

MUSIC 3680A

Minimalist Music

Fall 2022

Tuesdays, 1:30–2:30pm and Thursdays, 1:30–3:30pm in Talbot College 202

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:30–3:30pm

Course Description

Minimalist music emerged in America as a novel compositional practice in the 1960s. Its use of scarce material and repetition resulted in long works subjected to gradual change. This new method of composing contrasted the preceding experimental, abstract expressionist artists, who above all else sought complete control of multiple parameters in their compositions. This course explores minimalist music in terms of its compositional, performative, historical, and analytical significance in society and academia.

Course Outcomes

Students will become familiar with prominent minimalist and postminimalist composers through readings and recordings. Weekly reading topics will cover minimalist music itself, its composers, historical analysis, and music-theoretical analyses. In each class, students will demonstrate their knowledge of the readings and their familiarity of the assigned listening through discussion. By the end of the course, students will know how to assess critically, historically, and analytically what makes minimalist and postminimalist music “minimal.”

Assessment:

Engagement: 10%
Assignments: 40%
Film presentation: 10%
Final paper abstract/bibliography: 5%
Final paper: 35%

Assessment Summary:

- i. *Engagement*: Students are expected to prepare, attend, and participate in class. Preparing involves reading the assigned material and listening to the recordings for each week. The majority of class will be dedicated to discussing the readings.
- ii. *Assignments*: Assignments will range from analytical, historical, and critical reflections of minimalist composers and their compositional practices. Each assignment is due at the beginning of **Tuesday** classes for the *specified weeks*.
- iii. *Film presentations*: Each student will present on selections of a film, television show, or other multimedia work scored by a known minimalist composer, or a score exhibiting attributes commonly found in minimalist music.
- iv. *Final paper*: Students will write a 2,500–3,000-word original research paper on minimalist music. The student can choose to discuss a topic, composer, work, or a combination of the three that remains within a narrow scope. A 250-word abstract with a working bibliography will be due one month before final paper. Students are encouraged to consult with

Professor Ross for any assistance in choosing a topic and approach. The final paper is due **by 12:00pm on Saturday, December 10th**.

Course Policies:

i) **Course Prerequisites:** MUSIC 2651A/B or the former MUSIC 2650A/B, MUSIC 2641U or the former 2636A/B. Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

ii) **Grading scale:** A+=90-100%, A=80-89%, B=70-79%, C=60-69%, D=50-59%, F=0-49%.

iii) **Academic Consideration for Student Absence & Missing Work ($\geq 10\%$):** Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. The University further recognizes that medical situations are deeply personal and respects the need for privacy and confidentiality in these matters. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet their academic responsibilities.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210), together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. Students are directed to read the Senate policy on accommodation for medical illness at the following website for further details regarding requirements and procedures for the supporting documentation:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Whenever possible, students who require academic accommodation should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, examinations, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and their Academic Counselling office in a timely manner.

iv) **Academic Consideration for Missing Work ($< 10\%$):** In cases where students miss work that is worth less than 10% of the total course grade (ie. two or fewer assignments) due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean's office and the Associate Dean grants an accommodation, then the missed assignment(s) or quiz(zes) will be discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course. If documentation is not voluntarily submitted then the missed assignment(s) will receive a grade of zero. Students who have been denied accommodation by an instructor may appeal this decision to the Associate Dean's office but will be required to present appropriate documentation.

v) **Academic Offences:** Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism, which is considered a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, as found at:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

vi) **Mental Health & Wellness:** Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to the Health and Wellness at Western page (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or to go to the Wellness Education Centre located in UCC room 76. **Students in crisis in need of immediate care are directed to go directly to Student Health Services in UC11 or to click on the green “I Need Help Now” button on the Health and Wellness page above.**

vii) **Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** Students work with Accessible Education Western (AEW, formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

viii) **Religious Accommodation:** Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

<http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

ix) **Contingency Plan:** Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 restrictions may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

x) **Gender-Based and Sexual Violence:** Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence, either recently or in the past, you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca or call 519 661-3568.

xi) **Evaluation Policy Exemption:** This course has received an exemption from the requirement in the Senate Policy on Evaluation of Undergraduate Academic Performance that stipulates “At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a 1000- or 2000-level course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade.”

xii) **Electronic Devices in Classrooms:** The in-class use of electronic devices (other than for instructor-approved in-class uses) is expressly prohibited. Students found guilty of disrupting the class with electronic devices will be asked to leave the class and may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

xiii) **Plagiarism Detection Software Usage:** All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

Course Schedule

Recordings will be posted on OWL and/or made available in the Music Library

Week 1 (Sept. 8–11): Minimalist Music’s Origins

Geoff Smith, “Composing After Cage: Permission Granted.” *Musical Times* 139/1864 (1998), 5–8.

Kyle Gann, “let x = x: minimalism versus serialism,” in *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 147–149.

Week 2 (Sept. 12–18): La Monte Young

Listening: La Monte Young, *The Well-Tuned Piano* (1964–)

Cecilia Sun, “The Theatre of Minimalist Music: Analyzing La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960, #7*,” *Context* 31 (2006): 37–50.

Week 3 (Sept. 19–25): Terry Riley

Listening: Terry Riley, *In C* (1964); Terry Riley, *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1968)

Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–115.

Week 4 (Sept. 26–Oct. 2): Steve Reich

Listening: Steve Reich, *Piano Phase* (1967); Steve Reich, *Violin Phase* (1967)

Steve Reich, “Music as a Gradual Process,” in *Writings on Music: 1965–2000*, edited by Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34–36.

Paul Epstein, “Pattern Structures and Process in Steve Reich’s ‘Piano Phase,’” *The Musical Quarterly* 72/4 (1986), 494–502.

Week 5 (Oct. 3–9): Philip Glass

Assignment 1 due

Listening: Philip Glass, *Two Pages* (1968); Philip Glass, “*Music in*” works (1969–74)

Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, 284–300.

Week 6 (Oct. 10–16): Analytical Considerations

Assignment 2 due

Jonathan Bernard, “Theory, Analysis, and the ‘Problem’ of Minimal Music,” in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, ed. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 261–264.

Ian Quinn, “Minimal Challenges: Process Music and the Uses of Formalist Analysis,” *Contemporary Music Review* 25/3 (2006), 283–294.

Week 7 (Oct. 17–23): Opera

Listening: Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach* (1976)

* **No class Tuesday**: Dissertation Public Lecture

Martin Ross, “Gesture in Steve Reich’s Music and its Signification: A Referential Approach to His Process, Stylistic, and Postminimalist Works”

Jelena Novak, “From Minimalist Music to Postopera: repetition, representation and (post)modernity in the operas of Philip Glass and Louis Andriessen,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2013), 129–140.

Week 8 (Oct. 24–30): Minimalism in Film

Film presentations

Week 9 (Oct. 31–Nov. 6): READING WEEK

Week 10 (Nov. 7–13): Non-Western Influences

Final paper abstract and bibliography due

Listening: Terry Riley, *Mythic Birds Waltz* (1983)

Allison Welch, “Meetings along the Edge: Svāra and Tāla in American Minimal Music,” *American Music* 17/2 (1999), 179–199.

Week 11 (Nov. 14–20): Postminimalism and John Adams

Assignment 3 due

Listening: John Adams, *Phrygian Gates* (1977), John Adams, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* (1986)

Jonathan Bernard, “Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music,” *American Music* 21/1 (2003), 112–133.

Week 12 (Nov. 21–27): Minimalism in Europe

Assignment 4 due

Listening: Louis Andriessen, *De Staat* (1972–76); Arvo Pärt, *Tabula Rasa* (1977); Arvo Pärt, *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978)

Maarten Beirens, “European Minimalism and the Modernist Problem,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist Music*, ed. Keith Potter, Kyle Gann, and Pwyll ap Siôn (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2013), 61–86.

Week 13 (Nov. 28–Dec. 4): Julius Eastman

Listening: Julius Eastman, *Gay Guerilla* (1980); Julius Eastman, *The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* (1981) (and *Prelude* (1981))

Kyle Gann, “Julius Eastman and the Conception of ‘Organic Music,’” in *Gay Guerilla: Julius Eastman and His Music*, ed. Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 95–99.

Mary Jane Leach, “Connecting the Dots,” in *Gay Guerilla: Julius Eastman and His Music*, ed. Renée Levine Packer and Mary Jane Leach (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 179–190.

Week 14 (Dec. 5–8): Time, Environment, and Listening

Listening: Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening* (1989), Éliane Radigue, “Kyema, Intermediate States” from *Trilogie de la Mort* (1988)

William Duckworth, “Pauline Oliveros,” in *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995; Reprint: Boston: Da Capo Press, 1999), 159–178.

Selections from *Sisters with Transistors* (2020)

December 10: Final paper due by 12:00pm