Minimalism

Minimalism involves a general reduction of materials with an emphasis on repetition and stasis as well as gradual change. Early minimalist works contained a steady pulse, short melodic patterns (recurring ostinati) that were gradually extended, contracted, or modified in some way, phrase relationships that were based on gradual nonsynchronization, and a tonal bias. Minimalist music is a type of compositional process. Some of the early minimalists were Terry Riley, Lamonte Young, and Steve Reich. Philip Glass extended the minimalist's procedures into the world of music theater.

Types of minimalistic music:

   (1) **Tape loops** - Recurring ostinati. Sounds were recorded on magnetic recording tape. The tape was then spliced and taped back together to form a loop. This created an infinite number of repetitions of the sound when the tape loop was played back. See *Come Out* by Steve Reich.
   (2) **Live performance** - Reich often composed pieces for two or more of the same instrument. *Piano Phase* was written for two pianos. *Four Organs* involves the gradual increasing of durations of individual tones within a single chord.
   (3) **Nonpulsed minimalism** - No pulse, and limits are placed on a certain music parameter or parameters creating a sense of a fluctuating stasis. There is generally a more precise notation empolyed. Ligeti's *Atmosphères* uses sound masses that gradually ebb and flow. Arnold Schoenberg's op. 16, no. 3 involves a single chord which is filtered through various colors.

Four basic compositional techniques employed by minimalist composers:

(1) **Additive Melody** - Extends or reduces a repetitive melodic pattern by increments of the smallest rhythmic value.

(2) **Rotation** - Successive statements of a melodic or rhythmic pattern begin at different points within the pattern.

(3) **Texture Construction** - An ostinato fabric of multiple voices may gradually grow more or less complex as individual members enter or leave the texture during repetitions.

(4) **Isorhythmic Overlap** - Ostinati of various lengths are stated simultaneously.