

20th Century Modernism

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DEFINITIONS: (Google)

noun: modernism

1. ~~modern character or quality of thought, expression, or technique.~~

2. a style or movement in the arts that aims to break with classical and traditional forms.

20th Century Modernism

Modernism was the dominant cultural attitude of the 20th Century.

- 1. Rejection of Existing Cultural Standards in Religion, Politics & Art.**
- 2. In Art, an Adoption of “Primitive” or “Naive” Techniques in order to undermine established styles.**
- 3. Idealization of Science, Technology & ‘Progress’ (sometimes.)**

***Modernism in music** is characterized by a desire for or belief in progress and science, surrealism, anti-romanticism, political advocacy, general intellectualism, and/or a breaking with tradition or common practice. Ezra Pound's modernist slogan, "Make it new."*

Modern music is often thought to begin with, or just after, Debussy's Impressionism, rising to rhetorical, if not commercial, dominance after World War Two, and then being gradually superseded by post-modern music.

(Wikipedia)

20th Century Modernism

CHARACTERISTIC: 1. Rejection of Existing Cultural Standards in Religion, Politics & Art.



Antoine Watteau - Pilgrimage to Cythera, 1721 (French Royal Academy of Art)

20th Century Modernism

CHARACTERISTIC: 1. Rejection of Existing Cultural Standards in Religion, Politics & Art



Claude Monet - Sunrise, An Impression (1872)

20th Century Modernism

CHARACTERISTIC: 2. Adoption of “Primitive” or “Childish” Techniques.



Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? Paul Gauguin, 1897

20th Century Modernism

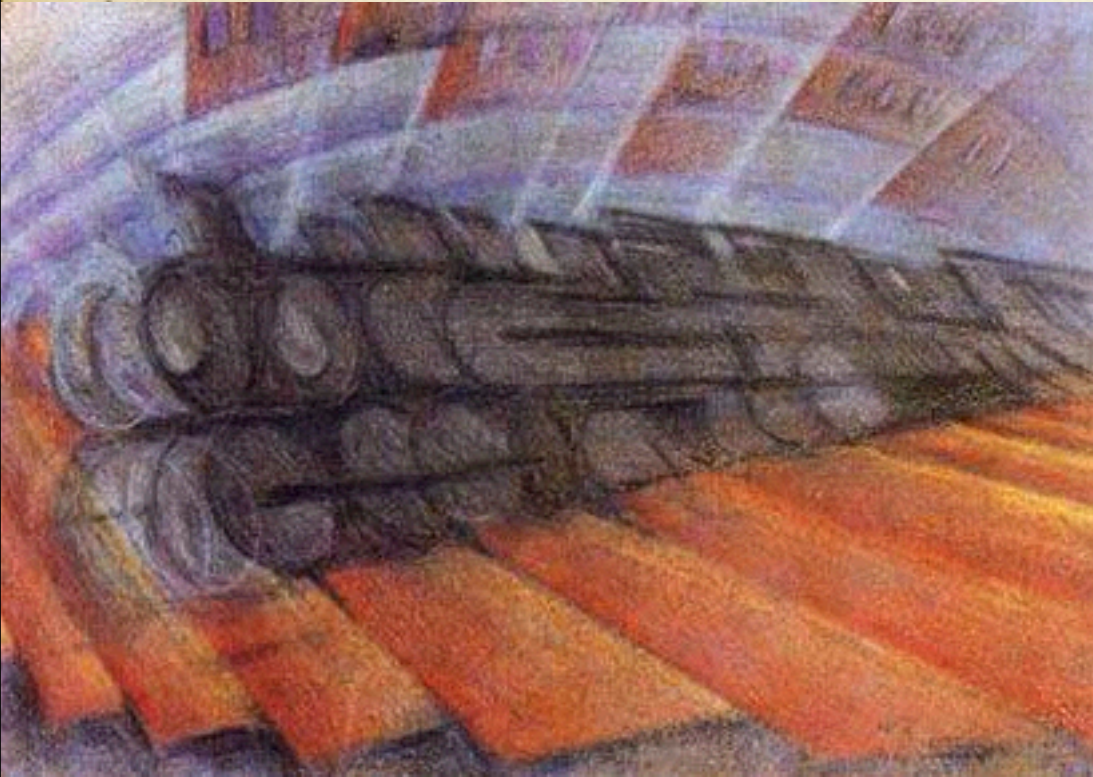
CHARACTERISTIC: 2. Adoption of “Primitive” or “Childish” Techniques



Rousseau - The Repast of the Lion, 1907

20th Century Modernism

CHARACTERISTIC: 3. Idealization of Science, Technology & 'Progress'



Russolo - Dynamism of a Train, 1912



Russolo - Noise Orchestra ca. 1920

20th Century Modernism

WHY DID IT ARISE?

1. **Industrial Revolution** and rapid growth of **urban populations** caused great unrest and disorientation.
2. **Technological and Scientific advances** - many traditional attitudes appeared obsolete.
3. **European Colonial Wars** of the 19th Century, culminating in the horrors of the "Great War" (World War 1) and "Total War" (World War 2.)

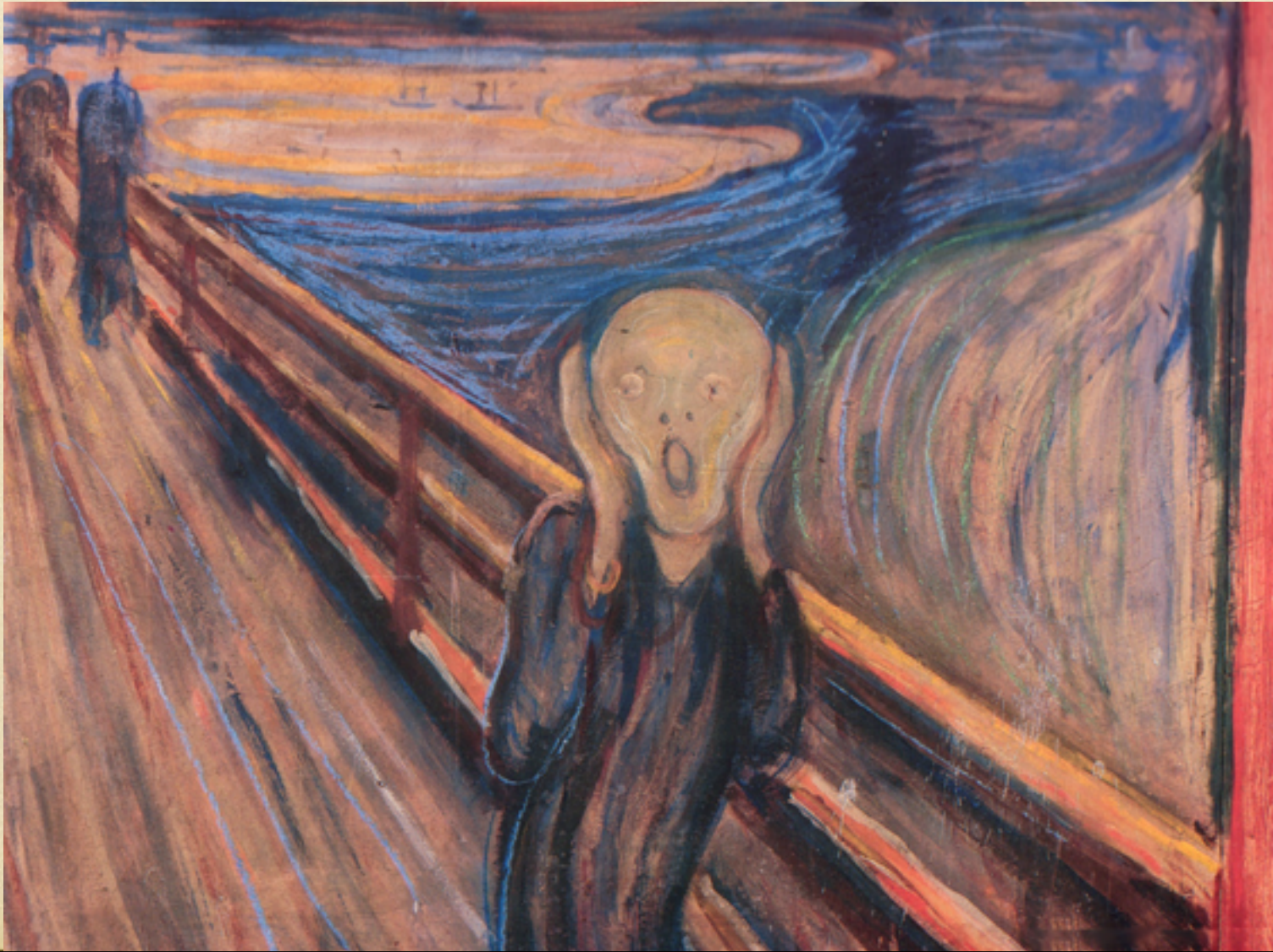
It appeared to many in the 20th century that the only moral reaction to these problems was the destruction of the old order, a clearing away so that something new (and presumably better) could take its place.

Modernism is therefore essentially a negative attitude, an attempt to destroy existing culture.

20th Century Modernism

C.G. Jung - On Modern Art -

"(Modern Art) ... fails entirely if people do not see that it depicts the sickness of our time. That is why this art is neither enjoyable nor elevating ..but .. a "scream." (On Picasso, 1934)



Edvard Munch -

*The Scream
(1893)*

20th Century Musical Modernism

- 20th century music was characterized by a self-conscious “modernism” - a breaking of the old rules and striving for new modes of expression
- many artistic movements expressed themselves in the form of various ‘isms’, including:
 - *impressionism*
 - *minimalism*
 - *futurism*
 - *expressionism*
 - *primitivism*
 - *serialism*
 - *neo-classicism*

Minimalism

Minimalism describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music, where the work is stripped down to its most fundamental features.

The term "minimalist" can also refer to anything which is spare, stripped to its essentials, or providing only the outline of structure, independent of the particular art movement, and "minimalism" the tendency to reduce to fundamentals.

(Wikipedia)

In classical music of the last 35 years, the term **minimalism** is sometimes applied to music which displays some or all of the following features: **repetition** (often of short musical phrases, with minimal variations over long periods of time) or **stasis** (often in the form of drones and long tones); emphasis on **consonant harmony**; a **steady pulse**.

Three composers are principally associated with minimalism: *Steve Reich*, *Philip Glass*, and *Terry Riley*.

Minimalism flourished in the American musical avant-garde from appr. 1960 to 1990. By that time many of its features had been taken over by popular music groups, such as *Penguin Cafe Orchestra*.



Jack Bush *Spasm #2*, Gouache on Paper, 1969



Rothko's *Homage to Matisse* (1953)

Minimalist Art

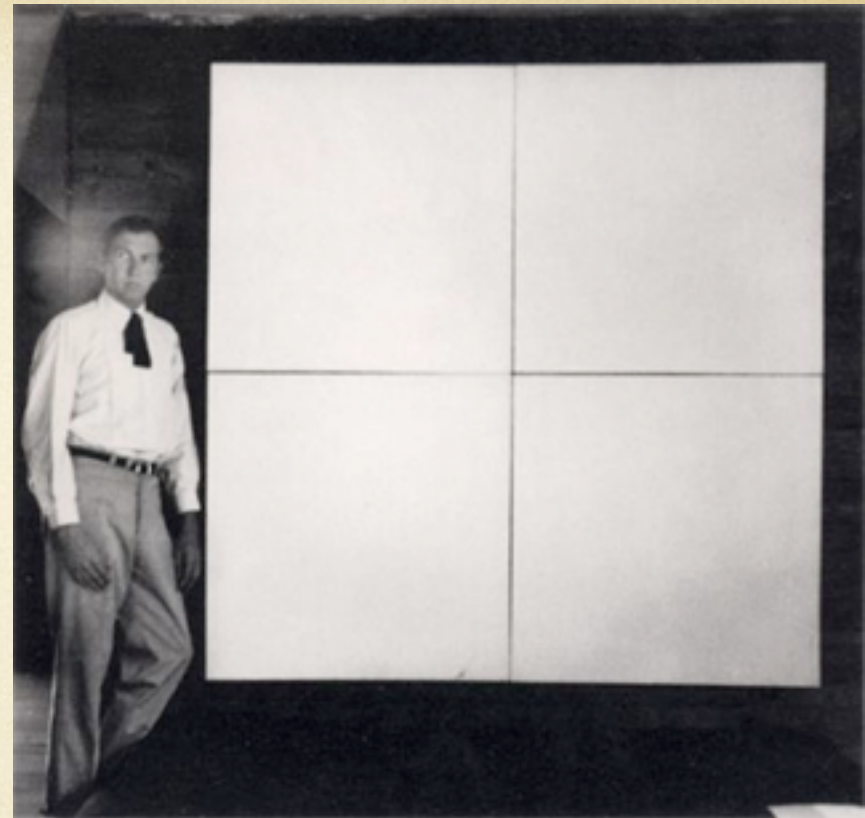
Minimalist Painters of the 60's were influenced by earlier avant-garde composers such as John Cage, whose piece 4'33 premiered in 1952. This piece consisted of the composer opening the lid of piano, sitting at it for the length of time specified in the title, and closing the lid to signify the end of the piece.

Cage later declared that he wanted to -

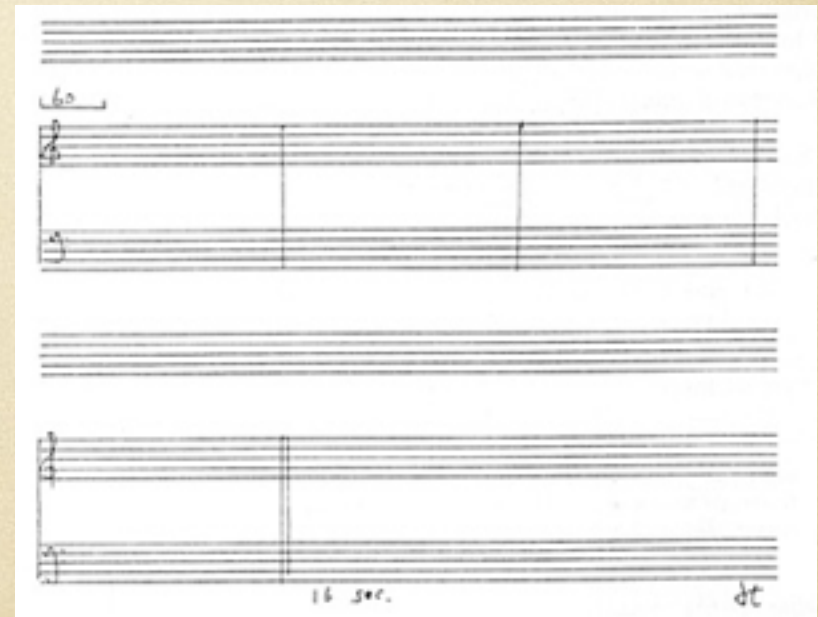
"compose a piece of uninterrupted silence and sell it to the Muzak Co. It will be 4 [and a half] minutes long — these being the standard lengths of 'canned' music, and its title will be 'Silent Prayer'. It will open with a single idea which I will attempt to make as seductive as the color and shape or fragrance of a flower. The ending will approach imperceptibly."

"Actually what pushed me into it was not guts but the example of Robert Rauschenberg. His white paintings... when I saw those, I said, 'Oh yes, I must. Otherwise I'm lagging, otherwise music is lagging'."

John Cage, score to 4'33, 1952



Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting*, 1951



4'33 - Orchestral Version

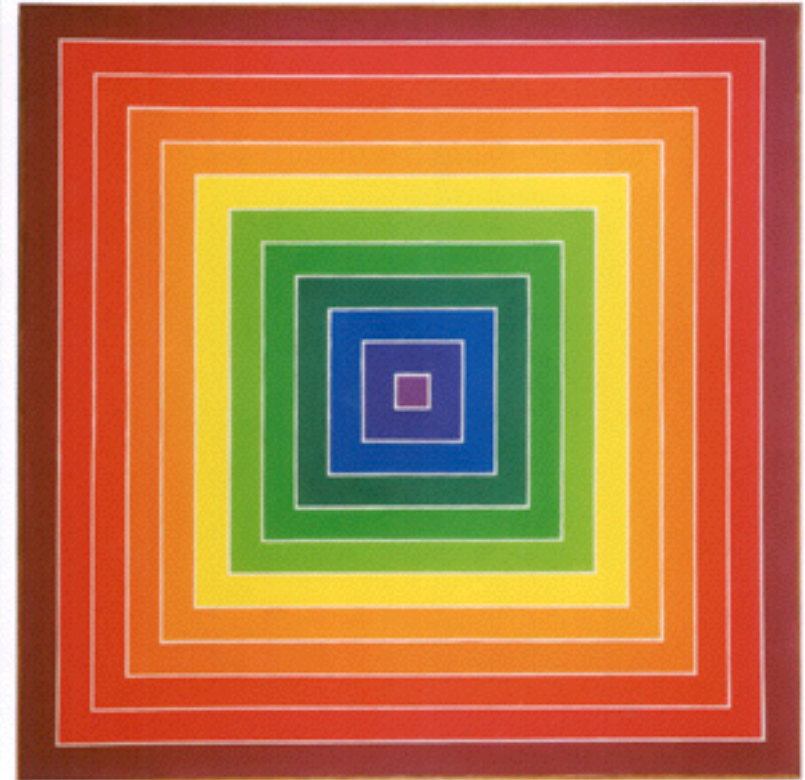


Minimalist Art

Minimalism became a recognized visual art movement in the in New York City in the 1960's with painters such as Frank Stella and Donald Judd.



Donald Judd
Untitled (93-1 Ballantine)
1993
est. \$2,000,000-\$3,000,000
Christie's New York
May 9, 2006



Frank Stella, *Sunset Beach*, 1967

Minimalist Design

German architect Mies van der Rohe was one of the founders of “modern” architecture. His motto was “less is more”

American architect and engineer Buckminster Fuller’s motto was “Do more with less”.



Buckminster Fuller, *Montreal Biosphere*, 1967



Mies van der Rohe, *Toronto-Dominion Towers*, 1963-1967

Musical Minimalism

Steve Reich (1936-)

- American composer, born and active in New York
- *The Guardian* has described Reich as one of the few composers to have "altered the direction of musical history".
- his music is consistently focused on issues of **rhythmic variation** and **repetition**.



Penguin Cafe Orchestra



- loose assembly of various musicians headed by Simon Jeffes (England) (1949-1997).
- influenced by folk music and minimalism

LISTENING

Steve Reich - Music for Pieces of Wood (1973)

PCO - Music for Found Harmonium (1994) (Napoleon Dynamite)

Why is it appropriate to describe this music as minimalist?



Musical Minimalism

Philip Glass (1937-)

- American composer, based in New York
- considered one of the most influential composers of the 20th century
- brought art music to the public via his theatrical works such as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), *Galileo* (2002) and film scores such as *Koyaanasqatsi* (1983)
- other film scores include:
 - *The Thin Blue Line* (1988)
 - *Candyman* (1992)
 - *The Truman Show* (1998)
 - *The Fog of War* (Oscar winner, 2003)



Musical Minimalism


Listening: *Music in Contrary Motion* (1969) - Philip Glass

Music in Contrary Motion

Philip Glass

1 Fast, Steady ♩ = 176

2



Listening: *Tubular Bells* (1976) - from *The Exorcist* - Mike Oldfield

Musical Minimalism

Philip Glass -- *Opera: The Perfect American* (2013)

Los Angeles Times



MADRID — Walt Disney was hardly a perfect American.

He may have been the most famous and beloved American during his lifetime. But his private magic kingdom was not always the happiest place on Earth. Disney had his own private torments and is reputed to have railed against unions, blacks and Jews.

At least that is part of the 21st century Disney legend, and it is necessarily part of Philip Glass' new opera, "The Perfect American." Far from sterilized yet also disarmingly affectionate, it looks at Disney the myth, the artist and the man. The work contrasts between the America that formed Walt Disney and the America he formed for the rest of us. (Los Angeles Times, January 2013)

Musical Minimalism

Koyaanisqatsi (1983)

director: Godfrey Reggio

cinematography: Ron Fricke

music: Philip Glass

first of a trilogy of documentary films depicting humanity's relationship to the earth and to technology

The movie has no dialogue but does feature the Hopi word *koyaanisqatsi*, a concept translated as "life of moral corruption and turmoil" or "life out of balance." "Koyaanisqatsi" is chanted at the beginning and end of the film in a dark, sepulchral *basso profundo* by singer Albert de Ruiter

ex.1 - opening

ex. 2 - 46:56

disc 56



Musical Minimalism

Powaqqatsi (1991)

director: Godfrey Reggio

music: Philip Glass

second of a trilogy of documentary films depicting humanity's relationship to the earth and to technology

Powaqqatsi is a Hopi word meaning "parasitic way of life" or "life in transition". While *Koyaanisqatsi* focused on modern life in industrial countries, *Powaqqatsi*, which similarly has no dialogue, focuses more on the conflict in third world countries between traditional ways of life and the new ways of life introduced with industrialization.

disc 57



Musical Minimalism

Naqoyqatsi (2002)

director: Godfrey Reggio

music: Philip Glass

third of a trilogy of documentary films depicting humanity's relationship to the earth and to technology

The name of the film is a Hopi word meaning "life of war".

In contrast to the first two parts, the majority of *Naqoyqatsi* was created not by filming in the real world, but by using archive footage and stock images, manipulated and processed digitally on non-linear editing workstations and intercut with specially-produced CGI. Reggio described the process as "virtual cinema."

disc 58



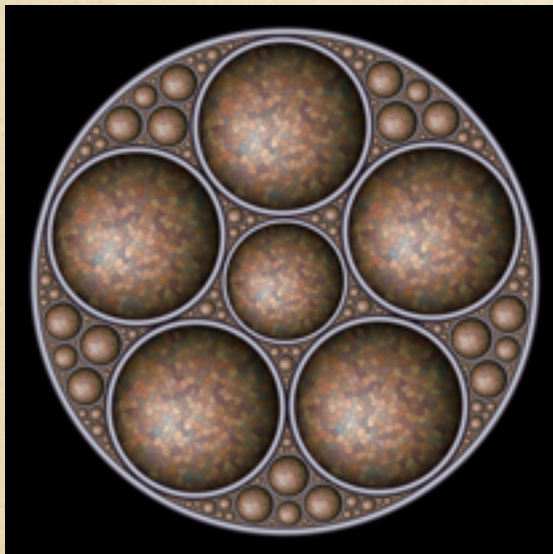
Apollonian vs. Dionysian

*beauty, reason, perfection,
geometrical art, formalism,
individuality, human beings
as artists, self-control,
exhaustion of possibilities,
creation,*

Apollonian
intellect
structure
rationality
tame
ideas
head

Dionysian
emotions
expression
irrationality
wild
feelings
heart

*intoxication, celebration of
nature, music, dance,
individuality dissolved and
hence destroyed, wholeness
of existence, orgiastic
passion, dissolution of all
boundaries, excess,
destruction.*



The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music (1872) is a 19th Century work of philosophy by Friedrich Nietzsche. It was in this book that he elaborated the distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian forms of art.



Minimalism

- Is Minimalism predominantly an Apollonian or Dionysian approach to art?

Apollonian

intellect

mathematical

rational

tame

ideas

head

Dionysian

emotional

expressive

irrational

wild

sensations

heart

Minimalism

- Minimalism is an *Apollonian* approach to art

Apollonian

intellect

structure & form

mathematical

rational

tame

ideas

head

RESEARCH THEMES

- Pick a 20th century musical stylistic movement.
- Present a composer whose work clearly expresses the ideals of the movement. Give dates, places, fields of activity. Answer the following specific questions:
 - How is this music/art movement *Modernist*?
 - What cultural standards did it undermine?
 - What new possibilities did it open up?
 - What were the musical (& visual) characteristics that defined the style?
 - In what way did it reflect a situation prevailing in the general culture?
 - Was this movement predominantly *Apollonian* or *Dionysian*?

RESEARCH THEMES

- partial list of musical movements in the 20th century
 - *impressionism* - Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel
 - *expressionism* - Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg
 - *primitivism* - Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev
 - *folklore revival (Great Britain)* - Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Gerald Finzi
 - *futurism* - Ferruccio Busini, George Antheil
 - *serialism* - Anton Webern, Pierre Boulez
 - *neo-classicism* - Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith, Sergei Prokofiev, Ottorino Respighi
 - *musique concrete and electronic music* - Hugh Lecaine, Edgard Varese, Karlheinz Stockhausen
 - *minimalism* - Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Philip Glass