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Plotinus and minimal music

Introduction

Plotinus held that Plato's thinking embodies wisdom¹. However, concerning the philosophy of music, and the philosophy of art in general, there are some differences between Plato's and Plotinus' position which does not imply that Plotinus' position is implausible. The contrary is correct. Especially, when we are confronted with "minimal music" the plausibility of Plotinus' philosophy of music becomes clear, and this is what I wish to show within this article. I progress as follows. Firstly, I give an outline of Plotinus' philosophy of music, whereby in succession I deal with the role of the musician, various aspects concerning music as such, and the reception of music. In the final part of the article, I show why Plotinus' philosophy of music is particularly plausible when one applies it to the analysis of minimal music which has become increasingly popular during the last thirty years. I start with part one.



Plotinus' philosophy of music

¹ Gerson (1994): P. XV.

§ 1 The Musician

In contrast to Plato, who holds that only philosophers can get access to the realm of forms which becomes obvious in Plato's allegory of the cave², it is possible also for artists to get access to the realm of forms or the *nous*, according to Plotinus. Moreover, it is not only artists who can contemplate the forms but also lovers, and, of course, philosophers³. Although I have referred to artists in general, Plotinus often mentions only the musicians⁴. Yet, it is clear that other artists have that ability as well⁵. Plotinus attributes particular importance to musicians, although he does not explain specifically why he attributes more importance to music than to the other arts but it is clear that he does as he particularly stresses the musician's ability to get access to the higher realms⁶.

According to Plotinus, there are three types of men who can get access to the realm of forms. There is the musician, the lover, and the philosopher, and there are two separate ways, which can be taken in order to reach the higher levels of existence. Firstly, one can start with the apparent things, and then progress to the intelligible realm, or one can directly start in the intelligible realm and then progress even further:

“Surely, as we read, those that have already seen all or most things, those who at their first birth have entered into the life-germ from which is to spring a metaphysician, a musician, or a born lover, the metaphysician taking to the path by instinct, the musician and the nature peculiarly susceptible to love needing outside guidance.

But how lies the course? Is it alike for all, or is there a distinct method for each class of temperament?

For all there are two stages of the path, as they are making upwards or have already gained the upper sphere.

The first degree is the conversion from the lower life; the second – held by those that have already made their way to the sphere of the Intelligibles, have set as it were a footprint there but must still advance within the realm –

² In particular Plato's Republic 517b-520e.

³ Compare Jankélévitch (1998): P. 27-50.

⁴ Plotinus (1991): P. 24.

⁵ Plotinus (1991): P. 410-411.

⁶ Plotinus (1991): P. 24-25.

lasts until they reach the extreme hold of the place, the Term attained when the topmost peak of the Intellectual realm is won.”⁷

The last option applies to philosophers only, as they have the appropriate constitution to deal directly with the realm of forms⁸. The other road has to be taken by musicians and lovers. They differ as follows. The musician loves beauty, harmony, good rhythms, pleasing sounds and figures, and consonance, and he gets repelled by everything ugly, disharmonious, and dissonant. So there is a natural disposition in him to be moved by everything, which is important for a musician⁹. He can progress to higher realms, if wise men show him the nature of music, and that the nature of something is always to be found in the higher realms.

The lover on the other hand does not start with a certain area of the apparent world, but with a specific object only. He falls in love with that object, and is absorbed by it. Then, the lover has to be shown that what he loves about the object in question can also be found in other things, and that the origin of that what he loves originates from a separate realm in which one can find that quality at an even higher level¹⁰. And when both the musician and the lover have reached the intelligible realm, then they have to be taken further along the road the philosopher has taken which finally leads up to the one or the *hen*.

Still, the question remains, what exactly is meant by the expression “musician”. Is it the composer, the performing musician, somebody who thinks about music, or does Plotinus employ the term to refer to artists in general, as Richter thinks¹¹. It is very tempting to agree with Richter and claim that Plotinus employs the term *mousikos* to refer to artists in general, as it becomes clear at various passages¹² that all artists can get access to higher realms, and so it seems necessary that Plotinus also refers to all artists in the paragraph in question, as here he talks about the various types of men who can get access to the higher realms. One could even claim in favour of Richter’s interpretation that *mousiké* includes all other type of art, and therefore Plotinus uses this term to refer to artists in general. However, it has to be noted that only in antiquity *mousiké* included the aspects of dance, poetry, and music, but in late antiquity a stronger separation between music and prose took place¹³. In addition, Plotinus stresses that harmony, sounds, figures and consonances are important for the *mousikos*, and this clearly implies that he had in mind actual musicians and not artists in general. Plotinus’ remarks also exclude the option that he was referring to men who were thinking about music,

⁷ Plotinus (1991): P. 24-25.

⁸ Plotinus (1991): P. 26.

⁹ Plotinus (1991): P. 25.

¹⁰ Plotinus (1991): P. 25 - 26.

¹¹ Richter (1968): P. 21.

¹² Plotinus (1991): P. 410-411.

as then he would not have stressed that they were primarily moved by harmony within the apparent world. It is also unlikely that the notion *mousikos* refers to performing artists, as these were not much respected in late antiquity. Then, music was mainly performed by slaves, and only very few famous musicians are known – Nero being one of the exceptions¹⁴. Therefore, we can conclude that it is very likely that Plotinus was referring to composers of music when employing the term *mousikos*. Of course, it is possible that these have also participated in the performances of their works sometimes.

So far we have found out that, besides lovers and philosophers, musicians can get access to the higher realms of existence¹⁵. If this worldly sounds, harmonies, and consonances naturally move someone, then this person is a musician. People who have already progressed further are expected to help these potential musicians to grasp that what they like within this world can be found in a cleaner instance in the higher realms of existence, the *nous* and the *hen*. Once musicians have taken this way, they can actually dedicate themselves to their very task, and compose. Then, one can find out whether the musician in question is good or bad. In case, he creates beautiful musical works, he is a good musician, if not, he is a bad musician. Bad musicians, and bad artist in general are bad, as they create ugly works¹⁶. After having analysed some aspects of a Plotinian musician, I can now explain what the musician creates – music.

§ 2 Music

After the musician has contacted *nous* and *hen*, he can compose music, and if he is a good musician, he creates beautiful works, and if not, then he composes ugly musical works. It is important to have had access to the *nous* and the *hen*, as in this way he comes in contact with beauty itself, perfect harmony, ideal consonance, and fulfilling rhythms, figures, and sounds. Still, even when he has experienced, and understood what a musician needs to be familiar with, it depends on his technical capacities as a composer whether he becomes a good musician or not. A good musician can use what he has experienced and produce corresponding musical works. A bad musician, on the other hand, has also come in contact with the higher realms but does not have the technical abilities to create corresponding musical works. Still, it is justified to call both of them musicians, as musicians are all those men who naturally get moved by everything musical which is a psychological disposition.

¹³ Georgiades (1958): P. 58 & (Ed.) Blume (1949-1986): P. vol. 5, P. 840.

¹⁴ (Ed.) Hamel/Hürlimann (1964): Vol 1, P. 17.

¹⁵ (Ed.) Nida-Rümelin/Betzner (1998): P. 645.



Whether the person in question is a good musician or a bad one depends on what he himself produces which is connected to his technical capacities.

The question remains what the relationship between music in the higher realms and music in the apparent world is. Plotinus gives a clear characterisation of this worldly music:

“We may know this also by the concordance of the souls with the ordered scheme of the Cosmos; they are not dependent, but, by their descent, they have put themselves in contact, and they stand henceforth in harmonious association with the cosmic circuit – to the extent that their fortunes, their life-experiences, their choosing and refusing, are announced by the patterns of the stars – and out of this concordance rises as it were one musical utterance: the music, the harmony, by which all is described, is the best witness to this truth.

Such a consonance can have been produced in one only way:

The All must, in every detail of act and experience, be an expression of the Supreme, which must dominate alike its periods and its stable ordering and the life-careers varying with the movement of the souls, as they are sometimes absorbed in the highest, sometimes in the heavens, sometimes turned to the things and places of our earth.”¹⁷

Here Plotinus explains the analogy between this world, the souls, and music. In the fifth century Boethius employs the following three expressions to refer to the analogies in question: *musica mundana*, *musica humana*, *musica instrumentalis*¹⁸. Firstly, *musica mundana* refers to the harmony in our macrocosm, which comes about by means of the harmony of the spheres. Secondly, *musica humana* means the harmony in the microcosm, the body/soul relationship. According to Pythagorean-Platonic thinking, the soul is constituted

¹⁶ Plotinus (1991): P. 241.

¹⁷ Plotinus (1991): P. 266.

¹⁸ James (1993): P. 74.

out of consonant numbers and can be influenced ethically by means of music, which is also based on numbers. Lastly, *musica instrumentalis* refers to the harmony of the apparent notes, melodies, and music. There is an analogy between all three types of music.

Numbers are important in Plotinus' philosophy of music, and in particular the ratios of the musical intervals. The Pythagoreans only regard intervals, which are based on ideal mathematical ratios as harmonious, and whatever is harmonious also promotes the appropriate ethical virtues. Yet, according to Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) who also belongs to the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition the sense of hearing is more important for deciding whether an interval is harmonious or not¹⁹. As a consequence, he holds that, besides the intervals based on ideal mathematical ratios, some others like thirds (5:4) and sixths (6:5) also have to be regarded as harmonious. Plotinus, on the other hand, takes a somewhat more radical position, as he claims that ideal mathematical ratios, and together with this pure music cannot be found within this world²⁰:

Plotinus' position does indeed have some plausibility, if we apply it to specific problems, like the Pythagorean comma. According to mathematics, seven eighths and twelve fifths are supposed to be identical, however, in practice one gets slight difference – the Pythagorean comma. So that musicians can play equally well in every key, a practical solution to this problem was put forward by Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706) in his work „Musicalische Temperatur“, and it had a significant effect on the history of music. In theory, Plotinus with his previous remark gives a good explanation, how the Pythagorean comma has come about. Seven eighths and twelve fifths are not identical because we are referring to the material world. In the intelligible world, on the other hand, the Pythagorean comma does not exist. Of course, Plotinus did not put it that way himself, but this could and most probably would have been his reply, if one had asked him how his theory applies to the Pythagorean comma.

Dealing with the ratios of intervals according to Plotinus, now we have found one explanation concerning the relationship between this-worldly, and otherworldly music in the numbers. In the other world, one finds ideal mathematical ratios, and in an imperfect manner these ratios turn up within our universe, and our music. By reference to these ideal mathematical ratios, one can explain rhythms, and harmonious intervals, as in both imitations of perfect ratios can be found. This understanding of numbers also provides us with one explanation, how something eternal and unchanging can turn up in a temporal manner.

¹⁹ James (1993): P. 150.

²⁰ Jankélévitch (1998): P. 40 & Plotino (2000): P. 130-135.



life²⁵:

“There, indeed, it was scarcely vision, unless of a mode unknown; it was a going forth from the self, a simplifying, a renunciation, a reach towards contact and at the same time a repose, a meditation towards adjustment. This is the only seeing of what lies within the holies: to look otherwise is to fail.”²⁶

As the political virtues are linked to the irrational soul, and the same applies to music, there is a link between music and the political virtues as well²⁷. The more beautiful music is, the more appropriate political virtues are contained in the music in question²⁸. The political virtues are part of the irrational soul, and they originate from higher levels of existence. The ethical

²¹ Plotinus (1991): P. 328.

²² Plotin (1937): Vol. 4, P. 157.

²³ Drews (1964): P. 262-263.

²⁴ Richter (1968): P. 447. & Heinemann (1973): P. 303.

²⁵ Plotin (1937): Vol. 5, P. 194.

²⁶ Plotinus (1991): P. 548.

²⁷ Miles (1999): P. 50-54.

²⁸ Zoltai is clearly wrong when he claims that Plotinus' music aesthetics is devoid of the *ethos*-theory [Zoltai (1970): P. 58].

connection of music is the second option of how music is related to the higher realms²⁹. As music is related to the higher levels of existence by means of the political virtues, and numbers, it is no problem for Plotinus that the forms in the *nous* are eternal and unchanging whereas music is flowing and in time – virtues, and numbers can be expressed in a dynamic manner.

All visual arts, in various degrees, are related to the Platonic forms. Music, however, is flowing, and more abstract than the other arts, as it does have neither representational, nor verbal content. It is difficult to see a connection of music to normal forms, which are usually described in visual terms, as it is done in the whole Platonic tradition. However, when one listens to music, then one rather gets embedded in the unity of music, the boundaries of ones individuated existence get dissolved, and one can reach ecstatic states which cannot be compared to experiences of other types of art. The experience of ecstasy in which there is no longer an “I” and a “you” but just a feeling of unity, is also praised as the highest virtue in Plotinus. *Theoria* is a form of ecstasy, as he himself says, a “going forth from the self”³⁰. One can experience this type of ecstasy when one enters the one, the *hen* which is described as unified but boundless³¹. I do not claim that the ecstasy one can experience when one listens to music, and the ecstasy connected to the entrance into the one are identical, but given Plotinus’ appreciation of music, it seems implausible to hold that these are two completely separate types of ecstasy, as Abert does³². There must be a connection between these two forms of ecstasy³³.

Given that background we can understand, how Plotinus can consistently hold that music is superior to the other arts which becomes clear when he points out that in particular musicians by nature have the capacity to reach the “Primal-Principle”³⁴ but also that beauty can rather be perceived by our eyes than our ears:

“Beauty addresses itself chiefly to sight; but there is a beauty for the hearing too, as in certain combinations of words and in all kinds of music, for melodies and cadences are beautiful; and minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of beauty in the conduct of life, in actions, in character, in the pursuits of the intellect; and there is the

²⁹ Beardsley (1966): P. 84.

³⁰ Plotinus (1991): P. 548.

³¹ Plotinus (1991): P. 500-502.

³² Abert (1964): P. 49].

³³ It is also interesting to note that Plotinus’ description of the *hen* even bears some similarities to the description of the evil, formless matter of his metaphysics (Plotinus (1991): P. 420 & P. 106-107 & P. 175), which again reminds one of Aristotle’s prime matter. The other levels of existence prior to the *hen* represent a permanent increase of unity, order, and form (Note: Horn (1995): P. 319-332). Only at the last step (Perpeet (1988): P. 94) from the *nous* to the *hen* one finds an opposing movement again (Perpeet (1988): P. 94).

³⁴ Plotinus (1991): P. 24-25.

beauty of the virtues. What loftier beauty there may be, yet, our argument will bring to light.”³⁵

It is easier to experience beauty by means of our eyes than our ears, but it is easier to get access to the “Primal-Principle”, or the one by means of music than by the visual arts, as the ecstatic states connected to music are related to the ecstasy of the *theoria*. The one is the source of beauty, and is therefore on a higher level than beauty. Beauty, which we can more easily grasp by means of the visual arts, exists on the level of the *nous*, but the feeling of unity, of which we can get a grasp by means of music, is related to the one. As the realm of the one is higher than that of the *nous*, and it can rather be reached by means of music than by means of the other arts, music is superior to the other arts.

“So, mounting, the Soul will come first to the Intellectual-Principle and survey all the beautiful Ideas in the Supreme and will avow that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty. For by their efficacy comes all Beauty else, by the offspring and essence of the Intellectual-Being. What is beyond the Intellectual-Principle we affirm to be the nature of Good radiating Beauty before it. So that, treating the Intellectual-Cosmos as one, the first is the Beautiful: if we make distinction there: the Realm of Ideas constitutes the Beauty of the Intellectual Sphere; and The Good, which lies beyond, is the fountain at once and Principle of Beauty: the Primal Good and the Primal Beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus, always, Beauty’s seat is There.”³⁶

Although we have already analysed some aspects of the relationship between music and higher realms of existence, we can ask whether beauty could be described even more specifically. Whenever we wish to explain earthly beauty, we usually refer to symmetry, and Plotinus himself also pointed out the importance of that notion when he explained that ratios of numbers are important for what is beautiful. Whatever corresponds to the golden ratio is symmetrical, and whatever is symmetrical is beautiful³⁷. However, Plotinus doubts that this is all there is to beauty, as in that case no single, unified thing could be beautiful but it is clear to him that this can be the case - in the *nous* we find beauty itself. In addition, he tries to show that symmetry alone is somehow lacking beauty, as symmetrical things in some respects (or sometimes) can be regarded as beautiful and in others (at other times) they cannot³⁸. I do not regard this as a convincing argument, as it is obvious that it is impossible that symmetrical things can ever be perceived as ugly. However, Plotinus puts forward another stronger

³⁵ Plotinus (1991): P. 45.

³⁶ Plotinus (1991): P. 55.

³⁷ Huntley (1970).

³⁸ Plotinus (1991): P. 46.

argument whereby he argues that other beautiful things, like laws, knowledge or science are not and cannot be symmetrical either, therefore we cannot link beauty with symmetry only³⁹. In this respect, I think, Plotinus is right. If he regards laws, science, and knowledge as beautiful, then the concept of symmetry alone is not sufficient, and not even necessary to explain what beauty is. In addition, symmetry implies a relationship and relationships imply more than one thing, therefore symmetry cannot exist in the one, as the one does not consist of more than one thing. However, the one is the source of beauty, and is what Plotinus calls the “Primal Beauty”⁴⁰. Therefore, it is not sufficient, and not even necessary to refer to symmetry to explain what beauty is⁴¹. Ratios of numbers, and thereby also symmetry represent one aspect of beauty, but it is not the only possible aspect of beauty. The virtues are another aspect. They are beautiful⁴², and they represent one reason why laws can be beautiful, as these should take the virtues into consideration. So if we wish to grasp what beauty is, we have to consider various aspects of existence. Numbers, and virtues are two important aspects of beauty, and I have already explained the relationship of these two aspects to music.

After having specified the concept of beauty further, especially with respect to music, we can now focus on the relationship of artistic objects⁴³ to ugly human beings, beautiful human beings, and natural non-human objects within this world. Thereby, we get an even better grasp of another aspect of beauty.

Plotinus wonders whether natural non-living objects or artistic objects are more beautiful. Thereby, he compares a raw piece of marble and one in the form of a god, which was created by an artist. As the marble god clearly is more beautiful than the natural piece of marble, Plotinus infers that what makes a thing beautiful is its form, and not its matter, and the reason for this is that the form was in the intellect of the artist before it entered the material world. And it always has to be the case that the creative principle is superior to the created thing⁴⁴.

Given such a world view, we can understand that Plotinus regards artistic objects as superior to other non-living objects. As he also says that the creative principle is superior to the created thing, we can also infer that he regards artists as superior to artistic objects. However, he generalizes this further by explaining that whatever partakes more in life is more beautiful⁴⁵. The highest form of life being the one, the source of everything. However, men as

³⁹ Plotinus (1991): P. 46.

⁴⁰ Plotinus (1991): P. 55.

⁴¹ Also see (Ed.) Cooper (1995): P. 335-336.

⁴² Plotinus (1991): P. 47.

⁴³ We have already seen that music is the most important art according to Plotinus.

⁴⁴ Plotinus (1991): P. 410-412.

⁴⁵ Plotinus (1991): P. 492.

they have a rational soul⁴⁶ partake more in life than other living objects, like animals and plants. These, however, are still superior to artistic objects and other non-living objects⁴⁷. He even applies the principle that living objects are more beautiful than non-living to artistic objects as well, even though none of them lives. However, artistic objects, which are more full of life, are superior to such which partake less in life by means of representation⁴⁸, even if those were more symmetrical⁴⁹. So the aspect of life is more relevant for beauty than the aspect of symmetry. Ugly human beings, of course, are inferior to beautiful ones, as the beautiful partake more in life than the ugly. Beauty here refers to inner beauty, the beauty of the soul and not that of the body, as internal beauty is more important than external beauty. The most ugly thing being raw formless matter as it does not at all partake in life. It is completely evil. Given this short summary of Plotinus' hierarchy of worldly beauty, we can order the earthly things as follow, starting from the lowest with respect to beauty: non living objects, artistic object, plants, animals, ugly human beings, beautiful human beings. Because of this analysis, we have become aware of another aspect of beauty, namely the aspect of life, which is more important with respect to beauty than the aspect of symmetry, according to Plotinus. The previous thoughts give us a clear understanding of where Plotinus places music among the earthly things. Music is the highest of the arts, and music which is full of life is the highest type of music. However, he ranks the arts in general below all living things. Living things are those, which have some kind of soul. After having dealt with the creator of music, the musician, we have concerned ourselves with the object created, music, and now the last theme to investigate is the reception of music.

Part two

Music

§ 3 Reception of Music

Although Plotinus has given a detailed account of what a musician is, and what he understands as music, his analysis of the reception of a work of art is less wide ranging. We have already seen that music appeals to the irrational part of the soul, which is also the part in

⁴⁶ Only because there are souls in this world, there is life in this world. For a good survey on the soul in Plotinus: Joseph Sen "Souls", in *Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2000): P. 415-424.

⁴⁷ Schöndorf (1974): P. 70.

⁴⁸ According to Julius Walter, Plotinus holds a different position concerning the rank of works of art [Walter (1967): P. 780-786]

⁴⁹ Plotinus (1991): P. 492.

which the political virtues are. However, it is still unclear, what happens, when people listen to music.

“Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the Soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful.

Therefore, first let each become godlike and each beautiful who cares to see God and Beauty.”⁵⁰

Relationships only come into existence on the basis of likeness. If the irrational part of the soul contains the political virtues, then it feels at home in harmonious, beautiful music, as they correspond to these virtues. If the irrational part of the soul is disorganised, then it feels drawn to dissonant music as well. However, if a disorganised soul were to listen to harmonious music, then the music could help the soul to become more and more ordered.



Music in Ancient philosophy was always regarded as a strong ethical force⁵¹. After aestheticism has started to dominate the philosophy of art, this view has lost a lot of his influence. However, if one considers the effects of heavy metal music on young people, and one compares it to the effects of a mass by Palestrina, then it is hard to believe in the truth of aestheticism. Music clearly has an ethical influence, and all the other arts have one as well. Tolstoy, in his wonderful essay “What is art?” is one of the few modern thinkers who takes the ethical effects of art as seriously as they have to be taken.

Perhaps Plotinus point becomes clearer, if we replace the term “soul” with the term “character”. The soul is what moves us,

and the irrational soul contains the political virtues, on which we base our actions. If the political virtues are present, our actions are orderly and appropriate; if not, they are chaotic

⁵⁰ Plotinus (1991): P. 55.

⁵¹ Abert (1968).

and irregular. We can make the same distinction with respect to the character. If someone has a strong character, his acts are clear, regular, and ordered. If someone has a weak character it is the opposite⁵². If we substitute the term “soul” with that of “character”, we can rephrase Plotinus’ observations as follows: People feel drawn to music to which their character can relate, and in which they feel at home. If one experiences music to which one cannot relate, then this has an effect on the respective character as well. I regard these observations as extremely plausible, and therefore worth considering further. However, with these thoughts we have reached the end of the description of Plotinus’ philosophy of music. We can now compare aspects of it with minimal music.

§ 4 Minimal Music

Among the various types of contemporary classical music, minimal music is by far the most successful, not academically perhaps but definitely concerning the educated public. Recordings of minimal music compositions sell well, composers of minimal music are often asked to write music for fairly popular films, like “The Piano” (Nyman) or “The Hours” (Glass; originally Nyman, but his score was turned down), and minimal music in contrast to many other types of contemporary classical music actually gets performed. One reason for the popularity of minimal music is that it combines elements from both pop as well as high culture⁵³. It makes music accessible again. Avant-garde music, on the other hand, has usually created single works whereby each work is a work in its own right with specific set of qualities which distinguishes it from all other works. A work of Avant-garde music normally does not fit into a genre, but represents a genre itself – a genre which consist of one work only. It demands a great amount of effort to be able to relate to such a work. Composers of minimal music do not accept the necessity of creating a genre, and a scale for each new work, but their works normally fit into a specific genre, and are based on a fairly tonal scale – harmony, and symmetry do have a central role in minimal music composition, and they also have a comparable position within Plotinus’ concept of beauty. Minimal music is often described as meditative, repetitive, and organic⁵⁴. The meditative aspect is also important for Plotinus, and as he values works of art which are full of life highly, minimal music also meets this demand, as it unfolds, and develops dynamically, and gradually, like a living organism.

⁵² Some prefer to refer to the same distinction in different terms. They distinguish between men who have a character, and others who do not. In this case, the person with character acts orderly, whereas the one without does not.

⁵³ Goette (2000): P. 192.

⁵⁴ Lovisa (1996): P. 11-19.



Harmony, and symmetry are not only relevant within a composition but also concerning the connection between a composition, and the world view on the basis of which it was created. Many composers of minimal music tend to think holistically, in the same way as Plotinus' philosophy was holistic⁵⁵. This leads us to the next aspect where a significant similarity between minimal music aesthetics, and Plotinus' philosophy of music can be found. - the

ethical aspect. The central role the virtues have in Plotinus' philosophy of music has already been described. However, to hold that there is a close connection between art, and ethics has not been given much consideration since Kant, because in that period Kant's disinterested aesthetic attitude has been in the focus of concern for most art theoreticians. We get pleasure from the contemplation of art, if the formal aspects of the work of art are appropriate. Art, and music has been taken to be pleasurable, and playful, but mostly without any ethical significance. Yet, many composers of minimal music have a different attitude concerning this relationship which is also the reason why the ethical aspect has a fairly central position in many of their compositions. In particular, we could consider Philip Glass, John Tavener, Arvo Paert, and Peter Michael Hamel. I only make some remarks about Philip Glass.

Glass has been heavily influenced by Buddhist thinking⁵⁶, especially after spending several month in India, and Ravi Shankar helped him to get a better grasp of Indian music.⁵⁷ However, Glass has also set texts from the Hindu tradition to music, and dedicated a work to the Christian Tolstoy⁵⁸. Such an open attitude toward the various world religions corresponds to Plotinus' negative theology. Only by means of negative statements, we get a grasp of God. Glass seems to accept that various religions provide appropriate approaches to the one God,

⁵⁵ In general, the phenomenon of minimal music has to be seen in a wider cultural context. The focus on religious questions, and the importance of religion increases again, as the continental philosophers Vattimo [Vattimo (1997): S. 7], and Sloterdijk [Sloterdijk (1987): S. 12] also stress. It can be seen, too, at the communitarianism/liberalism debate in Anglo-American philosophy - the communitarianist MacIntyre [MacIntyre, Alasdair, 'Which Gods ought We to obey and Why?' in *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 3, N. 4, October 1986] wishes to return to an Aristotelian Neo-Thomist type of Christianity.

⁵⁶ It is interesting to note Glass' similarity to the poet Allen Ginsberg with whom he has also recorded an album. Both are American Buddhists of Jewish origin who have managed to combine pop and high cultural aspects in their works.

⁵⁷ Lovisa (1996): S. 89.

also he personally favours the Buddhist religion. Connected to the great importance of religion, is the ethical aspect. All the world religions are in favour of a specific ethics⁵⁹. Within religiously inspired music, the importance of specific values also gets conveyed. Therefore, both Glass and Plotinus consider the connection between harmonious, symmetrical, orderly, and organic music, and values, and virtues. If one wishes to understand the Buddhist Glass who is open to other religious traditions, then it is advisable to become familiar with Plotinus' philosophy of *hen*, and of music, as their outlook on life, art, and music is similar, and Plotinus provides us with a complex system by means of which one can get a systematic grasp of minimal music.

However, religion has not only become important for Glass, Hamel, for example, has also spend a long time in India, and was inspired both by Indian music as well as spirituality. Besides having used these influences in his compositions, he has also gathered them in one of the most influential books on minimal music "Durch Musik zum Selbst: Wie man Musik neu erleben und erfahren kann" in which he not only embeds minimal and Asian religious music in a holistic context, but also shows the healing power of such types of music.⁶⁰ However, not all composers of minimal music were mainly inspired by Buddhist religiosity, John Tavener⁶¹, and Arvo Paert⁶² belong to the Russian-Orthodox church. Both mainly compose religious music⁶³. On a theoretical level the books "Nada Brahma: Die Welt ist Klang" by Joachim-Ernst Berendt and "The Magic of Tone and the Art of Music" by Dane Rudhyar need to be mentioned. Dane Rudhyar particularly points out the close connection between music, harmony, and holism.⁶⁴ Berendt even acknowledges the relevance of Plotinus' philosophy for minimal music⁶⁵. His account in general owes significant debt to the Pythagorean-Platonic tradition of music theory, to which Plotinus also belongs. As in Plotinus' philosophy musicians/composers are of great importance, it is particularly his philosophy of music which due to its complexity, and depth could help us getting a better grasp of the minimal music movement.

⁵⁸ Kostelanetz (1997): P. 182.

⁵⁹ It seems to me that one could even claim that the four Platonic virtues, and the value of the family can be found in all of them.

⁶⁰ Hamel (1976): P. 171-218.

⁶¹ Tavener (1999) :P. 37 & Haydon (1995): P. 128-129.

⁶² Lovisa (196): P. 196.

⁶³ E.g.: Boyden (1997): P.: 563.

⁶⁴ Rudhyar (1984): P. 185-207.

⁶⁵ Berendt (1983): P. 84.

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