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Bachelor's Degree Final Project

The 'Misa mínima':

Liturgical composition with minimalist techniques

Student:	Luis Meseguer Mira
Speciality:	Composition
Field:	Music Theory, Composition and Conducting
Director:	Josep Vila i Casañas
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Extract

Català

Com pot la música minimalista, "neutra i buida", representar allò sagrat? Aquest treball analitza les relacions entre la música minimalista i la sacra a la litúrgia catòlica. Es presenta el minimalisme com un conjunt de tècniques amb uns trets estètics gens "neutres", sinó fruit del context històric en què van néixer. Després d'observar l'evolució històrica del minimalisme, s'observa des d'una perspectiva estètica, desgranant-ne els elements més essencials. D'altra banda, es reflexiona sobre el sentit de tècniques minimalistes en pràctiques cristianes anteriors i allò que aporten a la música litúrgica actual. Aquesta recerca culmina amb la composició *Misa mínima* (2022) de Luis Meseguer Mira. Ella mostra com el llenguatge minimalista expressa allò sagrat d'una forma única i diferent a tots els altres llenguatges estètics.

Castellano

¿Cómo puede la música minimalista, "neutra y vacía", representar lo sagrado? Este trabajo analiza las relaciones entre la música minimalista y la sacra en la liturgia católica. Se presenta el minimalismo como un conjunto de técnicas con unos rasgos estéticos nada "neutros", sino fruto del contexto histórico en que nacieron. Tras observar la evolución histórica del minimalismo, se observa desde una perspectiva estética, desgranando sus elementos más esenciales. Por otro lado, se reflexiona sobre el sentido de técnicas minimalistas en prácticas cristianas anteriores y lo que aportan en la música litúrgica actual. Esta investigación culmina con la composición *Misa mínima* (2022) de Luis Meseguer Mira. Ella muestra cómo el lenguaje minimalista expresa lo sagrado de una forma única y distinta a todos los demás lenguajes estéticos.

English

How can minimalist music, "neutral and empty", represent the sacred? This paper analyzes the relationship between minimalist music and sacred music in the Catholic liturgy. Minimalism is presented as a set of techniques with aesthetic features that are not "neutral" at all, but the result of the historical context in which they were born. After observing the historical evolution of minimalism, it is observed from an aesthetic perspective, unraveling its most essential elements. On the other hand, it reflects on the meaning of minimalist techniques in previous Christian practices and what they contribute to current liturgical

music. From this research derives the composition *Misa mínima* (2022) by Luis Meseguer Mira. It shows how the minimalist language expresses the sacred in a unique and different way to all other aesthetic languages.

Summary

1. Introduction

According to Judith Kubicki in *Liturgical music as ritual symbol* (1999, p.50), Olivier Messiaen admitted that he had not succeeded in composing music for the assembly. There is no doubt about the quality and depth of Messiaen's language, but it did not fit in with what the musical reform of the Second Vatican Council proposed: a composition that encourages the active participation of the people.

If we take a look at the liturgical compositions of the second half of the 20th century and our 21st century era, we find cryptic languages for the people, such as the *Mass of John XXIII* (1962) by Julián Carrillo or the *Mass of Pope Francis* (2014) by Ennio Morricone. On the other hand, we find other works that, while encouraging the participation of the people, are linked to the romantic symphonic tradition, such as those of Marco Frisina; or to pop music, such as the music of Hakuna Group Music.

However, minimalism, as an avant-garde artistic current, can offer a different vision of liturgical music. It brings with it aesthetic and interpretative concepts that we intend to analyse. The aims of this research are: to clarify what minimalism brings to liturgical music and to provide technical and aesthetic tools for my work *Misa mínima (*2022), composed on the basis of this research.

First of all, we will situate the historical context of the minimalist movement. Going back to its origins will help us to see what characterises minimalism, the essence of its works, the concepts that energise the creations. In this chapter we will focus on the four most famous pioneers: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass, being aware that they were not the only ones. The reason for this reduction is to synthesise the information, as the stylistic diversity among these four is already representative of the diversity of minimalist composers. Moreover, the characteristics of their works contain what we consider to be the most essential aspects of minimalism. Next, we will analyse the evolution of minimalism, highlighting the stylistic differences in later composers up to the so-called "holy minimalists": Arvo Pärt, John Tavener and Henryk Górecki. The divergences between the composers under the umbrella of minimalism will give us a realistic overview of this trend.

In the third chapter, we will approach minimalism from an aesthetic perspective. We will investigate the origin and meaning of the term "minimalism", question its definition and

detail the influences that give rise to minimalist thinking and the implicit aims of minimalist techniques.

The fourth chapter deals with the relationship between minimalism and sacred music (which is concretised in liturgical music). First of all, we will discover minimalist tendencies in some Christian traditions of prayer and music. Then, we will see how minimalist aesthetics fit in with what the Catholic Church proposes for the liturgy. The chapter will end with a musical analysis of Arvo Pärt's *Missa syllabica* (1977, rev. 1996) as an example of a minimalist liturgical composition. This analysis will help to see how minimalist techniques are adapted to each part of the mass.

The composition of my work *Misa mínima* will be presented, showing the techniques used in each movement and how they relate to the meaning of the text and its liturgical context. It will conclude with a summary of the contributions of minimalist music to the liturgy, emphasising those aspects that make it different from other liturgical languages. It will also reflect on the creative process during the composition of the work and what research has contributed to this work.

2. History of minimalism

2.1 Precedents of minimalism in the 20th century

Minimalist art is often referred to as an artistic movement, established in the history of contemporary art approximately from the 1960s in the United States. But, as is usual in all artistic currents, it is difficult to fix a date of birth, a "before and after". This is as true in music as in other artistic disciplines.

In the visual arts, we can see precedents in Malevich's Suprematism - *Black Square (*1915), literally a black square on a white background - and later Abstract Expressionism, with artists such as Barnet Newman, Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt. This movement sought to represent the abstract with simple elements. However, what differentiated Minimalism from Abstraction is that Minimalism did not seek any kind of representation, neither figurative nor abstract. Frank Stella's *Black Paintings* (1959), symmetrical white lines on a black background, confirmed this artistic path. Stella defined his work with the famous sentence: "What you see is what you see" (Strickland, 1993, p.42).

As in the visual arts, many authors (Nyman, 2006; Strickland, 1993; Potter, 2002) consider that the foundations of musical minimalism were laid gradually throughout the first half of the 20th century. Thus, the minimalist Steve Reich acknowledges Erik Satie as one of his composers of reference (Reich, 2002, p.160). One of Satie's most controversial works is *Véxations (*1893): in this work the pianist must repeat a melodic theme 840 times. Michael Nyman (2006, p.185) cites serialism as another precursor phenomenon of minimalism. In particular, he explains that Young saw in Webern certain static elements that encouraged him to explore the minimalist language.

There are also proto-minimalist elements in Morton Feldman's music: the use of silence and the limitation of musical events, as well as an overall long duration as opposed to the low density of musical events in other works. While it is a precedent of minimalism, it does not share all of its characteristics, especially because of the unpredictability of its constant yet irregular harmonic and dynamic changes (Strickland, 1993, p.122).

Another composer who has been considered a predecessor of minimalism is Giacinto Scelsi. We see him in *Quattro pezzi (su una sola nota) (*1959) for orchestra. In these compositions, a single note is presented through different instrumental combinations and evidencing the

fluctuation of its partials. In that sense, he is largely considered a predecessor of spectralism, something that has been acknowledged by Tristan Murail and Gérard Grisey, among others (DeLio, 2017).

Other composers who explored the sound of the same note were Elliott Carter, in the seventh of his *Eight Études and a Fantasy for Wind Quintet* (1950) and Györgi Ligeti at the beginning of his *Cello Concerto* (1966). In addition, Ligeti worked with pitch reduction in his famous *Musica Ricercata* (1953). However, both composers did not develop pitch reduction as a stylistic aspect of their work in general, so we will have to treat these examples as isolated samples.

Undoubtedly, the precedent that most influences minimalism is John Cage, a pioneer of experimental music. Through the indeterminacy of his compositions, he encouraged listening to sounds by themselves, independent of any system that establishes relationships between them, avoiding cause-effect relationships (Nyman, 2006, p.97). In this way, listening was directed to a strict "present". *4'33* (1952) is the expression of this concept taken to the extreme: 4 minutes and 33 seconds in which the performers produce no sound whatsoever, causing listeners to fix their attention on everyday, random noises such as the coughing of the person sitting next to them, clothes brushing against the seat, and so on.

In some of his works (e.g. *Water Music* or the *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*), the "score" is a set of musical actions and gestures over which the performer makes decisions. Thus, no concrete musical result was required of him, but only the performative action. The musical result would come by itself, making each performance completely different from another. In others, such as *Music of Changes* (1952), he made compositional decisions following a random process from the Chinese divination book *I Ching*, eliminating any hint of personal expression.

In any case, the listener's attention to the work was linked to the vicissitudes of the present, the random or indeterminate events that happen ephemerally. This totally influenced the *Fluxus* movement, very active in the 1960s, which also influenced the work manifested in the present through the concept of *happening*. It was an avant-garde movement not only because it used a different language in its works, but because of the very conception of these works, their construction and a direct and engaging relationship with the public. La Monte Young, a pioneer of Minimalism, was involved in *Fluxus* between 1960 and 1963. The score of his *Composition 1960 no.7* (1960) shows only the notes B2 and F#3 with a notation: "keep for a

long time". It was performed by a string trio in 1961, with a duration of 45 minutes (DeLio, 2017). The work shows a simplicity of execution and concept that will be found in minimalist works.

2.2 The 1960s and 1970s: the minimalist movement

One of the first minimalist musical works, if not the first, is *Trio for Strings* (1958) by La Monte Young (Strickland, 1993, p.10). But we will have to wait until the mid-1960s to find minimalist works that were more widespread: Terry Riley's *In C* (1964), Steve Reich's *It's gonna rain* (1965) and Philip Glass's *1+1* (1968), among others. These works marked the beginnings of the movement for their radical proposal based on simple concepts, which we will now briefly describe.

The first of these is *Trio for Strings* by La Monte Young. It is characterised by the use of suspended notes and long rests in the total space of approximately one hour. According to the composer, these notes are not to be understood as melodies, but as layers of the same chord (Nyman, 2006, p.186). The notes are held with a strict *senza vibrato* and with dynamics ranging from *pppppp* to *fff*, causing both performers and listeners to concentrate on the subtleties of the sound. He also uses the *Dream Chord*, a chord he builds from a childhood memory: the sound of telephone poles in his hometown (Potter, 2002, p.23). This chord, formed by the notes G, C, C# and D, is very characteristic of his particular style and will reappear in many more compositions. Thus, all the elements of *Trio for Strings* are about the same thing: a cult of sound, worthy of being heard on its own, in its pure expression. The viewer has no narrative guides for listening, but must face its very flow.

If *Trio for Strings* seeks staticism from long notes, Terry Riley's *In C* seeks it from repetitions. The title attests to the provocative nature of the work. In an academic context dominated by atonality and the complexities of serialism, *In C* calls for a return to tonality, C (Major) being the most basic and simple. The score of this work is made up of a series of 53 melodic patterns which the performers must repeat indefinitely, moving from one to another as they wish. There are also other indications: the number of performers is undefined, although around 35 is suggested; the total duration is undefined, but between 45 and 90 minutes is suggested; the performers are also asked to listen to each other so that they are simultaneously no more than three patterns apart. We see, then, the strong influence of aleatoric music, more specifically, of indeterminate music, which does not ask for a specific

result, but promotes a listening focused on interpretative particularities that will not be repeated.

Steve Reich's *It's gonna rain* is based on "phase difference", a psychoacoustic effect with which the perception of the same sound can be "split", turning it into the perception of two identical sounds separated by a slight time difference. *It's gonna rain*, then, is constructed from the process between these two perceptions, a technique he called *phasing* and applied to more compositions such as *Piano Phase* (1967).

However, apart from *phasing*, what is remarkable in Reich's compositions of this period is the concept of process. In his works, process is made explicit as a generative element of composition. Although in many of Cage's works there was a process behind the musical events, this process was not consciously perceived in the musical result (Reich, 2002). In contrast, in Reich's music, the process is fully audible and easy to identify. Moreover, it is the element that moves the work forward and gives it meaning. As Reich writes in his manifesto *Music as a Gradual Process* (1968),

> Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest; turning over an hour glass and watching the sand slowly run through the bottom; placing your feet in the sand by the ocean's edge and watching, feeling, and listening to the waves gradually bury them. (Reich, 2002).

1+1, by Philip Glass, also originates through an audible process. In this case, through rhythmic addition and subtraction. In the score we are given two rhythmic cells that the performer must play in an arithmetic progression. For example, if we have the cells *a* and *b*, you can perform the following combination: *ab aab aaab aaaab*, etc. Or any other arithmetic transformation. The process is subject to the performer's taste. The tempo and the total duration, too. Again, there is indeterminacy, timbral simplicity (the performer bangs a table with his hands) and simplicity in the process of compositional generation. Glass works with processes of addition and subtraction in more works from this period, such as *Two Pages*, (1968) *Music in Fifths* (1969), *Music with Changing Parts* (1971).

It is in the 1970s that we find a more evolved or "mature" style (Potter, 2002, p.211; p.307) of Reich and Glass. Their concern shifted from structural purity to the particularities of sound. To this end, their scores abandoned indeterminacy, demanding from the performers a very precise interpretation of what was written. The works also gained in complexity, especially in

Reich's counterpoint and rhythm. This is the case in Reich's *Drumming* (1971) and Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts* (1974).

On the other hand, Terry Riley was interested in other subjects, such as melody, just intonation, Indian modes and improvisation. Young also delved into Indian music and tuning research. *The Well-Tuned Piano* (begun in 1964, taken up again in the 1970s) is the result of a constant research on tuning. Thus, if the history of minimalism could be traced in lines, we would say that Reich and Glass took a common direction, gaining greater fame. On the other hand, the line traced by Young and Riley would deviate from this main path and their works were not as widespread.

Paul Hillier (Reich, 2002, p.4) considers 1976 as the climatic point of minimalism: Louis Andriessen composes *De Staat*, Gorécki composes his 3rd Symphony, Arvo Pärt performs his first compositions using the *tintinnabuli* technique, Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* is premiered, Glass' *Einstein on the Beach* is completed. On the latter two, we highlight the harmonic development as a structural element. This will mark the trajectory of these composers, who will give harmony an importance it had not previously had in their previous works.

All four composers analysed here are from the United States, and there is a widespread belief that minimalism is intrinsically 'American' (Strickland, 1992, p.3-4). However, a study of minimalist music in the Netherlands and Belgium suggests that a minimalist essence already existed in these countries in the compositions of Karel Goeyvaerts and Frans Geysen (Delaere *et al*., 2004, p.32,72). In the case of Goeyvaerts, already in the 1950s he composed works with a markedly static style and whose structures depended on basic ideas. In the case of Geysen, during the 1960s he composed works with repetitive and additive techniques without knowing the parallel American reality. This fits in with what was explained in the section on the precedents of Minimalism: in Europe, the concept of the minimal had already emerged as a terrain for experimentation, even if it was only timidly shown in very few and scattered works. If the minimalist novelty from the USA was later embraced, it is because a breeding ground had already been created that was conducive to an interest in this type of music.

2.3 From the 1980s onwards: post-minimalism

From the 1980s onwards, more composers joined the minimalist movement and the language continued to evolve. An important fact to take into account is the geographical diversity: while the earlier composers were in a narrow context (New York and California), more appear elsewhere in the USA - William Duckworth in Pennsylvania, Janice Giteck in Seattle, Peter Gena in Chicago (Stanton, 2010, p.31) - or in Europe - Michael Nyman, Steve Martland and Graham Fitkin in the UK, Louis Andriessen in the Netherlands, Karel Goeyvaerts in Belgium, Hans Otte in Germany, etc.

In many cases, the works acquire certain characteristics that make it necessary to differentiate them from minimalism, and one begins to speak of "post-minimalism". Some of these characteristics are greater harmonic movement, greater textural variety, a less obvious compositional process and a greater willingness for subjective expression as opposed to "minimalist motoric impersonality" (Stanton, 2010, p.28-30).

Postminimalism has been ideologically linked to so-called "postmodernism". Postmodernism, unlike previous avant-garde movements, is not committed to a break with tradition or to a radical conceptual postulate, but draws on elements and ideas from different influences, giving rise to a hybrid result (Stanton, 2010, p.28). Minimalism, then, would be one more source from which composers feed, a set of tools for composition. We see it, for example, in the first movement of John Adams' *Harmonielehre* (1985). It uses minimalist rhythmic patterns in placated chords in *tutti* together with an extremely lyrical melody with references to Mahler.

As far as European post-minimalism is concerned, we highlight the work of the Dutchman Louis Andriessen, who thus influenced his students such as Graham Fitkin, Steve Martland, Mary Finsterer, Cornelis de Bondt or Diderik Wagenaar, giving birth to what is known as the "Hague School" (Delaere et al., 2004, p.73). Andriessen's *Working Union* (1975) refers to the mechanical sound of machines and factories, linking the sound material to an extra-musical meaning.

The development of minimalism in some countries behind the Iron Curtain is striking. The Warsaw Autumn Festival, a benchmark for contemporary classical music, played a strategic role: Terry Riley's *In C* was performed in 1969 and later other works such as Andriessen's *De Staat* (1976) inspired many composers in this area (Nakas, 2004). In Lithuania, minimalism

was linked with a search for folk, medieval and religious roots. Examples are *Muzika septyniems* [Music for seven] (1975) by Feliksas Bajoras and *Paskutines pagoniu apeigos* [Last pagan rites] *(*1978) by Bronius Kutavicius. This aspect of return to roots or nationalistic exaltation can also be observed in the music of the Estonians Veljo Tormis and Arvo Pärt and also of the Pole Henryk Górecki. In general, this type of music was linked to a reaction against communism and was often censored by the authorities. However, not all minimalist music in these countries has been linked to folklore and pre-Renaissance history: this is the case of the Lithuanian so-called "machinists" or "super-minimalists" with the largest output in the 1990s: Rytis Mazulis, Sarunas Makas, Ricardas Kabelis and Nomeda Valanciunte (Nakas, 2004).

In 1993, Edward Strickland begins his essay on minimalism by talking about the death of minimalism as such (p.1). He explains that, from the 1980s onwards, minimalism is no longer only in art and avant-garde circles, but has been exported to the popular level. And from there it has mixed with popular and diverse phenomena such as rock music of the 1970s, *New Age* music of the 1980s or the audiovisual media.

Julia Wolfe has musical examples of dialogues between pop-rock and minimalism, such as *Lick* (1994) and *Believing* (1997). Since 1987, she has been a member of the *Bang on a Can* collective, together with post-minimalists Michael Gordon and David Lang. This group tries, among other things, to break down the barriers between academic and popular music (Delaere *et al*., 2004, p.74). Also the Englishmen Steve Martland and Graham Fitkin have incorporated recognisable elements of rock, such as characteristic timbres and musical gestures (Potter, 2019).

In the case of *New Age* music, it is difficult to differentiate between it and post-minimalism, as some authors have been classified with both labels: Michael Nyman, Brian Eno, Ludovico Einaudi or Yiruma, among others. In fact, *New Age* music has points in common with minimalism, especially in the emphasis on the static and the use of non-Western musical ideas[1] , although it is distinguished by its clear objective of relaxation and contemplation. In any case, the classification between minimalism or *New Age* is often for commercial purposes and it is not clear whether it is based on purely musical criteria.

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[1] The terms "Western" and "Eastern" are imprecise, but necessary to understand the music within the parameters of the period under discussion, as these terms were used by the composers discussed here.

Regarding postminimalist music in audiovisual media, the clearest example of this relationship is the career of Philip Glass. After *Einstein on the Beach*, Glass transformed his language by emphasising the functional harmonic aspect, constructing the discourse through the repetition of unfurling chords and clear melodies. This is attested to by his works from *Glassworks* onwards (1982), which mark "a significant trend towards the greater commercialism, which so often troubles listeners, and critics, from the Western classical music world" (Potter, 2002, p.251). Given its flexibility and high adaptability to extra-musical contexts, its music has been used in the soundtracks of *Mishima* (1985), *The Truman Show (*1998) and *The Hours* (2002). Other famous examples of the influence of minimalism (or post-minimalism) on cinema are Mychael Nyman's *The Piano* (1993), Yann Tiersen's *Amélie* (2001) and Ludovico Einaudi's *Intouchables* (2011). Strickland (1993, p.1) also cites 1980s advertisements for Kellogg's, IBM, Infinity and NASDAQ with musical elements borrowed from the style of Glass and Reich.

Minimalism is nowadays often associated with a lifestyle. The documentaries *Minimalism: A documentary about important things* (2015) and *The Minimalists: Less is now* (2021) are about Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, two lecturers and writers who advocate avoiding compulsive buying and the possession and consumption of useless goods. In 2017, the Spanish clothing brand *Minimalism brand* emerged, which refuses to put logos on its products and makes sustainable products with 0 CO_2 emissions. As examples of their commercial philosophy, on Black Friday 2018 they launched the campaign entitled "Don't buy it if you don't need it" and in the manifesto published on their website we read: "We are not fashion, we are not a brand, don't associate us with anything because we are nothing." (Minimalism brand, n.d.).

2.4 *Holy minimalism* or sacred minimalism

Arvo Pärt (Estonia, 1935), John Tavener (UK, 1944-2013) and Henryk Górecki (Poland, 1933-2010) are the three composers commonly associated with so-called "sacred minimalism". All three, during the 1970s, abandoned their serialist style and other avant-garde techniques in favour of an austere, modal language rooted in much earlier traditions: Pärt in Gregorian chant, Tavener in Byzantine chant and Gorécki in traditional Polish music. All three were also involved in the composition of explicitly religious music, though not exclusively.

After the composition and premiere of his serialist work *Credo (*1968), Pärt considerably reduced his output of new compositions. He devoted himself to the study of Gregorian chant and early medieval polyphony. His main interest was "how to write a single line of melody or combine just a very few notes" (Hillier, 1997, p.86). From this he derived a new compositional method called *tintinnabuli*. The name refers to the sound of the traditional bells of the Russian Orthodox Church, present in Estonia. The bells are usually fixed in a small carillon and their clappers are struck manually with the help of a rope (Longin de Klin, 1988).

Pärt's *tintinnabuli* technique is summed up in a counterpoint between two voices: an "M" voice tracing a melody usually in joint degrees and a "T" voice playing the notes of a triad, the notes being as close as possible in pitch to the "M" voice. The overall aural effect will thus be of a melody moving in time with the notes of a triad, waiting to be "struck" like Russian bells. Sometimes the harmonic intervals will be consonant, sometimes dissonant. The duality between the voices M and T may represent body and spirit; time and eternity; however, they must be understood as two parts of the same reality, as expressed by Pärt in a formula: 1+1=1 (Hillier, 1997, p.96). In the first bars of *Für Alina* (1976) we can observe the relationship between these two voices: M in the right hand and T in the left, playing the B minor chord. Moreover, the rhythmic notation is striking, ambiguous and "liberated" from metrical temporality:
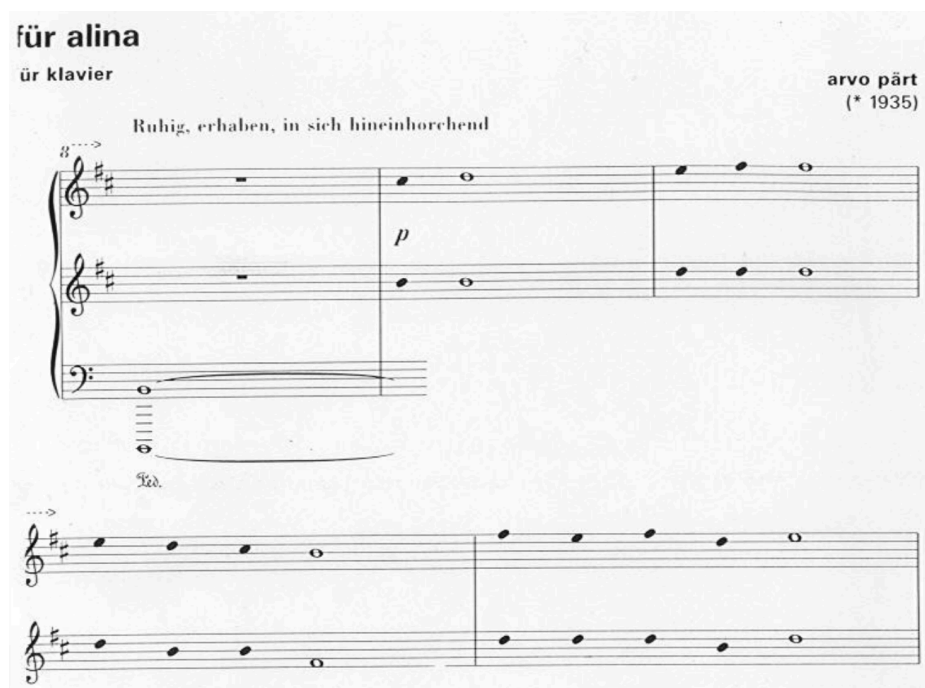

Figure 1. Excerpt from Für Alina (1976) by Arvo Pärt. cc.1-5

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Tintinnabuli, despite being a "tonal system without funcionality", owes its way of being to serialism. "Serialism enabled Pärt to create coherent musical spaces in which melodic and harmonic aspects derive from the same formula" (Bouteneff *et al.*, 2021, p.29). In addition to *tintinnabuli*, Pärt developed compositional methods based on mathematical concepts and algorithms. In *Missa syllabica (*1977), he assigned intervallic movements according to the number of syllables in the words. And later he applied simple formulas for the composition of phrases - *Cantate Domino* (1977) - punctuation - *Passio* (1982) - and accentuation - *Te Deum* (1985) (Bouteneff *et al.*, 2021, p.31). In a way, putting the choice of notes and rhythms in the hands of the text and a mathematical system "helped Part to distance himself from the subjective and emotional realm of music" (Bouteneff *et al.* 2021, p.29). He also placed *Fratres* (1977) in the hands of a compositional process that David Dies (2013) has compared to Steve Reich's process in *Piano Phase* (1967).

This emotional detachment is related to orthodox icons. Unlike the baroque imagery of the Counter-Reformation, the orthodox tradition observes that the iconographer must guard against any sentimentality, to be solely an instrument of God. We see common characteristics of Pärt's music with what is usually expected of an orthodox icon:

> [The icon] is the actualisation of the timeless and the sacred manifested by the calm and serenity of the characters represented, sobriety in its composition and its inscriptions, simplicity in its essential forms, purity in its colours and its light, transparency in its technique, strength in the movement it expresses. (Atelier Saint André, 2008).

John Tavener, who converted to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977, also seeks to identify his works with icons, something he openly acknowledges:

> I felt myself groping towards the idea - the ideal! - that what I wanted to do was to make ikons in sound […] What I loved so much about the ikon was the quality of its tenderness, its serenity, its 'unreality', the fact that unlike Western painting it does not force itself on you in any way (Tavener, 1999, p.47).

Although Tavener's music does not present such an extreme reduction of resources as Pärt's, we do see a clear reductionism in the compositional method. He proposed to "unlearn" everything he had learned about canon, sonata form, serialism, counterpoint, etc., to sit down in front of a blank sheet of paper, empty the mind and keep only what remains in the mind. That "remainder" would be the sacred (ImperiumUltimum, 2014).

Also, as in Pärt's music, Tavener represents eternity melodically. If in *tintinnabuli* eternity is represented by the voice T, in Tavener's music it is represented by the *ison*. The *ison is* the name given in the Byzantine tradition to the dron, i.e. a note that is held for most or even all of the piece of music (Tavener, 1999, p.154). Moreover, as in Pärt, there is a marked statism and lack of development in the music of Tavener, who was especially critical of the Western concept of "evolution" or "progress". However, unlike the Estonian composer, Tavener finds compositional ingredients in elements of Byzantine music, such as melodic contours and modes, including microtonality. From the following sample of the *Magnificat we* observe *ison* in second sopranos, third altos and basses; staticism in the melodies of the first and second altos; the main melody rescued from a traditional Greek song (Lorenz, 2020, p.158); and microtones in the *acciaccaturas*:

Figure 2. Excerpt from Magnificat *(1986) by John Tavener. p.2*

Henryk Górecki developed a tonal language from his 3rd Symphony *pieśni żałosnych* [of mournful songs] (1976), constructed from texts related to motherhood and Polish folk melodies. There are elements common to minimalism: "gradual processes, drones, static harmony and repetition" (González Garza, 2018, p.3). We also see it in other works such as

Totus Tuus (1987) or the *String Quartet No. 1* (1988). However, especially in the 3rd Symphony, the preponderance of a highly emotive melody distances him from minimalist "coldness" or "neutrality".

The extent to which Górecki's music is minimalist has been questioned. And so has Pärt's and Tavener's music, as we shall see in the following chapters. But Górecki's case is particular: the 3rd Symphony was not internationally known until 1992, when Elektra Nonesuch released a recording, becoming an unprecedented success and for that it had been strategically labelled as *holy minimalism* (González Garza, 2018, p.1). In this way, he would join the aforementioned Pärt and Tavener who at that time were also commercially successful and the label placed them in a favourable niche.

As an example we have this fragment from the *Miserere* (1981), with some remarkable elements: rhythmic reductionism, melodic and harmonic statism, and a veiled drone in the G note of the tenors.

Figure 3. Excerpt from Miserere *(1981) by Henryk Górecki, section 5, cc.1-14*

Neither Pärt, Tavener or Gorécki knew each other when they started their new styles (Tavener, 1999, p.45). In fact, each has his own particular way of proceeding with composition and it makes no sense to speak of a "school" (Moody, 2001). But their common interests and techniques are not the result of pure chance either. According to Tomás Marco (2017):

> [Minimalism] is, however, linked to post-modern thought. One of its characteristics, in its even contradictory complexity, is the reappearance of religious or para-religious concerns in life and in the arts. Of course, this occurred quite extensively in the musical field.
>
> Let us add that it is not only the practice of traditional religions, which can occur in countries where they were previously repressed [as in Estonia and Poland], but also the interest in Eastern transcendent thought and the rise and popularisation of all kinds of superstitions such as, for example, astrology. It has been said that it is the revival of a religious thought that has been lethargic because of the progressive positivism of Western modernity or because of Marxist hostility in the Soviet bloc. [...]
>
> The approach to the spiritual was considered novel because, in the context of the avant-garde, the musical thought of modernity had been so abstract that there is hardly any room for religious or socio-political thought (p.138).

This approach to the spiritual can be seen in various works by non-minimalist composers. Karlheinz Sotckhausen's *Stimmung* (1968) can be understood as "aleatoric because of its combinable moving fragments, but also minimalist and meditative because it can be seen as a long variation on a single, non-dissonant chord" (Marco, 2017, p.139). But there are other Eastern European composers who show a deep mysticism in all their works, even some aspects close to minimalism: Russian-Tatar Sofiya Gubaidúlina for the static perspective of certain textures - *Introitus* (1978), *Quasi Hoquetus* (1984) -; Russian Galina Ustvólskaya for the reduction of materials and resources - *Dona nobis pacem (*1971), *Symphony No. 2 Eternal and Lasting Happiness (*1979) -; and Uzbek Alexander Taifel for suspended notes and long durations - *Solaris* (1980), *Agnus Dei* (1985).

2.5 Conclusions about the history of minimalism

To recapitulate, we have seen that the history of minimalism has been very flexible and liquid, with many variants and parallel trajectories. The boundaries are blurred, not only to distinguish the beginning of this movement, but also to distinguish its different branches.

The influence of precedents, especially John Cage, is a key point: listening based on the particularities of the sounding object, with the composer's minimal intervention on the material. We see in the early works of the 1960s a preponderance of the conceptual, a search for the minimum in the very conception of the work or in the compositional method, as would be the case of Steve Reich's processes or Philip Glass's methods of melodic addition and subtraction. Later, from 1976 onwards, the focus was placed on a more complex construction, through minimal elements. This shift paved the way for postminimalism.

Post-minimalism, as a post-modern movement, would treat minimalism as a technique that, combined with others, would give hybrid results: with rock, with *New Age* music, with traditional European music, etc. In this way, new meanings of minimalist music emerge: for some, it will be something extremely mechanical and cold; for others, a return to the folkloric and telluric; for others, an invasion of commercial music into classical music; and many more meanings.

In the case of "sacred minimalism", we find three composers who, with different interests from the previous composers, embark on a parallel path towards reduction and the use of minimalist techniques.

Everything leads us to conclude that, at least after a historical review from the 1960s to the 2000s, minimalism has been a malleable movement, pointing in many directions and that it has been transformed with very different objectives to those it had in its origin. This fact can be explained, as we will see below, by the simplicity of the elements that compose it: the simpler a tool is, the more uses it can be given.

Finally, although in 1993 Edward Strickland (p.1) already spoke of the death of musical minimalism as an avant-garde, we have to admit that in the 21st century it is still alive, although not in the same way. There are composers who continue to compose music that can be fully identified as minimalist or post-minimalist: Tom Johnson, David Lang, Jeroen Van Veen or other lesser-known composers such as Marc Mellits. But there is a larger number of current composers who, despite not making minimalist music, show undeniably minimalist traces: we see it in the motoric rhythmic accompaniments of Ola Gjeilo's choral works *Tundra* (2010) or *The Rose* (2017); in the drones of Max Richter's *Ad Astra* (2019) soundtrack; in the static harmonies and use of just tuning in Michael Harrison's mystical *Seven sacred names* (2021); or the aesthetics of repetition in Nico Muhly's symphonic work *Gait* (2012). These are a few and varied examples of the influence that minimalism has

exerted on a large part of today's music, as a result of minimalist immersion and dissolution in a fairly broad panorama.

3. Aesthetic parameters of minimalism

3.1 Origin of the term "minimalism"

The term "minimal art" was coined by the art critic Richard Wollheim in *Art Magazine in* 1965, in an article entitled *Minimal Art*. He was not referring to the artistic current then coming to light, but to earlier works such as those of Marcel Duchamp, Ad Reinhardt and Robert Rauschenberg, which, according to him, had certain aspects in common:

> They have minimal art-content: in that either they are to an extreme degree undifferentiated in themselves and therefore possess a low content of any kind, or else that the differentiation that they do exhibit, which may in some cases be very considerable, comes not from the artist but from a nonartistic source, like nature or the factory. (Wollheim, 1965/1968, p.387)

Later, art critics used "minimal art" to refer to works by Carl André, Donald Judd, Dan Falvin. Expressions such as "ABC art", "reductive art", "literalist art", "rejective art", "neomechanist school", "abstract mannerism" or "cool art" were also used (Strickland, 1993). However, the term "minimal art", or simply "minimalism", gradually gained ground and became the representative of this trend.

The first to speak of "minimalist music" was Michael Nyman in 1968 in an article in *The Spectator magazine* about Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*. In *The Great Learning*, performers produce certain sounds by following instructions, in an exercise in cooperation and listening to the sound produced, based on a book by Confucius. Four years later, fellow composer Tom Johnson used the same term 'minimalist music' to refer to a concert by Alvin Lucier, which attempted to explore some psychoacoustic phenomena (Potter, 2002, p. 2-3). It is striking that these two pioneering articles on "minimalism" do not deal with the composers who are now considered pioneers of minimalism, namely La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass and Steve Reich. These four were already composing minimalist works at the time, but the articles discuss Cardew and Lucier, whose trajectories and interests have not been so similar. Even so, some common characteristics led to talk of minimalist music in the works of Young, Riley, Glass and Reich later on. From then on, this label has been shaped to the detriment of others that were already used to refer to the music of the four composers, such as: "hypnotic music", "repetitive music", "pulse music", "trance music", "process music",

"modular music", "systemic music", "new simplicity" (Strickland, 1993, p.17; Marco, 2017, p.133).

Thus, minimalism began to be spoken about artistic tendencies of different disciplines (visual arts and music), understood as expressions of the same current. This is something that is still accepted today, given the evident friendship and relationship between the pioneering artists in both disciplines. The term "minimalism", however, is not perfect: on the one hand, it can be ambiguous, as Keith Potter (2000, p.1) points out, as it suggests "less than usual", and there is no consensus on what is "too much" or "too little". This ambiguity may be why Wollheim and Nyman's articles debut the term "minimalism" on works that are not currently considered minimalist (Duchamp's *Fountain* and Cardew's *The Great Learning*).

The terms "holy minimalism" and "spiritual minimalism" applied to the music of Pärt, Tavener and Gorécki emerged later, from the 1980s onwards. Critics such as John Rockwell found links between these composers and the Americans. Given the religious or mystical character of these compositions, the concepts of "sacred/religious/mystical/spiritual" and minimalism were brought together in a single expression: "holy minimalism". However, since the 2000s, it is not widely used in academia, as there is no consensus on whether they are truly minimalist. Moreover, some composers such as Sofiya Gubaidúlina, Giya Kancheli or Andrej Pnufnik (Dies, 2013) had been put under the same label, a very debatable decision, since their music differs from the previous ones both in compositional techniques and in its aesthetic conception.

3.2 Proposals for definition

As we have seen, the boundaries of minimalism have not been clear. A definition of minimalism will indeed serve to determine which works are minimalist and which are not, but above all to discover the true essence of this movement and its aesthetic implications. Timothy Johnson, in his article *Minimalism: aesthetic, style or technique? (*1994) collects several definitions and classifies them into the following categories: minimalism as aesthetic, style or technique.

Johnson presents us with some definitions of minimalism as an *aesthetic*. One is proposed by Elaine Broad, who distinguishes minimalism by its latent non-narrativity, a music that provokes listening in the process itself. Wim Mertens, on the other hand, highlights as a main

characteristic the non-teleology[2] of the compositions, preventing them from becoming a means of expressing the subjective emotions of the composer. These definitions of minimalism as aesthetics, according to Johnson, embrace the earliest minimalist compositions, such as *In C* or *Pendulum Music*, which are highly conceptual and dependent on a simple generative idea. But, on the other hand, they cannot encompass all minimalist music from the 1970s onwards, as teleology appears in harmonic movement and the focus is placed on elements other than the compositional process.

If minimalism is understood as a *style*, more works can be encompassed. Johnson explains how R. J. Pascall understands it: a style with certain characteristics: continuous formal structure, texture formed from interwoven rhythms and bright sonorities, simple harmonic palette, a certain lack of extended melodic lines and repetitive rhythmic patterns. However, this definition is not fully satisfactory, as more recent minimalist works do not have all the characteristics, or include other procedures in addition to those already mentioned.

Finally, Johnson introduces us to minimalism as a *technique* as defined by Glenn Watkins: general reduction of materials and emphasis on repetitive schemes and statism. In this way, minimalism is a compositional tool, free to be used in whatever musical aspects the composer considers and also free to be combined with other tools. This definition fits with the post-minimalist works we have analysed. Johnson confirms this with concrete examples: Andriessen's *De Staat* (1976) and Adams' *Harmonielehre* (1985), which present incomplete or contradictory characteristics to be considered minimalist in their style, but do so in the techniques employed.

Finally, Johnson encounters an objection: if minimalism is a technique, will any work with reduced means be considered minimalist, regardless of the period in which it was composed? It is a question that not only he but also Strickland (1993) asks:

> [Minimalism] is in one sense transhistorical, but to discuss it as an artistic movement rather than a stylistic tendency requires some chronological framework if it is to have any meaning at all as a cultural phenomenon. To call the builders of Stonehenge Minimalists is to evaporate the term; on the other hand, to date Minimal Art from the 1960s is rather like dating British Romantic poetry from Tennyson. (p.4)

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[2] Teleology in a musical work is the tendency to build the musical discourse towards a goal, often a climax or final resolution.

Johnson, for his part, solves the problem by linking minimalism to its emergence as a historical movement and its subsequent consolidation:

> Although the ideas of extended repetition and simplified harmonic materials have been explored in music at various points over the last several centuries, the development of minimalism, first as an aesthetic, then as a style, has singled out the technique and shaped it into a recognizable entity (Johnson, 1994, p.770).

Understanding minimalism as a technique gives us a very versatile range of possibilities for composition. We will therefore welcome this conception, but these techniques are indeed born out of an aesthetic context. As an example, we can draw a conclusion from the list of minimalist techniques and procedures that Kyle Gann (2001) has catalogued and summarised:

1. Static harmony: tendency to stay in a chord.

2. Repetition.

3. Additive processes in the construction of melodic and rhythmic patterns.

4. Use of the *phasing* technique[3] .

5. Permutation processes: exchange of notes avoiding obvious melodic progressions.

6. Regular pulse.

7. Static instrumentation: tendency for the orchestra to play at the same time, without hierarchies and in equal participation.

8. Linear transformation: slow and clear processes, e.g. from consonance to dissonance, from tonality to atonality, etc.

9. *Metamusic*: appearance of acoustic phenomena not written in the score.

10. Use of non-tempered tunings.

11. Influence of non-Western cultures[4] .

12. Audible structure.

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[3] Steve Reich technique defined in chapter 2.2.

[4] While number 11 is hardly considerable as a technique, it can be rephrased as a technique in this way: "use of techniques derived from non-Western cultures".

None of these techniques is "neutral" or meaningless. Nor is it by chance that they form part of the same list. This "toolbox" does not appear out of nowhere, but responds to a philosophy and ways of understanding reality shaped in the second half of the 20th century. For this reason, in the following chapters we will analyse the influences on minimalist thought and define the aesthetic objectives that most characterise it.

3.3 Influences on minimalist thinking

3.3.1 Western music

> I was beginning to organise my music according to a different order of ideas and maybe a higher order of reality [...] I found myself abandoning Western musical procedures and the whole idea of development and I realized it was something that simply did not interest me – the whole idea of progress or evolution (Tavener, 1999, p.42).

The first influence we would like to highlight would be a "negative" influence, i.e. a reaction of rejection, in this case, to certain postulates of Western classical and contemporary music. These postulates are the need for formal development, the complexity of semantic relations and the teleology of syntactic functions. The minimalists respond to these postulates (respectively) with statism, simplicity and contemplation of the minimum.

Precisely during the first decades of minimalism, serialism, which brought together the aforementioned "Western" postulates and took them to the extreme, prevailed in the academic sphere. According to some minimalists, serialism was "a musical and cultural mistake" (Dies, 2013). The abolition of serialist complexity was one of the flags of minimalism. "A lot of what serialists had aimed for in a vague, abstract way was now obtainable [by minimalism] in a repetitive, audible, playable, *feelable* new set of processes" (Gann, 2001). Steve Reich stated:

> Berg, Schönberg and Webern were very great composers. They gave expression to the emotional climate of their time. But for composers of today to recreate the *angst* of Pierrot Lunaire in Ohio, or in the back of a Burger King, is simply a joke. (Page, 1986, p.23)

Without the need to enact a cause-effect relationship, we see that this rejection coincided in space and time with phenomena such as the counterculture of the 1960s in the USA, May '68 and philosophical currents such as deconstructivism. These movements questioned the very

foundations of the political, social and moral order, just as the minimalists and other artists questioned the necessity of compositional elements considered basic for centuries.

3.3.2 Non-western music

Also, at the same time as there was a move away from the postulates of Western music, there was a rapprochement with certain non-Western musics. This was not only manifested in the composers' works, but was rooted in their personal experiences.

We see this in some of the precursors of minimalism: both John Cage and Giacinto Scelsi lived Zen Buddhism and this profoundly marked the musical direction of their compositions (Ircam-Centre Pompidou, 2010; Fondazione Isabella Scelsi, n.d.). La Monte Young became a disciple of the Indian master and singer Pandit Pran Nath (Potter, 2000, pp.79-80). Terry Riley learned to play tabla and tambura on numerous trips to India and was also taught by Pandit Pran Nath (Fink, 2005, p.72). Steve Reich's trip to Ghana in 1970 and study of Balinese gamelan in 1973-73 led him to discover new rhythmic patterns and performance practices (The Steve Reich website, n.d.). Philip Glass travelled several times to India and Nepal, and was taught by Ravi Shankar and various spiritual teachers (Glass, 2017). John Tavener, for his part, understood Byzantine music as 'Eastern', distinct from 'Western' in the same way that one distinguishes between Catholic/Western Church and Orthodox/Eastern Church, and also studied Sufi music and Samaveda chanting (Tavener, 1999, p.46).

It is not the first time that Western classical music encountered other, foreign music, as we can observe during Impressionism. But, unlike Debussy or Ravel, minimalist composers did not use musical elements as exotic colourings or new sound palettes, but rather rethought the very conception and structure of their works.

This approach to the extra-Western also shared space and time with phenomena such as the *New Age* or the hippie movement. Their followers not only studied and admired extra-Western cultural practices, but also incorporated them into their daily lives and their way of understanding the world, in the same way that composers conceived works from a radically different perspective.

Also, in parallel to some of the practices of these movements, some composers such as La Monte Young and Terry Riley took drugs and had experiences that manifested themselves in their works. Riley tells us about one of them:

When I took peyote then I really saw the sacredness of the music [...] Music was also able to transport us suddenly out of one reality into another. Transport us so that we would almost be having visions while we were playing. So that's what I was thinking about before I composed *In C*. I believe music, shamanism and magic are all connected, and when it's used that way it creates the most beautiful use of in music (Duckworth, 1995, p.269).

3.3.3 Medieval music

Another influence on minimalist music is medieval music. Although it can be considered as a basis of Western music, it has a special status among minimalists because of the static nature of its musical discourse. According to La Monte Young:

[In classical music] climax and directionality have been among the most important guiding factors, whereas music before that time, from the chants through *organum* to Machaut, used stasis as a point of structure in a manner somewhat closer to that of Eastern musical systems (Nyman, 2006, p.186).

Similarly, Reich also finds inspiration in medieval music and claims that his *phasing* techniques were prefigured in medieval canons (Mertens, 1983, p.48). Pärt, for his part, studies Gregorian chant, but not out of a fascination for the static, but for the melodic construction with the minimum of notes.

3.3.4 Pop music

Finally, the influence of popular art should be noted. It is manifested, on the one hand, in the indeterminacy used in the notation of some scores. Riley explains:

The ritual spontaneity of my music comes from the fact that a lot of my musical experience has been gained in jazz halls or in places where the musicians are very much on top of every note they play, every note is a danger. I think music has to be dangerous, you have to be right on the edge of the cliff to really get interested, not so quietly playing something you know. If you never get close to the edge, you'll never learn what level of excitement you can get to (Nyman, 2006, p.192).

On the other hand, a rather peculiar phenomenon occurs in the way certain scholars understand the relationship between popular art and minimalism. In the realm of minimalism in the visual arts, Barbara Rose sees Pop art as "the reflection of our environment" and minimalist art as "its antidote" (Strickland, 1993, p.4). Others, such as Frances Colpitt, understand it as "Pop without image", as it shares with Pop art the anonymous design and industrial colour, but avoids any kind of representation (Potter, 2002, p.9). In other words, for

some, minimalism would be a rejection of pop culture, and for others, the opposite: the adoption of Pop art in a new language.

In musical minimalism, there are also conflicting views on the relationship with the pop phenomenon and consumer culture in general. In the argumentation used by labels selling minimalist music, the emphasis is on the effect of "disconnection" or "detachment from the world". Jeroen Van Veen's music, for example, is described as "relaxing, of course, as many listeners find ultimate peace by surrendering to their favourite minimal music" (Tuinman, 2020). The fact that Young, Riley, Glass and Reich practice yoga or Buddhism has also been linked as a sign of countercultural evidence (Fink, 2005, p.72).

On the other hand, others see it as a reflection of American superficiality, namely because of its commercial nature and easy-to-understand and easy-to-consume content. The list of criticisms is long and we offer some varied examples. Pierre Boulez saw it as a "sign that the American audience is primitive and rude" (Fink, 2005, p.19). *Télérama* magazine called John Adams' *Nixon in China* 'a kind of typically American product, like Coca-Cola, Disneyland and the New International Order' (Machart, 2004, p.111). In this sense, there are minimalist composers who, far from rejecting these ideas, embrace them with such explicit titles as *Brick Symphony* (1997) and *Telephone Book* (1985-95) by Michael Torke; *Tight Sweater* (2005) and *Five Machines* (2000) by Marc Mellits

3.4 Aesthetic goals

3.4.1 Non-representation

One of the most relevant aims of minimalism is "non-representation". Non-representation" consists, no more and no less, in preventing the artistic object from referring to anything beyond itself; to be mere presence and not representation. This concept has been discussed much more in the field of the visual arts, where it is usual to speak of presence and representation, due to the figurative tendency that their works may have, a tendency that is more difficult to achieve with music (if one does not want to fall into onomatopoeia). In music, however, it is more common to speak of signification.

Drawing on Richard Serra's "*What you see is what you see*" (Strickland, 1993, p.42), we can intuit the same idea in analyses of minimalist musical works:

> [Steve Reich and Philip Glass] brought the sharp focus on processes, clearly and deliberately
> audible to the listener, to thoroughly scrutinised musical materials to offer new perspectives

on interpretation: what is gained is, in their first results, no more and no less than what is heard (Potter, 2019).

This very "Cagean" concept of listening to sounds (or processes) for their own sake, justifies Reich's rejection of the label "hypnotic music", because, according to him, one has to be very concentrated in listening, as it is important to catch the small changes (Fink, 2005, p.76). In that sense, in his works, repetition is not as important as those imperceptible changes. This shows the great importance of the material in his works, where the real interest lies, as the relationship of the materials (repetition) is obvious. Therefore, we can say that, given the low semantic complexity, the material seeks to signify itself, with little possibility of double readings or ambiguous interpretations. This is not to say that all minimalist works avoid signification. We have already seen that minimalism is not necessarily an aesthetic. But its techniques do have this tendency, since they were born in a radical conceptual minimalism.

Returning to the visual arts, creating works without representation (whether figurative or abstract) can be a dead end, since, if the work is merely presence and not representation, it poses two problems. The first is that it is an impossible mission, since the human factor always appears and it is only through staging that new meanings appear; and the second is that this is an absurd mission for art: art is not needed to show the obvious. These insights also apply to music and may explain, at least in part, why Glass and Reich changed their approach to their works so quickly: only ten years passed from the more "aseptic" and conceptual *It's gonna rain (*1965) and *1+1* (1968) to the more complex and layered *Music for 18 musicians* (1976) and *Einstein on the beach* (1976). Let us say that their early works ran into this cul-de-sac and they were forced to develop works with greater semantic complexity, more relationships between their parts and more marked harmonic directions, i.e. processes in which the material speaks of something other than its mere presence..

3.4.2 Simplicity

The second aesthetic objective that we emphasise, and deeply related to the previous one, is simplicity as a formal value, even as an object of contemplation. In some works, simplicity is sought in their overall structure; in others, it is in the local elements with which a more complex structure is built. In either case, this has some implications.

First of all, the ease of access to understand the language, both for the performer and the listener. Some see it as "a genuine breakthrough for new music, and it proved to many of us

that contemporary music could appeal to more than just a small, specialized audience" (Potter, 2002, p.210).

And secondly, the elimination of the "mystery" of the form, of the surface of the work.

> For me, the thing that *Drumming*, *In C*, *Attica*, *Composition 1960 No. 7*, *Einstein on the Beach*, Budd's *The Pavilion of Dreams* and all the other classical minimalist pieces shared was that their structure was right on the surface, that you could tell just from listening, often just from the first audition, what the overall process was. It seemed to me that part of minimalism's early mystique was to have no secrets, to hold the music's structure right in the audience's face, and have that listened to (Gann, 2001).

These two implications promote a concrete form of participation of both the performer and the listener. They will not direct attention to the usual musical elements, such as melody, phrasing, etc., as they are deprived of expression. They will seek attention to other elements: to the musical ritual itself, to the auditory effects that can be provoked, to the silences, to the strict present.

3.4.3 Non-teleology

Another important objective is the aforementioned non-teleology. It consists of avoiding the provocation of expectations and the resolution of tensions, without clear harmonic functions or directions towards a climax.

> Because there is little sense of goal-directed motion, [minimal] music does not seem to move from one place to another. Within any musical segment, there may be some sense of direction, but frequently the segments fail to lead to or imply one another. They simply follow one another. (Meyer, 1994, p.326).

This is achieved through statism, resistance to development and the avoidance of classical resources such as memory and anticipation (Nyman, 2006, p.186). Also, through repetition, the repeated elements are decontextualised, detaching them from any cause-effect relationship that might arise. This affects the perception of the temporality of the work:

> Many pieces tend, through duration and repetition, to establish a sense of timelessness or continuous present; the use of *drones* reinforces this effect. [...] The use of repetitive patterns and harmonic immobility suggest an awareness of time very different from the materiality of Western "clock" time (Hillier, 1997, p.4).

3.4.4 Ecstasy

The fourth objective is the search for ecstasy in the musical practice of many minimalist works. Ecstasy, understood as a "going out of oneself", is an experience that blurs the boundaries between the psychological and the spiritual, having in common the "rapture" or "annulment of the senses". Although it is true that many minimalist works do not reach the extreme of the "annulment of the senses", we can admit gradations of this experience in some of the three phases of musical practice: in listening, in performance and in composition, although in the latter it is presented in a metaphorical way, as we will see below.

On *ecstasy in listening*, some experiences have been reported, such as the following:

> *Music in Similar Motion* is a string of eight notes that goes on for about fifteen minutes without respite. It could get you high and there were people who got high from it. [...] Listening to this music was like enduring a strong, cold wind and feeling the scourge of hail, sleet and snow on your body. It was absolutely empowering. The music produced the feeling of a force of nature (Glass, 2017, pp.296-297).

The most obvious way to achieve this effect is through repetition. Elliott Carter, especially critical of minimalism, defined repetition as a technique derived from "brainwashing in Hitler's advertising and speeches" (Strickland, 1993, p.286). To this Steve Reich responded:

> Certain people look at music that is totally controlled, written out, as a metaphor for right-wing politics. But I'd suggest that the kind of control I try to exercise on myself and other musicians who play this music is more analogous to yoga. Those are two different conceptions of control—the one imposed from without, the other maintained from within.. (Henahan, 1971)

Robert Fink, in *Repeating ourselves: American minimal music as cultural practice* (2005) offers a different view of the ecstatic effect. He links minimalist repetition with the consolidation of the consumer society, they are indeed historically simultaneous events. According to him, in such everyday realities as advertising, disco music and the arrangement of products in the supermarket, repetition is used to discipline desire and control attention. Sometimes it provokes pleasure, but at other times it is experienced as excessive and alienating (Fink, 2005, p.4), an experience similar to listening to repetitive minimalist music.

According to Fink, there was a cultural shift in the mid-twentieth century: the repetitive massification in consumption was not limited to the "production of things" but to the

"production of the desire for things", i.e. advertising (Fink, 2005, p.81). This new social habitus would affect the way of understanding desire itself and, therefore, of manifesting desire in music: moving from teleological composition to static (and ecstatic) composition, based on a repetition that falls into excess and surpasses or annuls the active capacity of listening.

That said, Fink's thesis refers to repetitive minimalist music, especially that of Glass and Reich, but in works where repetition is used less aggressively the effect is not so evident. For example, in many works by Arvo Pärt, such as *Tabula Rasa (*1977) or *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), the use of silences and long tempos diminishes the "power" of repetition. There is indeed repetition with all its connotations[5] , but they are somehow counteracted and their effect is not so invasive.

On *ecstasy in performance*, something can already be glimpsed in the title of Satie's *Véxations* (1893): "To play this motif 840 times, it will be good to prepare oneself in advance, and in the deepest silence, for the most intense immobility" (Davis, 2007). The performer must be prepared to interpret the work correctly in a context that invites rapture. Steve Reich's experience in playing *gamelan* is also striking: "The pleasure I got from playing is not the pleasure of expressing myself, but of subjugating myself to the music and experiencing the ecstasy that comes from being part of it" (Reich, 2002, p.44). In this type of music, and particularly in *gamelan*, the ecstasy shared between the performers provokes a bond between them, a strong sense of participation. And, moreover, a distancing from the score, evidenced as mere paper (who would play while looking at a bar repeated 22 times?) and, therefore, an interpretation inevitably oriented towards the acoustic and performative experience.

About *ecstasy in composition*, it is not necessarily physical rapture, but a certain self-forgetfulness and emotional detachment. This aspect has been glimpsed in previous chapters: the use of methods such as Reich's *phasing*, Glass's addition and subtraction, Pärt's algorithms and Tavener's forgetfulness of everything he learned speak of denial of one's own emotions and subjugation to a pre-established order.

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[5]Rebecca Leydon (2002) summarises the potential effects of the use of repetition in minimalist works in six ways: maternal (regression to pre-linguistic states of the person), mantric (state of mystical transcendence), kinetic (incites collective dance), totalitarian (evokes an involuntary state of freedom), motoric (evokes a mechanical process) and aphasic (madness or logical absurdity).

These four described aims, non-representation, simplicity, non-teleology and ecstasy have specific implications for sacred music. However, we will discuss them in the corresponding chapter (4.2).

4. Minimalism in sacred music

4.1 Minimalism in pre-existing Christian practices

Church history provides us with a variety of forms of prayer that are based on the reduction or repetition of musical or textual materials. These practices are found in the rich diversity of local traditions at different points in time, which we describe below.

4.1.1 Cantillation

We go back to the origins of Christianity, which inherited cantillation from Judaism. It is a form of reciting sacred texts that "vests" or "elevates" the tone of declamation, resulting in a mixture of reading and singing. Juan Carlos Asensio (2003) attributes two functions to it:

> The first of these is the utilitarian function: the sacred text, enhanced by this sound amplification, can reach the listeners more easily and clearly. The second is no less important and consists in placing the sacred word on a higher plane than the spoken word. We can say that it is a spiritual function [...] The sacred words resounded in the sacred precincts provoking an *ethos* that facilitated the common union of those present (p.170).

Cantillation, based on repeated notes and some simple cadential and ornamental formulas, will gradually be transformed into the forms proper to the regional liturgies (Hispanic, Gallican, Roman, etc.), until the unification of Gregorian chant in the 8th century. In all these practices there is no established metrics, but the rhythm depends on the text. We can find a common aspect with minimalism: the linear repetition of notes, which provokes a remarkable timeless sensation and favours the meditation of the text.

Meditation on the text is the main purpose of both chant and Gregorian chant, for without the text such music would be meaningless. This is also the case in the Eastern Christian traditions. In the words of Tavener (1999):

> Sacred music must be capable of being sung in some form, because, from the Christian point of view, the Word must be heard. Music is the extension of the Word, not a flowery decoration of the Word. It is at the service of the Word, as in all the great traditions (p.47).

Thus, we can glimpse the raison d'être of this music, which makes even more sense in sacred minimalism: the reduction of the ornamental to enhance the text. It not only enhances its intelligibility, but points to its essence in a more direct way.

4.1.2 Hesychasm and Jesus Prayer

In chapter 2.4 we have already seen pictorial (the icons) and musical (the *ison*) influences as elements of Eastern Christianity that are related to minimalism. These elements employ reduction and statism and are reflected in the music of Pärt and Tavener. But they are not the only realities with minimalist techniques. The best example is Hesychasm, a doctrine born in the 4th century. It was spread by Evagrius Ponticus, among other Desert Fathers, who were hermits in Egypt and Syria. This doctrine seeks inner stillness and a mystical encounter with God through ascetic practice and a particular form of prayer. This is the continuous repetition of the so-called *Jesus prayer* or *prayer of the heart*, which consists of a simple phrase: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner". The constant repetition of this formula "is traditionally linked to the rhythm of breathing, which, while favouring perseverance in the invocation, gives a physical consistency to the desire that Christ become the breath, the soul and the "all" of life" (John Paul II, 2002, n.27).

This form of prayer spread in the Eastern eremitic world, reaching large monasteries such as those on Mount Athos. In the Catholic sphere, this practice has not been very widespread and has been viewed with suspicion or even rejection (Vailhé, 2011). However, from the 20th century onwards, and especially thanks to the ecumenical efforts of John Paul II, it was seen in a different light:

> There was no lack of tension with the Catholic point of view on certain aspects of this praxis [Hesychasm]. But it is obligatory to recognise the goodness of the purpose which guided the defence of this spiritual method, that is, to emphasise the concrete possibility offered to man to unite himself to the Triune God in the intimacy of his heart, through the profound union of grace which Eastern theology usually designates with the particularly intense term *"theosis"*, divinisation. (John Paul II, 1996).

4.1.3 Rosary

However, another form of repetitive prayer was established in the Catholic Church: the Rosary. Born in the Middle Ages and spread by the Dominicans in the 15th century, it was made official by Pius V in 1569. Two years later, it was credited with the victory at the Battle of Lepanto against the Ottoman Empire. The Rosary is prayed by repeating Hail Marys grouped into mysteries (1 mystery is equivalent to 1 Our Father, 10 Hail Marys and 1 Glory Be). To each mystery is attributed an episode from the life of Jesus or Our Lady to be

contemplated during the recitation. At the end, the Lauretan Litany, a set of short, repetitive formulas[6] in praise of Our Lady, is recited. John Paul II wrote about the effect of repetition in the Rosary:

> The Rosary proposes the meditation of the mysteries of Christ with a characteristic method, suitable for encouraging assimilation. This is the method based on repetition [...] If we consider this repetition superficially, we might think that the Rosary is an arid and boring practice. On the other hand, the Rosary can be seen as an expression of love which never tires of addressing itself to the one it loves with expressions which, although similar in expression, are always new in relation to the sentiment which inspires them. (John Paul II, 2002, n. 26).

He also spoke about the connection of this practice with similar practices in other religions:

> In such experiences [non-Christian meditation practices] there is also an abundance of a methodology which, claiming to achieve a high level of spiritual concentration, uses psychophysical, repetitive and symbolic techniques. The Rosary is part of this universal picture of religious phenomenology, but it has its own characteristics, which respond to the specific demands of Christian life.
>
> Indeed, the Rosary is a method of contemplation. As a method, it must be used in relation to the end and cannot be an end in itself (John Paul II, 2002, n.28).

Both the Jesus Prayer and the Rosary base their method on repetition. But, as we have seen, it should not be a repetition empty of content, quite the contrary. It should foster love and devotion to Jesus and the Mother of God, to whom the recited text alludes. This point is crucial to understanding the nature of these practices, for they must point directly to God, and cannot become an alienating exercise, of self-contemplation or of entering into an indefinite void.

> The most significant factor that distinguishes the Jesus Prayer from a mantra is that, although it works with the human mind and body, its content is grounded in the name of the person of Jesus Christ, who is understood to be the Son of God; the prayer is addressed *to this person*. (Bouteneff, 2015, p.125)

4.1.4 Silence

The keeping of silence, like repetitive prayer, is a reality in many religions, including Christianity. In the Bible, silence before the divine presence is a sign of awe and wonder, as we see in the Books of Job and Zechariah (Bouteneff, 2015, p.110). In the Gospels, Jesus'

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[6] Repetition in litanies was musically explored by Karel Goeyvaerts in *Litanieën* (1972-82).

silent attitude is also striking, as in the episode of the woman caught in adultery or in the moments when he is accused before his Passion (Bouteneff, 2015, p.117).

Going back to the hesychasts, they took biblical silence as a reference and practiced silence continuously in order to enhance contemplative stillness. The practice of contemplative silence was also established in Western Christianity, especially in the monastic orders. The most austere of these are the Cistercian Order of the Strict Observance (also known as the Trappists) and the Carthusian Order. In this Order, words are reserved for strictly necessary information. We read in their *Statutes*:

> Our endeavour and purpose are chiefly to empty ourselves into the silence and solitude of the cell. This, then, is the holy ground and the place where the Lord and his servant often converse as between friends; where the faithful soul is often united with the Word of God and the bride lives in the company of the Bridegroom; where the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the divine, are united [...].

> God has led his servant into solitude to speak to his heart; but only he who listens in silence perceives the whisper of the gentle breeze that reveals the Lord. (General Chapter of the Carthusian Order, 1989, n.4 and n.14).

We see, therefore, a conception of silence as a place of encounter, as a space conducive to the encounter between God and man. It is a silence filled by the loving presence of God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also understands silence in a similar way:

> Contemplation is silence, this "symbol of the world to come" or "silent love". The words in contemplative prayer are not speeches but twigs that nourish the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable for the "external" man, the Father makes known to us his incarnate, suffering, dead and risen Word, and the filial Spirit makes us sharers in the prayer of Jesus. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, n.2717).

John Paul II, in a homily on Saint Teresa of Jesus, warns us against a mistaken conception of silence and reminds us of its true meaning:

> Therese reacted against books that proposed contemplation as a vague absorption in the divinity or as "thinking nothing", seeing in it a danger of turning in on oneself, of turning away from Jesus from whom "all good things come to us". Hence his cry: "To turn away from Christ ... I cannot bear it". This cry is also valid today against certain prayer techniques which are not inspired by the Gospel and which tend to dispense with Christ in favour of a mental

emptiness which is meaningless in Christianity. Every prayer technique is valid insofar as it is inspired by Christ and leads to Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

Man learns to remain in profound silence when Christ teaches him interiorly "without the noise of words"; he empties himself within himself "looking at the Crucified One". Teresian contemplation is not a search for hidden subjective potentialities by means of refined techniques of interior purification, but opening oneself in humility to Christ and to his Mystical Body, which is the Church (John Paul II, 1982). (John Paul II, 1982).

4.1.5 Taizé

Taizé is the name of the community founded in 1940 by Roger Schutz, better known as "Brother Roger". Its main location is in Taizé, a small village in eastern France. There, at the end of the Second World War, Brother Roger settled down, wanting to form a small community in the monastic style. He, a Protestant, was attracted by the monastic spirituality and was joined by more brothers from different branches of Protestantism.

Judith Kubicki (1999, p.44) tells us that in 1996 the community already numbered 100 brothers: Protestants, Catholics, Lutherans and other Reformed denominations, from 25 different nationalities. Indeed, the spirituality of Taizé is characterised by its ecumenical character and reconciliation between different confessions.

One of the great concerns of the Taizé liturgy, Kubicki tells us, was to avoid imposing one musical model on others, since that would mean displacing Christian groups who did not share those models. It was also important to make everyone feel part of it and to encourage active participation in the music, as proposed by the recent Second Vatican Council.

Jacques Berthier, the composer of most Taizé chants, took all these elements into account. He made chorales for 2, 3 or 4 very simple voices. They had a very short duration, and were made in order to repeat them as many times as necessary.

> The short chants, repeated over and over again, give it a meditative character. In a few words they express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. As the words are sung many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being. Meditative singing thus becomes a way of listening to God. It allows everyone to participate in a time of prayer together and to remain together in attentive waiting for God, without having to set the duration of the time too precisely. (Taizé, 2004)

Indeed, there is no stipulated duration of the works, nor is there a fixed number of repetitions. In this sense, the notation of Taizé music is reminiscent of the score of Terry Riley's *In C*

(1964). It will be intuition that will guide and give the interpretative guidelines, always appropriate to the context.

> Something very interesting in Taizé is that this formula of calm repetition has been taken up in the liturgy, i.e. it is not only used in personal prayer, but also in common prayer or in prayer together. (Taizé, 2004).

One of the great contributions of Taizé music is precisely the focus on the assembly, which is responsible for creating an atmosphere of meditation. Simplicity and repetition thus help this effect in a ritual context. Moreover, the simple fact of all singing, in different voices, but creating a repetitive harmony, highlights a symbolic aspect: the harmony between different confessions, sharing a timeless space, symbol of the eternal Church.

4.1.6 Penitential liturgical seasons

Finally, we see that in the penitential liturgical seasons (Advent and Lent), use is made of silence and the elimination of ornamentation.

This is most evident during Lent. It is a time of prayer, fasting and almsgiving and no floral decoration of the altar is allowed. As far as music is concerned, the *Gloria* and *Alleluia* are omitted from the Eucharist. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2007, 313) prescribes that, if musical instruments are present, they should be played only to sustain the chant. In the Good Friday Office, there are not even altar cloths on the altar and there is complete silence at the *Introit*.

The reason for these practices in the liturgy is the preparation for two great feasts: Christmas, anticipated by Advent; and Easter, anticipated by Lent. In both cases, the believer must purify himself and detach himself from everything material. We see once again, then, that this "liturgical minimalism", if it can be called that, is not sought for its own sake: it is a path towards a joy, concretised in two feasts of great joy.

4.2 Contributions from minimalism to liturgical composition

4.2.1 Characteristics of liturgical composition

Liturgy is understood as the way in which the rites of a religion are celebrated. In the case of the Catholic religion, the liturgy occupies a special place, since it is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her

power flows" (*Sacrosantum Concilium*, n.10). In it, God is understood as making himself present through visible or audible signs, such as music.

Liturgical music "is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action" (*Sacrosantum Concilium*, n. 112). In other words, music must be subordinate to the function of each chant, enhancing its liturgical meaning. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic liturgy has stressed the importance of the active participation of the assembly, an aspect that music must also manifest. One of the most relevant documents of the Second Vatican Council on liturgy is the constitution *Sacrosantum Concilium* (1963), which devotes its chapter VI to liturgical music, whose purpose it declares to be "the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful" (n.112) and contains a specific section for composers (n.122):

> Let them produce compositions which have the qualities proper to genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works which can be sung only by large choirs, but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful.
>
> The texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine; indeed they should be drawn chiefly from holy scripture and from liturgical sources.

After the Second Vatican Council, the instruction *Musicam sacram* (1967) concretised some aspects for the implementation of the new liturgical musical model. Some points were established which are important to take into account as far as composition is concerned:

- The Church does not reject any musical genre if it is appropriate to the liturgical action (n.10).

- The participation of the assembly must be first of all interior but also outwardly manifested (n.15).

- It is possible to delegate some pieces to the choir because of their complexity, but in no case should it be entrusted with all the songs, excluding the people (n.16).

- In the Proper of the Mass, it is appropriate for the people to participate, for example with easy responses or adapted musical forms, especially the gradual or responsorial psalm (n.33).

- In the Ordinary of the Mass, if necessary, alternate verse formulas can be found to encourage participation. Participation in the *Credo*, the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei* is also important (n.34).

- "Anything done in churches, even if only for experimental purposes, which is unbecoming to the holiness of the place, the dignity of the liturgy and the devotion of the faithful, must be avoided." (n. 60).

- Musical instruments are permitted, with preference given to the organ (n.62) and avoiding those suitable only for secular music (n.63), although it is not specified which ones. Instruments may not cover the voices or hinder the understanding of the text (n.64). They may also play "solo" at the entrance, offertory, communion and at the end; not in Advent, Lent, the Sacred Triduum or in offices of the dead.

In the following we will review the minimalist aesthetic aims and see how they relate to liturgical music.

4.2.2 Non-representation

In the realm of Christian sacred music, the work must speak of the divine in order to be considered as such. Therefore, an aesthetic of non-representation would be incompatible with this type of music. Thus, we see that, although the American minimalists and the *holy minimalists* coincide in their techniques, their aims are completely different. The latter do not seek reduction for the sake of reduction, nor the minimum for the sake of the minimum, but try to "achieve the maximum of expressive content from every single note" (Dies, 2017) or, in Pärt's words, "to love every note" (Service, 2017), understood as a creation that reflects the beauty of the Creator. Therefore, "spiritual minimalists would be more religious than minimalist" (Dies, 2017), as minimalism does not interest them as a goal, but as a journey to sacred representation. It is a way of stripping away the accessory in order to get to the truest essence. For this reason, Bouteneff (2015) considers that Pärt's music is not aesthetically minimalist:

> Here one must absolutely distinguish "reduction" from "simplification", and certainly from "minimalism". What we are talking about has more to do with concentration, the identification of what Pärt calls the "nucleus": Reduction certainly does not mean simplification, but is the way - at least in an ideal scenario - to the most intense concentration on the essence of things. The falling away of the extraneous, through this focus on the essential, is more than simplicity-for-its-own-sake. It is distillation; the identification of archetype. (p.100)

So, analogous to what has been said about Jesus' prayer and the Rosary, minimalist sacred music finds its meaning by pointing to God in his work. And, following the Christian

tradition, the most effective way is to start from the word, as we have seen in cantillation and Gregorian chant. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Pärt constructs melodies following syllabic patterns, as we shall see below.

As far as the liturgy is concerned, the word is indispensable and unavoidable, since most liturgical compositions are based on a text and the Church encourages participation through song. Moreover, according to the text, the music must reflect its character and point in the same direction.

4.2.3 Simplicity

As we have seen in previous chapters, simplicity helps active participation. Also, interest in form is reduced and attention can be channelled to other aspects, whether external (the ritual itself) or internal (meditation). The absence of complexity also helps to highlight certain aspects of the work that are presented without distraction.

In any case, simplicity is not only a useful tool, but also has a symbolic aspect. We find it in the book *Liturgy for Tomorrow* (1977) by Joseph Gelineau, a Taizé composer. According to him, there are two ways for music to make "audible the inaudible", and the second one occupies our attention:

> The second way I dream of would be that this music would not necessarily be new in its language, nor too difficult to interpret, but very transparent towards what it celebrates, that it would be an inexhaustible source of prayer, meaning and sensations. A symbol, very simple, almost pure and naked, like baptismal water, the flame of a candle or broken bread. A music that is no longer filled with itself, but carries silence and adoration, like the Virgin Mother carries the only-begotten Word (Gelineau, 1977).

Simplicity also refers to concepts that can be linked to Christian life: austerity, simplicity, transparency. In Pärt's words: "all important things in life are simple" (Smith, 1999, p.21). In Christian ethics, simplicity has also been seen as a virtue, largely preached by St. Vincent de Paul. Simplicity as a virtue means living without duplicity, without masks, being truthful to God, to others and to oneself.

4.2.4 Non-teleology

Regarding non-teleology, this is one of the most significant characteristics of minimalist sacred music. It has been said about Pärt's music:

Procedures such as isorhythm, measured canon and serial permutation, together with a rejection of the categories of contrast and development associated with traditional tonal practice, result in a suspension of linear temporality. Pärt's music leads nowhere, connects to no syntactic discourse. It is concerned with being, not with "becoming". (Dies, 2013)

Indeed, it follows from this aesthetic aspect that the listener's attention is not on "getting to a place", but on "being in that place". If one could draw an analogy between the musical narrative and the life course of the listener, there is no longer a journey to the Promised Land or heaven, but a direct experience, a sojourn in that very place. This experience is similar to what happens in the Eucharist, since, according to the Catechism, "by the Eucharistic celebration we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p.1326). The alteration of temporal perception, typical of minimalist music, finds its liturgical meaning as a symbol of heavenly eternity.

On non-teleology, Tavener went a step further and declared that it should be indispensable for sacred music. Any hint of harmonic direction or teleological resolution would be judged by moral criteria:

> This word, 'aspiration', is very important, because a Western Christian tends to aspire to go, [...] whereas the Eastern Orthodox Christian is already aware of the divine presence. For an Orthodox, religion is more about removing the dross that obscures what is already divine, than it is about attaining some distant spiritual goal. You see it in the whole of Western tradition. Even in composers like Victoria or Palestrina, there is always aspiration. Bach is full of this yearning after the solace of the personal God. But if you listen to the music of the East, somehow the divine is already there. "It is", which is a parallel to the eternal "I am". (Tavener, 1999, p.128)

Tavener's thesis presumes that that which is celestial and eternal is static and timeless. However, fellow composer James Macmillan criticises this assumption, as he understands the aesthetics of sacred music in a completely opposite way:

> I find their [Pärt, Tavener and Górecki's] music very beautiful… but it's a music that is deliberately mono-dimensional music [...] There is a deliberate avoidance of conflict, and people like Tavener make very convincing claims as to why their music should be that way: an avoidance of the dialectical principles that have been in Western music through Beethoven and before.... my whole compositional philosophy thrives on conflict and ambiguity…; so there is violence in my music whereas with these other composers there is not, and that

sometimes surprises people who think that music of a spiritual dimension should not have violence.... Perhaps the downside of the *zeitgeist* [the spirit of the times] for spirituality in music is this need to retreat from the world. That has never been my concern (Begbie, 2007, p.79).

To retreat from the abyss and focus solely on the transcendent would be to conform with the post-Christian spiritual narcissism of our predominant capitalist culture. We are artists formed in the Christian tradition and we bring a radical confrontation and challenge to all that is fashionable and accepted. If our radicalism has transcendent potential, it is because it is rooted in a knowledge of the death of Jesus (Parsons and Sholl, 2020, p.94).

What Tavener sees as "aspiration" or "glorification of the human ego" (ImperiumUltum, 2014), Macmillan understands as "conflict" and "multidimensionality". When Macmillan speaks of the death of Jesus, he is referring to the suffering of Christ (who is God himself), who experiences conflict in his very being, as a consequence of the mystery of the Incarnation. The theologian Jeremy Begbie has expressed criticism of Pärt's music for a similar reason:

If Christ has embraced our fallen humanity, including its fear, anxiety, hunger, loss, frustration and disillusionment, and these have become the very stuff of salvation, can we be content with a vision of the spiritual that is incapable of engaging with just these realities, with a cold cathedral that bears little relation to life on the streets? (Begbie, 2007, p.179)

In contrast, the composer and priest Ivan Moody sees in Pärt's style a manifestation of the Incarnation. Not in an obvious, "pictorial" and emotional way, but through symbols. The symbol, according to him, alludes to its meaning without being violated by human passions. He gives as an example the unexpected final chord of *Passio* (1989) or the unison of voices in a strategic place in *Stabat Mater* (1985), as symbolic elements that allude to "incarnated" situations such as the death of Jesus, but without emotion clouding the contemplation of this fact. This symbolic contemplation is another reason for altering the temporal perception:

Time is suspended, and that is another important element of mysticism. In an icon there is no perspective, i.e. it is not situated in reality. Similarly, mystical music must suspend real time to create its own 'two-dimensional' level, into whose metaphorical simplification the initiate can enter in order to understand the multidimensional mystery presented to him". (Moody, 1996, p.78)

Furthermore, he notes that the quiet and calm style may allude to the human and incarnate condition, which is fragile and to which God has also silently lowered himself (Bouteneff *et al*, 2021, p.208-218).

On the issue of temporality, Robert Sholl has written that both Pärt's and Macmillan's conceptions of music refer to the two temporal measures that come together in the person of Christ (God and man): a divine and eternal temporality with a human and 'progressive' temporality. But he warns that Manichean readings of this can be problematic (Parsons and Sholl, 2020, p.94).

We see that, in any case, all music is itself "incarnated", since it translates the divine into human and temporal parameters. Indeed, a non-teleological style seems more committed to invisible and timeless realities, but this does not exempt it from conflict. As Moody points out, the use of symbols moves us away from a "one-dimensional" reading according to Macmillan or "narcissistic" in Begbie's words.

4.2.5 Ecstasy

"When the voice becomes perfectly attuned to the drone, to the tambura, says [La Monte] Young, "it is like leaving the body and meeting God" (Potter, 2002, p.79-80). This sensation is thus, for Young, a spiritual and rewarding experience. However, there are authors who see problems with physical ecstasy because of the limitation of cognitive freedom:

> The crucial problem is that "ecstasy" or ascension "to heaven" demands a release from the control of the listener - ecstasy etymologically meaning a "standing out" from one's normal self. Insofar as one is a hearer, it therefore implies submission to an external force that imposes control supposedly in the service of non-control. The agent of 'hypnotic' ecstasy or 'trance' music ultimately exercises far greater dominance than, for example, the baroque composer who directs all the elements of his compositions to evoke particular *Affekten*. (Strickland, 1993, pp.286-287)

How does this experience of ecstasy relate to the Christian tradition? We see that, in the mystical tradition, there have been saints who, in an exceptional way, have experienced ecstasy, the "suspension of the senses", such as Saint Teresa of Jesus or Saint John of the Cross. But as we have seen in previous chapters, in Christian prayer what prevails is the contemplation of the person of Jesus Christ, and any sensory experience that occurs is only a consequence of this.

P Thus, while in Young's spirituality, ecstasy is produced by an auditory and earthly experience, in Christian spirituality, ecstasy is produced by a spiritual encounter with the Beloved. All the methods of prayer we have seen (the Rosary, cantillation, the repetition of the Jesus Prayer) provide a favourable and calm environment for this encounter with the Beloved to occur, but they are not the direct cause of ecstasy. On this subject, the Catholic Church has pronounced itself:

> Spiritual authors have adopted those elements that facilitate recollection in prayer, while recognising their relative value: they are useful if they conform to and are oriented towards the purpose of Christian prayer (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1989, n.26).

As far as minimalism in liturgical music is concerned, the effects of repetition cannot be denied, as a preparation for a climate. But if the participation of the assembly is to be "full, conscious and active" (*Musicam Sacram*, 1967, n.15), the people involved must be masters of their own faculties.

> Repetition and a sense of hypnotic incantation certainly have a place in the music of both Tavener and Pärt's, though they are far from being the technical 'core' of their work; this, I would argue, is akin to the state of prayer, though of course to be completely effective in this way the music needs to be prayed and not simply sung. It is an element that clearly derives from the liturgical rhythm of the Orthodox Church (Moody, 1996, p.78).

"Praying" and not merely "singing" implies attention to the word. This is why an attitude of silence, also typical of minimalism, is necessary. The ecstasy sought in sacred minimalism is not so much physical, but rather ethical: to keep an inner silence, to come out of oneself and listen to the word.

On the ecstasy of composition (ethical, not physical), Tavener says: "I was beginning to find 'The Voice', not my voice. I was beginning to extinguish John Tavener. Some other level of reality was taking over" (Tavener, 1999, p.59). Ecstasy in composition is thus a self-emptying in order to let God act. It is closely related to what is required of icon painters:

> The Council of Nicaea II [...] demands that his work be conceived in a personal and working atmosphere that ensures the execution of a holy work. The writing of the icon also demands that the iconographer follow a holy lifestyle, identified with the liturgy he serves by his work and nourished by prayer and asceticism. (Vara, s.f.)

> The iconographer must become transparent to Grace, be imbued with the Gospel and liturgical texts and beware of any sentimentalism. (Atelier Saint André, 2008)

4.3 *Missa Syllabica* (1977): an example of minimalist liturgical composition

*Missa Syllabica (*composed by Arvo Pärt in 1977, revised in 1996) is a composition for the ordinary of the Mass with the following movements: *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei* and *Ita missa est*. Below we offer the most essential features of the work, without being able to offer the entire score because it is subject to copyright.

Although it is known as a single work, several versions of it coexist. As with some of Pärt's works, there is some confusion as to how these versions should be classified (Bouteneff *et al*., 2021, p.166). The most widely performed are those derived from the 1996 revision: the version for mixed choir *a cappella* and the version for mixed choir and organ.

The difficulty in establishing which is the "true" version, according to medievalist Andrew Balbin, is a value in itself of Arvo Pärt's music and can only be understood from the point of view of the Middle Ages, not from our capitalist era. In the Middle Ages there was no intellectual property, there were no official versions, and certainly not all codices were expected to present the same versions (Bouteneff *et al*, 2021, p.166).

But there is another ambiguity in this work that is even more striking. There is no indication of tempo, there are no dynamics and the note stems have been eliminated, leaving black and white note heads to be interpreted. The notation "gives the score a medieval aesthetic and perhaps leads singers and conductor to think about the tension of the text rather than the actual note values, thus making the music more like a speech" (Cargile, 2008, p.26). The length of the work, as it has no fixed tempo, can vary from 13 to 16 minutes, according to the 1996 revision.

Ello provoca una participación del director y los intérpretes en el proceso creativo, ya que tendrán que tomar decisiones que el compositor ha dejado libres. La escritura original es, por lo tanto, minimalista, ya que se ha escrito lo únicamente esencial.

Another characteristic of the work is how the music is rooted in the word. As in many of Pärt's other works, the measures last as long as each individual word. This reflects the compositional method, based on the number of syllables in each word. On this, conductor Paul Hillier has commented that the first beat of each bar should not be accented, but that Renaissance polyphony should be taken as a reference. In the original Renaissance scores, there were no bars; there was a metre, but no accented beats (Bouteneff *et al*, 2021, p.91).

Regarding the minimalist techniques employed, these are: *tintinnabuli*, extreme reduction of melodic material based on diatonism and joint degrees, strict melodic rules according to the number of syllables in each word and minimal variety in the rhythmic material. All these techniques eliminate any hint of ornamentation and leave the word bare and in the foreground. The composer leaves aside the "expressive" driving of the phrases and leaves them to the rules he has devised.

The words bring their own teleology, the syllables leading to a destination or referring to an origin. To give an example, we see that in the *Gloria* the melody of joint degrees is adapted as follows: in the alto, all words end in *A* and in the tenor all words begin in *D*, resulting in a subtle counterpoint.

Figure 4. Fragment of Missa Syllabica for choir and organ. 2. Gloria, bars 7-11

In the *Sanctus* he seeks a more solemn and "rounded" effect: all the words end in *F*.

Figure 5. Fragment of Missa Syllabica for choir and organ. 4.
Sanctus, bars 1-5

As for the tintinnabuli, it is surprisingly simple. In the version for choir and organ, it delegates the M-voice (melody) to the choir and the T-voice (tintinnabuli) to the organ, which

in this case is the D minor chord. The notes of the T voice alternate between lower and upper positions. In the example below, we see that the organ starts with the D m note closest to the tenor F "from below"; but on the next note it plays the D m note closest "from above". This succession will be repeated throughout all the movements.

Figura 6. Fragmento of Missa Syllabica *for choir and organ. 1. Kyrie, bars 1-2*

The composer seeks the greatest possible contrast with the limited options available to him. We see this in the variation of structures, inversion relationships, contrary and mirror movements, the alternation in the appearance of voices and the assignment of melodies, timbral contrasts, etc. These contrasts serve the text and its liturgical function. They also help to structure the text and thus enhance its meaning.

In general, there is a sense of extreme dryness and austerity, which draws the listener's attention and invites recollection. The pauses, besides having structural and symbolic significance, help to purify the listener and to be more attentive to the events that may occur and, above all, to the words themselves.

5. *Misa mínima* (2022)

As a composer, I am challenged to express profound mysteries with very simple elements. This is the musical interest of the *Misa mínima*, composed *specifically* for this work and as a result of the research of the previous chapters. In this composition I select and apply minimalist techniques according to the meaning of each movement and the context in which it develops.

Also, as a believer, the challenge is to capture the spirit of each text, or at least what I perceive of them on a spiritual level, and to manifest it in the music. This does not mean "translating the text into notes" as a mere translation exercise, but making the music: the space where the text is framed, the meeting point between the participant and the text, and a window into the beyond that the text speaks of. These objectives will always be in my liturgical compositions, regardless of the techniques I use. But in this case, working with such austere techniques will bring very particular meanings and will demand an extreme sensitivity from me on a musical and spiritual level.

The complete work is available in the annexes to this work.

5.1 Aesthetic justification

At the moment of consecration at Mass, God becomes present in a piece of bread. A whole God, eternal, infinitely immense and omnipotent, becomes an extremely small element. There, too, is concentrated the mystery of the Incarnation and the offering of his Blood as atonement for human sin, sacrificed on the altar, as food for the salvation of each person. The Eucharistic bread is thus a symbol that contains a great number of meanings that go beyond its small appearance. This is the main justification for the *Misa mínima*, which concentrates the meanings of each movement in small elements, as a metaphor for this bread.

Also, as the Church reduces liturgical vestments and eliminates chanting in the season of Lent, the *Misa mínima* will be ideal for this time. It will help to create a suitable *ethos*, seeking silence, sobriety, inner stillness and a listening attitude.

Lastly, following on from the Second Vatican Council, emphasis is placed on the participation of the assembly. The simplicity of the musical phrases, as well as having a symbolic charge, will be an effective tool for participation.

5.2 Music analysis

The structure follows the ordinary of a Lenten mass, which is the usual one, but omitting the *Gloria*: in total *Kyrie*, *Credo*, *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*. In all the movements I use the following minimalist techniques:

- Reducing the melodic material, concretised in each movement with different rules. In all cases, it tries not to establish "expressive" melodies, but rather mathematical relationships such as scales or joint degrees.

- Reducing the relationships between voices and harmonic material, also with different rules depending on the movement.

- Avoiding ornaments or melismas

- Restricting the variety of rhythmic values.

- Use of silences as structural points and as spaces for meditation.

- Use of repetition as a recurring element.

- Minimalism in notation: avoid tempos and measured notation (only in *Kyrie* and *Credo*) and avoid dynamics (in all movements).

In addition, each movement may include some techniques that are not common to the other movements.

5.2.1 *Kyrie*

It is a movement with a great deal of interpretative freedom, with no metre, tempo or dynamics. The *Kyrie* is an individual and collective plea for divine mercy, something that concerns the most intimate and personal of each person. Therefore, these decisions will be made by the conductor, recognising the needs of the situation, which may vary according to the day and the place where it is performed.

Each singer and each member of the assembly enters freely singing *Kyrie* on the note D until the conductor cuts off the sound. Then, after a silence, the voices join in the supplication *eleison*. In this way, the two concepts of individuality and collectivity are brought to the table. This is also the case in the *Christe eleison* and the final *Kyrie eleison*.

This is how some of the techniques used are specified:

- Reduction in melodic material: joint degrees in each *eleison* and joint degrees between *Kyrie - Christe - Kyrie* (*D - C - D*)

- Reduction in the relationships between voices and harmonic material: contrary movements and perfect fifths.

5.2.2 *Credo*

In this *Creed* the role of the assembly as the active agent of the text has been emphasised. Indeed, the *Creed* is a firm and solemn declaration of the faith of the participants. For this reason, musical importance is given to the only verbs in the first person singular in the text: *credo* (I believe), *confiteor* (I confess), *exspecto* (I hope) and also the final word *Amen*. These verbs mark the formal structure and are also the only interventions of the choir and the assembly. The rest of the text will be interpreted by a baritone soloist.

Below is the structure of the text along with the notes on which the melody of each verse is based:

Section	Text	Notes
1. I believe in God the Father	CREDO	E-D
	In unum Deum	e-d
	Patrem omnipotentem	e-c
	Factorem coeli et terrae	f-r
	Visibilium omnium et invisibilium	f-e
2. I believe in God the Son	CREDO	F-E
	In unum Dominum Iesum Christum	f-e
	Filium Dei unigenitum	f-e
	Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula	f-d
	Deum de Deo	f-e
	Lumen de lumine	f-d
	Deum vero de Deo vero	f-c
	genitum	f-d
	Non factum	f-e
	Consubstantialem Patri	f-d
	Per quem omnia facta sunt	f-c
	Qui propter nos homines et proptem nostram salutem descendit de caelis	f-d
	Et incarnatus est de Spiritu Santo ex Maria Virgine	f-c
	Et homo factus est.	f-c

	Crucifixus etiam pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato	f-b
	Passus et sepultus est	f-c
	Et resurrexit tertia die	g-c
	Secundum scripturas	g-d
	Et ascendit in caelum	g-e
	Sedet ad dexteram Patris	g-f
	Et iterum venturus est cum gloria	g-e
	Iudicare vivos et mortuos	g-f
	Cuius regni non erit finis	g-f
3. I believe in God the Holy Spirit	CREDO	G-F
	In Spiritum Sanctum	g-f
	Dominum et vivificantem	g-e
	Qui ex Patre filioque procedit	g-f
	Qui cum Patri et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur,	a-f
	Qui locutus per prophetas	a-g
4. I believe in the Church	CREDO	A-G
	unam	a-f
	sanctam	a-g
	catholicam	b-g
	Et apostolicam	b-a
	Ecclesiam	b-a
5. I confess...	CONFITEOR	B-A
	Unum baptisma	b-a
	In remissionem peccatorum	c-b
6. I look forward….	EXSPECTO	C-B
	Resurrectionem mortuorum	c-b
	Et vitam venturi saeculi	d-c
7. Amen	AMEN	D-C

Figure 7. Structure of Credo *de* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira. Own elaboration.*

Each section is based on two notes, which will behave as axes leading the melodic line in an ascending direction. As an example, these would be the axes of section 1 *I believe in God the Father*:
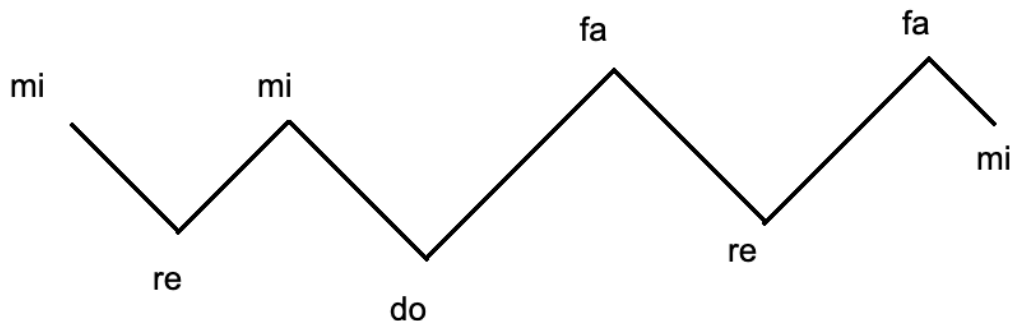

Figure 8. Diagram of section 1 of Credo *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira.*
Own elaboration.

Figure 9. Fragment of section 1 of Credo *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira.*

In this way, each section will raise the axis notes one second, so that the first *credo* will be e-d, the second will be f-e and so on until the d-c of the final *Amen*. As an important detail, the tritone f-b is reserved only for the *crucifixus*, in the second section.

Notes are assigned by syllables: the tonic syllable and its preceding syllables will have the sharp note of the axis; those following the stressed syllable will have the low note. This formula is derived from the cadential formulas of Gregorian chant, which also depend on the stressed syllables.

The harmony, carried by the strings, is based on fourths and fifths that sometimes "overlap". To mark the end of each section, thirds are allowed.

These are the concrete techniques of this movement:

• Melodic material subject to syllabic rules.

• Reduced relationships between voices and harmonic material: chords restricted to fourths and fifths, with exceptions to mark section endings.

• General structure based on simple relationships: joint grades from one section to the next.

5.2.3 *Sanctus*

The *Sanctus* is characterised above all by repetition. Throughout the movement, the assembly sings and repeats the word *Sanctus*. On the other hand, the acclamation *Hosanna in excelsis* is repeated in canon. The main reason for the use of the repetition is the suspension of temporality, as a symbol of eternity, since in the *Sanctus* the assembly joins in the heavenly praise of the angels. Here is an example of the repetition of the two formulae:

Figure 10. Fragment of Sanctus *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira, bars 37-41.*

This would be the structure:

Sections	intro	A	B	A'	B'
Asambly	Repetition *Sanctus*				
Soloist		*Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua*		*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*	
Choir	Repetition *Sanctus*		Repeated canon: *Hosanna in excelsis*	Repetition *Sanctus*	Repeated canon: *Hosanna in excelsis*
Strings		Simultaneous suspended notes: A-D-G-E	Descending tetrachord: C-D-B-A	Simultaneous suspended notes: A-G-F-E-D	Ascending Dorian D scales in proportional rhythms

FigurE 11. Structure of Sanctus *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira. Own elaboration.*

The movement is in D Dorian. However, the *Sanctus* repetition is based on the notes *F* and *A*, and it is not until the B section that the *B* natural appears. Therefore, it is not revealed to be in this mode until the triumphant *Hosanna* of section B.

The soprano soloist's melody uses only the notes *A* and *D*, again emphasising the importance of the just fifth as we have seen throughout the mass.

As for the canon of *Hosanna*, it is a round canon. In each melodic cell, two voices sing in opposite directions, beginning at octave distance and ending in unison.

Figure 12. Fragment of Sanctus *from*
Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira,*
bars 18-21.

In sections A and A', the strings play suspended notes, which contrast with sections B and B', where they play scales, B being descending and B' ascending. In the latter, different scales coincide, in the rhythm of square, round and white. These scales accompany the choir singing *Hosanna* and the assembly singing *Sanctus*, giving an overall sense of different layers coming together.
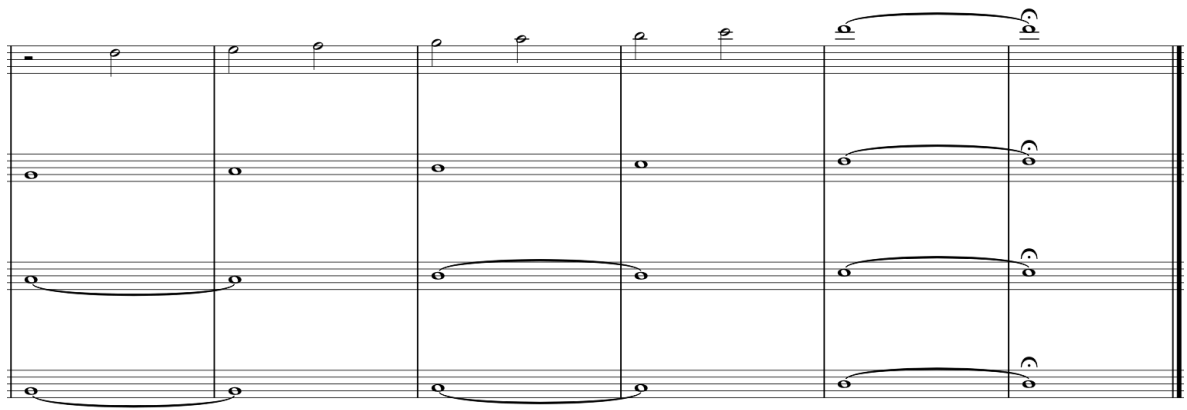
Figure 13. Fragment of Sanctus *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira, bars 46-51.*

This is the list of minimalist techniques specific to this movement:

- Reduction of melodic material: fifths in the soloist's melody, joint degrees in the choir's canon and scales in the strings.

- Simplification of harmonic material. It is based on joint degrees of the Dorian D scale.

- Ostinato in *Sanctus* and *Hosanna in excelsis*

5.2.4 *Agnus Dei*

In this movement, the intervention of the assembly is limited to the moments when *miserere nobis* is sung, with the melodic pattern E-D-F-E.

Sección	1	2		3
Texto	*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,*	*Miserere nobis.*	*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,*	*Miserere nobis.*
S			C	
A		E-D-F-E	E-D-F-E	E-D-F-E
T	A			
B	E-D-F-E			
Strings	E-D-F-E	Pedal: A fa-mi-re-do	Pedal: A E-D-F-E	C-B-A-G Pedal: B
Mode		A minor		E Phrygian

(3)	4
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,	*Dona nobis pacem.*
E	E-D-F-E
E-D-F-E	
E-D-F-E	
E	
E-D-F-E Pedal: B	Pedal: C G-F-E-D
(E Phrygian)	C Major

Figure 14. Structure of Agnus Dei *from* Misa mínima *by Luis Meseguer Mira. Own elaboration.*

The note E is essential in this movement, as it contributes to the creation of modulations with as few notes as possible. *E* is the fifth of the *A* chord, the fundamental of the *E* chord, and the third of the *C* chord. It is also the axis for the E-D-F-E motif. These chords are heard thanks to the strategically arranged pedal notes: *A* in section 2, *B* in section 3 and *C* in section 4. These three notes in a row are joint degrees: A-B-C.

The notes of the strings in each *miserere nobis* are also joint degrees: F-E-D-C; C-B-A-G; G-F-E-D. They are joint degrees within each group, but also between them: F-E-D-C/C-B-A-G/G-F-E-D.

In addition, for each comma and full stop in the text, the choir has an unmeasured silence written in - at the conductor's discretion -, but the strings do not, as one of them plays the pedal note.

This is the list of minimalist techniques used:

• Reduction of melodic material: simple E-D-F-E motif and joint degrees on strings.

• Use of harmonic material derived from a simple principle: E as a fundamental, third or fifth.

• Use of pedal notes

6. Conclusions

On the one hand, we have seen how the history of minimalism has evolved since its recent appearance. Since its beginnings, not only its delimitation as an artistic current, but also its essence and its very name have been discussed. We have seen that this current has simple tools that allow it to point in a multitude of directions: overwhelming silences, exacerbated repetitions, folkloric rhythms or mechanical patterns. Although minimalist techniques originally had definite aesthetic goals, over the years they have been modified according to the intention of each composer. As a result, minimalist music can be created for a wide range of contexts.

One of these contexts can be the liturgy, which, through the techniques analysed, can acquire meanings typical of minimalist language. We have seen them: suspension of temporality and teleology, simplicity, austerity, etc. However, the fact of being minimalist does not guarantee its suitability for liturgy. We have already seen, for example, the tendency of many minimalist works to seek physical ecstasy or mental abandonment in a void without representation, both concepts incompatible with liturgy.

The Word is the main element that leads liturgical music to fulfil its function. Precisely, minimalism, by skilfully using its techniques, can offer a unique vision of the Word, pointing directly to it, preserving it as the most essential and diluting the ancillary. In this it stands out from other forms of composition.

Minimalist techniques offer a peculiar form of participation for both the composer and the performer. The composer loses his role as the "emotional" conductor of the work, but "subjugates" and "impersonalises" his music under melodic or harmonic rules. The performer also gives up "the pleasure of expressing himself" (Reich, 2002, p.44) and the focus on the text is even greater. These ways of composing and performing can invite participants to live a disinterested, disengaged and open listening lifestyle. In this respect it also stands out from other forms of composition.

Megan Hill, editor of the Protestant publication *The Gospel Coalition,* welcomes a minimalist lifestyle, understood as being free of goods and accessories. But she warns:

> Christian finds freedom not in lifestyle changes or donations at the local charity shop but
> in Christ. He finds relief not in what he has done but in the One who has done everything for

him; not in needing less but in acknowledging his complete dependence on his Savior […] Our greatest burden is the sin that drags us ever closer to an eternal grave. And only in looking to Jesus can we ever be truly free. (Hill, 2017)

In a parallel way, a minimalist work will not be more suitable for liturgy by how few notes it uses, or by how simple the materials and relationships are. Rather, it will achieve its goal by how it emphasises the liturgical text and context: its techniques achieve this in a unique way.

As far as the composition of the *Misa Mínima* is concerned, I can express some reflections on the creative process. The research I have done has helped me, first of all, to see how important the context of composition and personal sincerity are, especially thanks to the experiences of Pärt and Tavener. I needed a suitable climate for the composition: a context of silence and abandonment of the world. Indeed, with minimalist techniques I was not looking for "compositional virtuosity", but rather to make the right choices. Therefore, I wanted to purify the ear and the soul. It was not an easy task and I am convinced that I still have a long way to go to achieve it. Another part of the process was to study the texts, historically, liturgically, linguistically and structurally. At the same time, meditating on these texts and bringing them into personal prayer with God has helped me to become familiar with them and to enter into them.

On some (few) occasions, the structures or characteristics of the movements have come to me spontaneously while praying. This has happened to me with the structure of the *Kyrie* and the canons of the *Sanctus*. In the rest of the pieces, the techniques have been chosen with strategic thinking, looking for what would be the most ideal according to the meaning of the text. My research has also provided me with a wide "catalogue" of techniques. To give an example, the structure of the *Credo* would not have been possible without the previous analysis of the *Missa Syllabica*.

In several cases, I have been forced to simplify the pieces, as I instinctively sought a little more complexity, moving away from the proposed aesthetic. However, in the *Credo*, I have tried to give it a minimum of complexity in order to increase the aural interest, a balance that is very difficult to maintain.

The study of works such as Riley's *In C* or the repetitive melodies of Taizé has encouraged me to leave decisions in the hands of the conductor and the interpretative context. Each community where the *Minimal Mass* is performed has its own way of proceeding, and it seems to me that it is more important to adapt the work to the performance than the other way

around. Pärt's "emotional distancing" has inspired me not to have absolute control over my creation in that sense.

Composing with minimalist techniques also made me realise how difficult this task is. The *Minimal Mass* has been done with a variety of techniques, but Pärt's *Missa Syllabica* presents no variety in that sense, as all the movements are governed by the same rules. That gives it all the more merit and demonstrates his extraordinary ability to connect with unprecedented depth with such a diverse audience, with the most austere of tools. That is something that can only be achieved with a deep silence and a fully open ear. For this reason, the work he has done encourages me to continue on this musical and spiritual path.

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