* (1893), in which the same theme repeats for approximately 18 hours. Regarding the instrumentation, the early works were 'minimal' but not definite. This notion reached a maximum in *1+1* (Glass, 1967) in which the performer plays the notated rhythm on any instrument; fur-

ther, a desk could perfectly be an instrument to perform it. Later, however, this approach changed and minimalist music was performed first with ensembles and then orchestras which included conventional instruments but to be played with modern techniques, especially with the contribution of Reich. Therefore, the 'repetitive structure' found its place in different and more 'sonorous' textures. With the success of minimal music, the performance of it moved out from art galleries and attics to large concert halls and opera houses. There is a dual relationship between the change in instrumentation and spatial change; it also accelerated the abandonment of the term 'minimal music'. Johnson (1981) described *Einstein on the Beach* (Glass, 1975-1976) as *maximal* due to the rich instrumentation, different composition techniques employed and sudden changes in the texture. While all these objections continue, the music in question has maintained its 'repetitive' structure. As Strickland (1992) states, it is quite interesting that, at the same time when the expression 'minimal music' became widespread, the core minimalist repertoire began to be abandoned. It is impossible to speak of a single kind of minimal music. At this point, Johnson (1994) questioned whether musical minimalism is an aesthetic, a technique or a style. He considered early musical minimalism, as an aesthetic since it required new methods of listening, a *non-teleological* type of listening. Since there was usually no tonal or formal goal in these early stages, the listener is expected to listen to without a goal-centred approach. In his 1960 Lectures, Young (1960) expressed that he stretched the sounds for so long durations to get into a world of sounds. Glass expressed in his work *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971-1974) that "When it becomes apparent that nothing 'happens' in the usual sense, but that, instead, the gradual accretion of musical material can and does serve as the basis of the listener's attention, then he can perhaps discover another mode of listening" (Mertens, 2007, p. 79). Cage surveyed what and how to listen to, furthermore, what is music and what is not in Darmstadt, during the seminal *Composition as Process* (1958) speech. Cage enquired why it is so difficult for so many people to listen to, why they immediately start talking when there is something to listen to, what and who is musical and what and who is not. (Fırıncioğlu, 2012). In early minimalist works, the audience was free to move around the concert space (this could be an attic or a studio) during the performance. This is an important case of minimal music which tried removing the barriers between the listener and the work, just as Carl Andre's intention when arranging wooden blocks on the floor or Donald Judd's idea of using fabricated blocks to create a sculpture. Minimalist sculpture and painting (sometimes the boundaries between the two are quite blurred) positioned themselves within the flow of life, not on an art gallery wall as a superior artwork separate from life and the spectator, higher than them.

If one goes beyond music and art, one finds that the adjective 'minimal' is used in the media as an attractive marketing term for small-sized products with elegant but simple designs. In music, children's songs are not regarded as minimal although they usually employ a very simple tonic-dominant harmony, so many repetitions, with a simple melody that does not show much progression, since minimalist music is not only a repetitive, simple music but art music. Why are folk songs not in the category of minimalist music, then? Many folk songs are extremely repetitive, and this repetition can even be a constant repetition that never changes. Moreover, in many folk songs, there is no barrier between the listener and the music, just as minimalist art and therefore music aimed to do. The instrumentation is also very 'minimal', just like how it was in early minimalist works. The reason is that minimal music is a continuation of Western art music, not separate from it. Is it the historical line that Wagner's romantic chromaticism or Liszt's innovative bagatelles evolved into Schoenberg's *dodecaphonic* music and then into the repetitive and reductivist music of early minimalism, just as the complexity of Baroque music gave birth to the simplicity of Galant music? All these questions are subjective, as are the answers. However, it is clear that the adjective 'minimal' is quite inadequate to signify, characterise, and define this music, just as it is now obvious that it is impossible to replace this term with another, after the establishment of post-minimalism, which 'everyone is related by definition, in the promised land of new tonality' as Bernard (2003) stated.

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