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MINIMALIST AESTHETICS IN "ATMOSPHERE" BY FARRUKH AKRAMOV

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Abstract

The piece *Atmosphere* for percussion ensemble demonstrates the realization of minimalist principles through timbral differentiation, micro-variation and metric shifts. The study is based on a score analysis that includes formal mapping and a component-by-component examination of intonation, metrorhythm and articulation. The analysis is carried out within the minimalist conception of "less is more" and the understanding of minimalism as an aesthetic category, with an emphasis on perceptual parameters and the organisation of time in sound.

Keywords: *minimalism, timbre, metrorhythm, pattern, idiophones, aesthetics, spatiality*

Minimalism in twenty-first-century music – understood here as a broad phenomenon encompassing later manifestations and modifications of this trend – is increasingly interpreted as an aesthetic category (Bernard J. W., 1993; Korobova A. G., 2021). Its defining features include an economy of expressive means, an engagement with time as a compositional material, and the prioritization of sound and silence over thematic dramaturgy. In contrast to the "large processes" of the 1960s-1970s, when compositional logic was conceived as an extended, gradually unfolding procedure described by Steve Reich (Reich S., 2002) and contextualized by Michael Nyman (Nyman M., 1999), the emphasis shifts toward a hybrid chamber orientation: toward patterns built from small sections, micro-variability within individual blocks, and heightened attention to timbral color and the spatial characteristics of sound.

The composer's individuality is revealed in the choice of scale for the repeated blocks. From a receptive perspective on minimalism, as A. E. Krom notes, "not every audience member is interested (and not everyone is able) to follow closely over a long period of time the barely perceptible changes occurring within a pattern" (Krom A. E., 2017, 82). As a result, in twenty-first-century academic music, large-scale "long" processes become less productive and increasingly give way to patterns within shorter sections, featuring micro-variation and the articulation of form through timbre and silence. Consequently, structural functions are assumed by timbral coloring, pauses, and the duration of sound, while repetition remains an important – but not the only – principle of form-building.

Against this background, "*Atmosphere*" by Farrukh Akramov can be viewed as a representative example of twenty-first-century

minimalist aesthetics. The percussion parts function as separate textural layers, sectional boundaries are marked by acoustic cues, and the form is constructed according to a principle of arch-like symmetry. In terms of auditory perception, the semantic dimension of minimalism in this context lies in shifting meaning away from thematic relations toward parameters of sound and time. The compositional structure is oriented toward modelling a sonic environment with pronounced contemplative qualities; musical time unfolds outside the logic of thematic development and is perceived as a single, continuous sound stream.

Using the composer's score "Atmosphere" as the primary source, the discussion traces how the form emerges from repetitive procedures and their gradual deviations within a minimalist aesthetic. The focus is on the intonational core and its micro-variational transformations – inversion, redistribution of pitch supports, and the layering of material across the ensemble's timbral planes. Particular attention is also given to metrorhythmic organization: triplet, quadruplet, and quintuplet groupings, syncopation, and shifts of accentual supports against the metric grid, through which the process gains inner mobility despite its outward repetitiveness.

The piece is organised into three sections, each grounded in its own pitch collection (intonational core). In Section I, the centre is a five-note formula **E–F♯–C–B–D♯**. The succession does not form a functional tonality, yet it establishes a stable intonational field within which textural and rhythmic processes unfold.

Section I (bars 1–74):

Structure and parameters

- **Internal three-part design:** I (bars 1–30) – presentation of timbral and intonational supports; II (bars 31–52) – thickening of texture and metrorhythmic activation; III (bars 53–74) – thinning of texture and the fading of sonic activity;
- **Timbre and articulation:** opening – vibraphone bowed (soft attack, long resonance); then a contrast with the bright attack of glockenspiel and vibraphone with mallets (with pedal).

- **Pattern formation:** from bar 10 – triplet figures under bowed technique; from bar 15 – a sixteenth-note motif in the glockenspiel; dynamic gradations from *ppp* to *f* (including a sharp swell on tremolo) intensify the expressive profile of the formula;
- **Micro-variation and inversion:** bars 21–26 – alternation of eighths, sixteenths, and triplets; in the glockenspiel – a quintuplet variant and mirror inversion of the motif;
- **Boundary marking:** bars 27–30 – triangle strokes on strong beats fix the transition; the return of the vibraphone's "opening" motif functions as a link;
- **Metre/tempo:** from bar 31 – acceleration $\text{♩}=42 \rightarrow \text{♩}=65$ and $5/4$; the five-note pattern shifts its initial pitch within quadruplet groupings (to the 2nd/3rd/4th beat), producing a sense of metrorhythmic destabilisation while retaining an anchor on the downbeat.
- **Additive progression:** bars 40–52 – expanding repetitions **4+5+6+7** bars (including an inverted variant), perceived as a "rising wave" with unchanged intonational material.
- **End of the section:** bars 53–74 – return to $\text{♩}=42$, chordal supports in the vibraphone, two-layer texture (bowed vibraphone + glockenspiel), fragmentation of the pulse; two triangle strikes articulate the transition to Section II.

Section II (bars 75–147):

Motoric drive and refrain

Initial parameters: from bar 75–7/8, $\text{♩}=378$; a stable pattern with accent on the downbeat. Two intonational formulas (**G–D–E_b–G–D–B_b–A** / **G–E_b–F–G–D–B_b–A**) alternate, sustaining asymmetrical pulsation and continuous motion.

Textural shift: from bar 91–4/4, dissolution of linearity and a turn toward chordal vertical.

Glockenspiel solo: bars 93–97 – two alternating four-note formulas (**A–E_b–D–G** / **A–B_b–E–D**) with a similar range but different intervallic configuration.

Internal refrain: bars 99–117 – verbatim repetition of the vibraphone material

from bars 75–93; its function is perceptual stabilisation and “fixing” the section.

Dialogue of layers: bars 118–130 – polyphonic differentiation of voices (upper – more static, accentuated; lower – more mobile), then alternation of **2/4** and **4/4**, reduction of textural density and shortening of motifs.

Section close: bars 135–147 – complete repetition of bars 85–97; gradual levelling of the intonational structure toward the end of Section II.

Section III (from bar 158):

Integration and arch symmetry

Synthesis of materials: the intonational core is drawn predominantly from Section I; rhythmic organisation and latent polyphony echo Section II.

Full instrumentation: for the first time, all four instruments sound simultaneously; a flexatone (pitch **E**) is introduced, with episodic triangle; vibraphone again bowed (muted attack, prolonged sustain).

Development: bars 175–192 – activation of motion; in the vibraphone – alternation of linear and chordal structures; the glockenspiel doubles the material, forming a two-layer texture through timbral differentiation.

Retrospective gestures: from bar 194 – glockenspiel quintuplets (reference to Section I) and mirror inversion of the motif; from bar 198 – return of the “opening” intonation, distributed among all instruments with stretched durations and smoothed attacks.

Formal closure: the reprise of the opening motif in the finale creates an arch form, reinforcing the work’s overall integrity.

Form-shaping factors:

- Timbre and sound production (bow/mallets) as carriers of contrast and layer function;
- Pauses and resonance as boundary markers and the “punctuation” of form;
- Micro-variation of patterns (shifts of accents and durations, inversions, additive series 4–5–6–7);

- Metrorhythmic displacements (5/4, 7/8, transitions to 4/4; quadruplets/quintuplets/triplets; syncopation);
- Triangle “signals” at sectional junctures.

Atmosphere is a tightly constructed work for chamber percussion ensemble that engages a minimalist aesthetic throughout. Its form unfolds in time through repetition and controlled variation, shaped by subtle rhythmic and timbral displacements. Rather than pursuing climactic tension or thematic contrast, the piece is conceived as a continuous sonic process, drawing the listener’s focus to internal motion and gradual transformation.

The three-part design makes it possible to follow successive stages in the music’s growth, densification, and eventual reduction. An arch principle – the return of the opening intonational idea at the end – creates a sense of symmetry and formal closure. Timbre plays a structural role: each instrument is treated as an independent expressive voice, revealing its characteristic color and generating distinct acoustic profiles.

The work’s minimalist semantics are embedded in its very premise. Repetition functions not as intensification but as a mode of listening, creating an immersive sense of time. Stasis and cyclicity do not negate movement; they reframe it as inward, contemplative change. Atmosphere thus emerges as a sonic meditation in which form becomes a temporal space, and compositional logic is experienced as attentive presence within a fluid yet rigorously organised sound world.

“Atmosphere” by Farrukh Akramov frames minimalism as an aesthetic category: a restricted set of expressive means, recurring patterns, and micro-shifts generate motion without thematic contrast, lending the sound a contemplative character through timbral differentiation.

From a practical standpoint, the piece demands rigorous control of articulation, a stable balance between textural layers and registers, and precise management of resonance. These observations are also applicable to a broader range of percussion works that operate within a minimalist aesthetic.

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