

Exploring the Aesthetics of Minimalism in Art

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ABSTRACT

Minimalism, as an artistic movement and philosophical orientation, has fundamentally reshaped how we understand form, function, and aesthetic value in modern and contemporary art. Emerging in the mid-20th century, Minimalism eschewed ornamentation in favor of simplicity, geometric precision, and material honesty, invoking the dictum “less is more.” This paper examines the historical roots of Minimalism, its theoretical and cultural underpinnings, and its influence across various art forms, including visual art, sculpture, architecture, and digital design. Particular emphasis is placed on the impact of Eastern philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism and Western formalism in shaping minimalist aesthetics. Through an analysis of key artists such as Carl Andre and the role of space and perception in minimalist artworks, this study explores how Minimalism challenges conventional modes of engagement with art, demanding an introspective and spatially aware encounter. The paper also discusses the cultural critiques of Minimalism, especially concerning issues of privilege, representation, and abstraction in the postmodern era. Ultimately, this work aims to contextualize Minimalism as both an aesthetic principle and a cultural force with enduring relevance.

Keywords: Minimalism, visual art, Zen Buddhism, Carl Andre, abstraction, formalism, spatial perception, simplicity, modernism.

INTRODUCTION

Minimalism, or simply minimal, is a word used to describe several objects, styles, disciplines, aesthetic expressions, and movements that employ the selection of a minimum number of elements. More specifically, it has been mainly used to delineate a trend in various arts that condemned excessive ornamentations in favor of simplicity. Artists, architects and designers who embraced minimalism were concerned with the essential properties of their chosen materials and medium, hence different materials were employed across the various disciplines: in visual art a preference for concrete and industrial materials was common; in music tone and rhythm were actively stripped; in architecture, structural elements, rough concrete, painted metals, and glass were preferred; in design, plywood, brass, concrete, painted metals, and cardboard were commonly used materials. Simply put, the artistic perspective behind minimalism, later adopted in other disciplines, could be summed up by the words of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: “Less is more.” It is, however, important to note that the term was later used in a narrower sense, to describe a particular movement in the plastic arts sometimes called “radical” or “true” minimalism. In this sense, minimal art is the extreme simplification and reduction to the essentials of the structure of an object’s properties, like any other artistic style; it is not surface transparency but a deeper, honeycombed structure transparency that is paramount. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, an idea already in the air that the formal elements of design or art could reflect a new scientific reality—translated first into a new pictorial language constructivism, de stijl, etc. that simply reinterpreted the legacy of European painting into a visual language suitable for the modern design of artifacts such as typography, graphic design, architecture, and industrial design. After WWII, a new generation of artists and designers took over this tradition and were the ones who understood that conventional models alone will not suffice to convey a brand-new reality and, in the case of a disciplinary crisis, pre-conventional forms and techniques could be employed with this totally new logic [1, 2].

Historical Background of Minimalism

Minimalism emerged as an avant-garde art movement in the late 1950s, becoming popular from the 1960s to the 1980s. It is linked to submovements such as literalism, objectivity, and conceptualism, reflecting influences from various philosophical schools like structuralism and neo-positivism. The early minimalism canon remains open to reinterpretation, allowing for diverse perspectives beyond traditional art-historical boundaries. Opinions differ on defining minimalism as the reduction to basic shapes like cubes or spheres, often criticized for being overly simplistic. This definition contrasts with broader, more abstract interpretations of art's visual languages. Minimalism's significance lies in its ability to transform social and commercial fields, serving as an indirect component of modern and postmodern aesthetics. The discourse around minimalism encompasses a variety of submovements within the history of art, exploring its impact on visual art and its manifestations in the digital age. Individual works that deviate from pure minimalism are cited to provide a richer understanding of reductive design and its implications in contemporary art [3, 4].

Origins in Modern Art

Artcraft having almost no form and little color and adjacently another artcraft having very different forms and colors which is sympathetically drawn, and again being compared with yet another artcraft lacking in form and color. Leading art theorists put forward approaches focused on the various aspect of Minimal Surface through experiments or observation. Consequently, there is a need for research on Minimalismo from a position or aspect thoroughly grounded on theories associated with individual artists. MŪS EYE inquiring into "the simple" attempted to study the aspect of Minimalismo that is used for aesthetic purposes, focusing on the theory of Compare, Contrast, and Grouping specially on artcrafts being located on a similar boundary of abstract painting and sculpture. Formalism, one of a school of Modern Art, is pursued a way deeply associated with aesthetics and cognition through the emotional expression of individual artists intentionally constructed by a limited unity, simple form. The existence of a form separated from external environment in Modernism art favored a sublimation bordering on the metaphysical, confirming an abstract beauty. For Form Problem pursued as stable but expressive aesthetic, form is the relationships of pieces and surface, a term bounded with painting and sculpture and the reason why Formalism theory has considerably discussed art forms and the becoming pure. Its kinetic quality was defined as one pushing the eye to either fidelity to the object or burgeoning for perceptual irregularity so that Formalism is supported by theory of motion strictly adhered on compositional inebriety, pictorial space and outline theory [5, 6].

Influence of Eastern Philosophy

The influence of Zen Buddhism on artists of the 1950s and 60s can be viewed through the lens of three concepts: Zen's notion of emptiness, the concept of ambiguity contained in the Zen concept of mu, and the relevance of the concept of attention in Zen meditation practice. Practiced in varied forms throughout Asia, Zen has become both well-known and misunderstood in the course of its journey from East to West. The aesthetics of Zen have been picked up by contemporary artists for reasons that parallel the doctrines of Zen which are at the same time deep and simple. Therefore, it is important to get a clear understanding of the tradition itself. Zen Buddhism has roots in the earliest rise of Mahayana Buddhism, known in China as Ch'an. Tenzo Shu, a letter written by Dogen, a 13th-century Japanese monk, is one of the few works of the Zen tradition that speaks extensively of aesthetics. Generally, it is considered that aesthetics is not an appropriate basis of Zen practice. Zen monks do not partake in making or appreciating art but instead practice the form of meditation known as zazen. Attention is given to one's posture, breathing, and mental process. When thoughts about the past or future arise, the mind is emptied by attentional redirection to a focus on the present moment, a process that at its height can make time seem irrelevant. Emptiness refers both to the lack of inherent existence in all things and to the absence of ego structure in the mind that distorts perception. In Zen, there are many Emptiness koans, some short, puzzling statements, and others are more elaborate stories. Teanishi-ima-tea cup is a good example of a longer one — a question asked by a tea cup and the answer given by the teanishi in the form of various tea ceremonial utensils. Sculpture, poetry, ink painting, and murky rock formations, jades, and natural materials, all of these are aesthetic creations which no artist has controlled or contained, with a supply ready at any time, preeminent in the sculpture of the simple polite stone, in an elegant roof-tile, a humble wood grain, or even in a speck of rusted iron. All these canvases of an artist are so many predecessors of the finest creations of a perfect artist. This stems from traditional aesthetics but is also relevant to contemporary artistic practice. Only at the heart of creation does the artist attain this highest stance of subtlety and profundity, wherein he

makes use of the blank tablet, wild streams, and careless thought to bear witness to truth. This frigid moon conceals from those ignorant of nature the vast beyond of its sphere [7, 8].

Key Characteristics of Minimalist Art

Minimalism is characterized by a strict reduction approach to art, literature, architecture, and design. In visual art, minimalism is manifested by a monochromatic color palette, geometric objects, serial arrangements, and industrial materials. The underlying perspective of modernist architects and minimal art can be summarized as, "Less is more," which was pioneered by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Following modernism and minimalism in the West, similar design tendencies also emerged in the East, including Japan's Zen aesthetics and the wabi-sabi movement. At the end of the twentieth century, research on minimalist design began to take shape within the field of human-computer interaction (HCI). With the emergence of the home computer and the Internet, signifying the shift into a PC-based information society, complexity was seen as key to understanding computing. To Carroll, complexity stems from both the hardware and software of the PC. Too many options, features, functions, or commands relative to users' capabilities are often blamed for difficulties users encounter in their efforts to utilize the computer. Writ large, both kinds of complexity can converge as overload complexity. In contrast to complexity, Carroll emphasized the HCI inquiry and design question: how to achieve simplicity? [9, 2].

Prominent Minimalist Artists

The first solo exhibition of Carl Andre in Rome in 1967, composed the most important works for the artist. The artist in textbooks on minimalist art is presented as primarily a sculptor, and the tendency to classify him primarily as a sculptor seems to be repeated in museum catalogs. He is described as a minimalist sculptor or the father of Minimal Sculpture. By so doing, it is usually concluded that Andre hewn from the stone of the forests of Massachusetts or sheathed in aluminum from the bauxite bay of Jamaica is a sculptor who camouflages himself so well in museum imitations of blocks and rustic beams that he is reduced to a mere creator of stage props for abstract scenery. Exhibition halls where a rectangle of pure simplicity in a flat floor plane on which regularly spaced intervals the substantial forms, little more than toys for giants, are limited to metal tiles of the length of twelve inches, slab heaps of raw from the quarry or wood treated as moist as the day it became engraved with its rings, are described as the prestigious John Weber Gallery and the Margulies's in Vivo in New York. Such tendentious classifications may be well meant, but they bring the art to a halt. A work such as Equivalent does not really arise from dispute over whether it is sculpture at all. Integrity and significance, beauty and movement, the monumentality of 672 Blue Stack and the impressed dunes of the thirty-five flat granite squares, Vallée du Roc are not of sculpture but are earned from genius. It is neither sculpture, installation, nor stage design, but something unique; it is incommensurable with any other object. It makes the viewer become as expressive as the artist for feeling, thinking, striving, and creating. Carl Andre, who has taken at once a unique stance in multitude of artists and critics who have contributed to the development of minimalism, is one whose work provides a view of the invisible minuet of forces levelling the extra space of the world both from itself and the art. The purest works of abstract sculptural art are those of Carl Andre, most of which are in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. He studied mathematics and philosophy and created a unique approach to the construction of monumental abstract works. They reveal the concrete nature of the forces among diverse elements without reductions, simplifications, or extrinsic codes [10, 11].

Minimalism in Different Art Forms

In the art world, minimalism is most commonly associated with works that had little artistic design and instead focused on pure geometric form. It usually produced works with identical shapes and colors, using methods to make it look industrial. Artworks are only as they appear: a steel block is a steel block; a floor lamp is a floor lamp. Therefore, these works did not provide art appreciation; an intricate painting was to be examined carefully, while minimalism asked viewers to stand afar for a full perspective. However, for some viewers, minimalist works unnaturally exclusive. Because of their outright forms, when viewers trespassed into this space, they felt like a trespasser. In fact, minimalism originated as a pure way of artistic production on the need for art appreciation. Not only the minimalist works but also the minutest imaginations provoked a negative return. It departed from the texture of paint, brushworks, and canvases in painting and returned to its object and visual purity; from the gesture of placement and grandness to spatial and temporality equality in sculpture. On the inorganic side of sculptures, they either acted as surrounding space or befall surroundings. A circle moved with the socialites embraced "environment artist" naming. Environment art referred to the integrated relation with inner logic and out with conceptions, while for landscape-based artists it stood for site-specificity; low-brow art was situational

site-specific room-based compositions with an exclusive view-giving spot. However, it derived and departed from social theories. It borrowed distinctness-point of vaccination-based social criticism, with attention grasping social actions against culture spoiling target points. It watched position and ratio change to create subtle influences in an all-dense fashion. It altered naturally occurring objects—inappropriate bumps left by construction sites or the inner texture of the room to adapt a bodily cue and mimic—; and discarded material objects, like discarded wood revamped as a palette to portray mostly pictographic objects in an alien light with touches beneath judging simple structures, abandoning culture and commented upon background. In such a way, simple minds directed the viewers into the artworks outside the ways they typically judged shapes in their culture, but would re-see their aesthetic standards anew [12, 13].

The Role of Space in Minimalist Art

Taking into account the perception of space as a form of construction of the visual environment before perceiving objects has led to an understanding that ambiguous paintings were not merely abstract images but presentations of a world of emptiness replete with infinite horizons. Not only pictorial image abstraction but the purification of form as a conscious approach of artists led to the use of pure visual units (shapes, colors, lines) not as a mere instrument of representation but rather as visual awareness constructs that constitute a spatial perception without hierarchy regarding their treatment of proximity, parallelism, contiguity, and overlapping, the essence of art becoming the production of visions of the world. The notion of empty visual surroundings resonated with other disciplines, seeking inquiry into space structure, the cognition of emptiness, its basic topological properties, mathematical notions of open and closed sets, and the occurrence of some types of control problems. Ideas from analytic topology were introduced into artistic creation. Askin and Abelson, fascinated by the notion of ambiguity, viewed ambiguities as localizations of infinitively valued relations. Wittgenstein, in his treatment of emptiness, defined the horizon as both limiting law and horizon, outside which things cannot be represented. The prospect of a change in aesthetic experience from pictorial beauty to empty sight opened the door to new possibilities for architectural drawings and design documentation. The art of the first avant-garde artists who opted for a pure painting free of representational contents and metaphors played a fundamental role in the reconsideration of the object of art and the emergence of the space of art canvas work. However, current exhibitions of minimal art that invite to wonder whether minimalism represents human coexistence difficult to set up with its entailments or otherwise consider emptiness a sign of new pictorial work precept. Confidence in art influence vanished as a bygone legacy of idealism; the wish to build a stable world of certainty vanished with vitalism, and faith in the purity of sense fled with the enlightenment foundation. The notion of art as a sublime machine that would replicate divine thought recollection and the presentation of objective eternity passed through a world of metaphysical light and sublime intelligence acquired gold ornamentation [14, 15].

Cultural Impact of Minimalism

Minimalism forms a distinct movement in U.S. art that began in the mid-1960s and flourished, to an extent, through the late 1970s. Minimalist painters and sculptors felt to a large extent that color was a non-essential aspect of artistic form and act. The result was a cooler, almost astringent art that for some critics at least, came through as concrete and self-referential. Additionally, there were questions about the ethics of self-referentiality. Much critique of minimalist art during its heyday focused on its (perceived) value-free aesthetic, a stance that somewhat mirrored the art-neutral view of the New Criticism that dominated academic criticism in U.S. literature in the 1950s and 1960s. In this respect, coolness came to be seen too closely in some quarters to Marxism's much vilified "icy Paganism." Criticism during this period sought to bring to light the supposedly ethically compromised and socially thick nature of this work assertions further amplified by the rise of feminisms of color and similar late-1970s affections. The sheer finitude of minimalist art the way its hand seems never to loom large—could not help but feed into hackneyed modernist takes on generic commodification and fear of the big Other. In the late 1980s, issues of diversity and their attendant postmodernist critiques reached the academy enforce, and minimalism slipped from the academic milieu. The emergence of a new smiley face avant-garde beginning in the late 1980s responded to feminist, gender, and race critiques of the "high art" tradition. Minimalism seems overtly abhorrent to the art movements that ensued in its aftermath. Pop and politically charged art were deemed means to a much more progressive end. Attention to feminism played a major role in these moves, responses in part to Judith Butler's newly emergent brand of gender theory and contribute to efforts to make sense of diversity in both Latin(ies) and post-colonial politics. But the general ligature would recast the minimalist brand as unbearably white, male, and privileged. As the newly emergent

ethnic and sexual left re-drew the map of artistic contestation in the 1990s, the white male theorization of minimalism seemed to fall away—forgotten, derided, or viewed as an imperious taboo [16, 17].

Critiques and Controversies

The several discourses on Minimalism that arise from such inquiries suggest many controversies and, more importantly, many instances of misunderstanding. Of some of the misuses of the term Minimalism a few will be reviewed, some misuses originating from cataclysmically different conceptual frameworks concerning the form. Here, in fine, two of those erroneous meanings will be studied: a doctrine concerning the kinds of available compositional materials and a doctrine concerning the compositional procedures a composer might or might not employ. Inappropriately restrained notions of Minimalism are usually based on a restricted idea of dissonance, an error due to the assuredly misguided understanding of the Minimalist compositional techniques firstly referred to European contemporary music and were not construed as compositional techniques of general usage. Minor cases of misunderstanding also emerged in pre-Mondrian visual art, even in the music of Pythagoras. A happy accident destroyed a masterpiece sculpture by Henry Moore: the grief-stricken artist nevertheless could construct a new piece of visual art with the remnant pieces of stone; this was called the sculpture of David. The Minimalist aesthetics, nonetheless, does not restrict the composing materials in any way. Input is input; hypothesis is hypothesis. What is equally unwarranted is to think that there is any such expiration date for compositional procedures. Properly applying one type of procedure does not preclude applying another type of procedure. Minimalism, for instance, may or may not be necessarily carceral, but one instance of minimalism may be [18, 19].

The Future of Minimalism in Art

Though art takes many forms, minimalist art aims to create beauty as simply as possible. While some artists leave nature untouched, minimalist artists carefully remove details to create universally enjoyable art. Musicians may explore solo vocal textures, producing ethereal sounds. A simple ivory mammoth figure can capture vast beauty, while the texture of a simple canvas or paper draws attention. Minimalist plays might be improvised about daily life without props or scenery. Mantras and repeating jokes spark unique interest. Any art that uses minimal means and expense is minimalist, a practice that has persisted over time and will continue with new artists. Minimalist works reflect an advanced civilization, focusing on ordinary items with forgotten beauty, such as vehicles, outdated billboards, or discarded objects like stained plates and burnt-out bulbs. These remnants may transform into treasures, like aged white crockery layered with frosting, symbolizing cultural wealth. A cab driver's detailed notebook may appear beautiful, while a gum-stained street could embody pop art. Over time, even common disposables may enchant us due to their past. Ignoring pretentiousness, the beauty found in decay offers richness. Small ideas require creative thought and interdisciplinary knowledge; simplicity can be profound. The sublime manifests in simple items, from two light bulbs on rods to a grass rug or the Sea of Tranquility. Yet simplicity can verge on nothingness, while minimalist artists strive to imbue simple objects with presence. This emptiness can serve as a backdrop for beauty, as bold minimalist forms stir the audience's awareness. The elusive beauty within emptiness leaves spectators puzzled and in awe. [20, 21].

CONCLUSION

Minimalism represents far more than a stylistic trend; it is a profound philosophical and aesthetic shift that redefined the boundaries of art and its experiential possibilities. By focusing on reduction, essential forms, and spatial relationships, Minimalism invites viewers into a meditative, often introspective dialogue with space, material, and perception. Drawing on both Western theories of formalism and Eastern concepts of emptiness and attention, the minimalist movement demonstrates a universal language of simplicity that transcends cultural boundaries. Yet, Minimalism has not been free from critique—its association with privilege, exclusivity, and detachment from social issues has prompted reevaluations within the art world. Despite these controversies, its legacy endures in contemporary design, architecture, and digital media, where the ethos of "less is more" continues to inform both function and form. Minimalism, in its purest sense, remains a compelling inquiry into how art can be both an object and a space for contemplation, engaging the viewer not through complexity but through intentional absence.

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