

Steve Reich

Steve Reich briefly talked about how his and others work fit in the discussion of minimalist music. It was suggested that the musicians of this style did not ascribe themselves this term, but was imposed upon them by critics years after the fact. Reich agreed that it was not the artists themselves who gave themselves the label, but could see the connection between his early work and the work of minimalist artists such as Frank Stella, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt. In both areas one of the primary ideas is to use relatively simple primitives that subtly change with different perspectives. In music this is primarily over time, while in art this is primarily done in space. However, he also mentioned that this only applied to his earlier work and that there was essentially nothing minimal about many of his more recent pieces. This I think highlights one of the troubles of classification that the speaker may have been alluding to. Once something has been labeled it is difficult to change perspectives again and see the many other subtleties that may be available to digest. Another issue the speaker could have been alluding to, that I find very interesting, is how the semantics of piece or body of work is defined. Sometimes an artist or musician clearly has an intention for the piece and can “will” that intention into the interpretation. However, many times regardless of what the musician or artists intends for the piece to be about it takes on an entirely new meaning based on the context it was performed, the attitude of the listener or society, or many other reasons. So in a way, regardless of what Reich or the other “minimalist” composers intended their work to be about it is now minimalist music non the less.