

Process and Design in  
*Similar Motion*  
by Philip Glass

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Philip Glass' seminal composition from his self-proclaimed minimalist period, *Similar Motion*, is a work which deals with *global concepts*, meaning that the processes that transform and develop the macrostructure are reflected in the microcosm of the musical materials, and vice versa. It is also one of the clearest and most approachable works to begin study of some of the minimalist concepts. With the accompanying charts, the rhythm of the piece as it unfolds, rather than develops, will become apparent.

On first listening, the most obvious traits include the *extension of material* and the *addition of voices*. At *modular units* (instead of 'bars' or 'measures' as they do not function as such) 6, 12, and 24 a voice is added to the original line. This 2:1 ratio is analogous to the additive proportions of the *Terminal Statement* in bars 25-29 (See Additive/Liquidation Procedure Chart - Section III). It is important to note that during the extension/addition of voices, that rhythmic additive process/liquidation is temporarily halted.

The use of voices creates a stable, although variable texture. The tenor is rigid throughout, with the introduction of the soprano at modular unit 6, the bass at modular unit 12. The alto, which served to support the pitch material of the tenor has through modular unit 23, takes the soprano line as the soprano introduces a new line at modular unit 24. This pattern creates a symmetry of entries which is further enforced by the interval at which they enter in relation to the other voices:

- a. Up from highest voice - Perfect 4th at modular unit 6
- b. Down from lowest voice - Octave at modular unit 12
- c. Up from highest voice - Perfect 4th at modular unit 24

The form of work is made transparent through the succession of the above mentioned operations. The interesting aspect is that proportion can be vastly different from performance to performance since each modular unit can be repeated *ad libitum*. This means that the perception of form is not a part of the flow of time within the piece.

Section I modular units 1-15: Additive Section (*Additive-Motive Material*) and introduction of *Terminal Statement* at modular unit 3 (modular unit 15 is the point of greatest extension of *Additive-Motive Material* in the piece). This section only contains expanding modular units of musical material.

Section II modular units 16-23: Liquidation Section, wherein the character of the original materials drop away, leaving only what had accrued during Section I.

Section III modular units 24-29: *Terminal Statement* extension - *Additive-Motive Material* from I and II becomes fixed and *Terminal Statement* becomes the basis of additive process.

Coda modular units 30-35: Absence of *Additive-Motive Material* from Section I-II. Here the composer deletes all of the musical material except formations of the *terminal statement*.

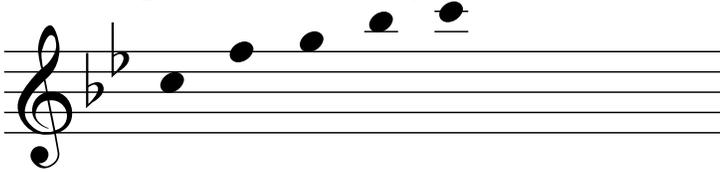
Glass uses various methods of additive/liquidation process, which differ from section to section. This allows the listener to have a certain degree of expectation throughout, without clear anticipation of the outcome.

- a. Motivic Insertion - wherein new motivic material is introduced between previous material.
- b. Motivic Duplication - wherein motivic material is reiterated.
- c. Introduction of New Motive - this can be in the form of an insertion, or at either 'end' of a modular unit.

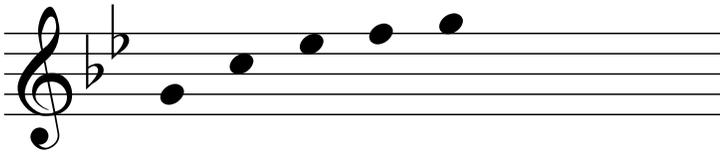
Additive process in Section I often uses inserts, wherein the insert follows the previous insert in the next modular unit. It is more systematic, or perhaps even predictable, than the opposite action in Section II: the use of liquidation. Note that the *Terminal Statement* is a development of the **A** motive from the *Additive-Motive Material Groups*.

# Pitch Material in *Similar Motion* by Philip Glass

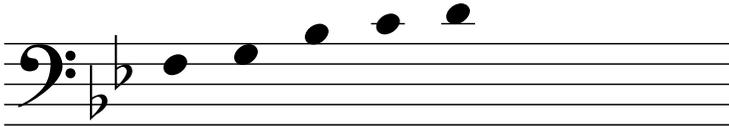
1. Soprano, Final entry at modular unit 24.



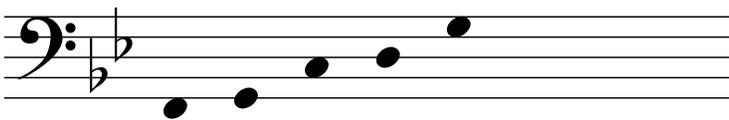
2. Soprano, at modular unit 6 - becoming the Alto at 24.



3. Tenor, fixed line.



4. Bass, entry at modular unit 12.



# Motive Groups in *Similar Motion* by Philip Glass

Note: all motives are displayed as they are articulated in the tenor (stable) voice

**A**



**B**



**C**



**D**



**E**



**F**



**G**



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**X**



**Z**



# Philip Glass *Similar Motion* Additive/Liquidation Procedure

This outline charts the use of motives throughout the course of the development of *Similar Motion* by Philip Glass. Use the accompanying Table of Motives as a guide to trace these motives. Underlined motives indicate those added. Parenthetical motives indicate those taken away from the previous bar. Highlighted bars indicate stable rhythm, but with the introduction of a new voice part.

## Section I: Additive Section

1. A B C
2. A B B C
3. A B B C, XY
4. B B D C, XY
5. (B) B D C, XY
6. **B D C, XY** [Introduction of Soprano Voice]
7. B C B D C, XY
8. B C B D B D C, XY
9. B C B D E B D C, XY
10. B C B D E B B D C, XY
11. B C B D E B A B D C, XY
12. **B C B D E B A B D C, XY** [Introduction of Bass Voice]
13. B C B D E B A B D C C, XY
14. B C B D E B A B D C C F G, XY
15. B C B D E B A B D C C F F G, XY

## Section II: Liquidation Section

16. (B C) B D E B A B D C C F F G, XY
17. (B D) E B A B D C C F F G, XY
18. (E) B A B D C C F F G, XY
19. (B) A B D C C F F G, XY
20. (A) B D C C F F G, XY
21. B D C D C (F F G), XY
22. B D (C) D C, XY
23. B D (D) C, XY

## Section III: *Terminal Statement* extension

24. **B D C, XY** [Shift of Soprano, Alto assumes previous Soprano notes]
25. B D C, XY XY
26. B D C, XYXY XYXY
27. B D C, XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY

28. B D C, XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY  
 29. B D C, XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY  
XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY XYXY

Section IV: Coda

30. (B D C) XY  
 31. X X Y  
 32. X X Y Y  
 33. X Y X X Y Y [Bar 30 + Bar 32]  
 34. X X Y, X Y Y [Bar 31 + Bar 33/second half] – reordering of Bar 33  
 35. X X X Y - X X Y Y - X Y Y Y - X X Y Y [Second and Fourth Groups  
 from Bar 32]