Minimalism in Architecture:  
The Juxtaposition between Architecture and Sculpture

ABSTRACT: The juxtaposition between architecture and sculpture is present in the history of architecture from the earliest civilizations. The phenomenon of their relationship, which manifested through their interaction, was expressed especially in the twentieth century, when the sculptural shape of attractive architecture has reached its culmination in architecture of Blob (Binary Large Objects). Today, present as the controversy in the discussions is the factional dispute between advocates of Blob and Minimalism which is, as the leading paradigm of the twenty-first century architecture, expressed through the objects that clearly contain a sculptural approach. The dialogue between architecture and sculpture brought a new dimension to the architecture of the XXI century and showed that the architectural sculpture features our movement towards the future.

KEY WORDS: minimalism, architecture, sculpture, juxtaposition, archisculpture, blob

INTRODUCTION

New digital technology that is in line with the development of new materials, brought a revolutionary innovation in the field of construction and design. It gave a new impulse and inspiration to architects. As a result of new thinking and new ideas exhibitionism emerged in the search for form and expression, so that we are at the end of the twentieth century witnessing the realization of the most unusual building shapes. Let us remember that the name of the Seventh World Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2000 was "Less Aesthetics, More Ethics". The dynamics of the modern era is reflected in the experimental architecture, known by Blob (Binary Large Objects) architecture. In contrast to the approach of aggressive and spiritually poor architecture, which emphasizes the dynamics of hopelessness and in the line with the vision of the world of violence and destruction, minimalism in architecture is a diverting attention to other values. According to many, it is "a step towards the realization of the authentic art of the sublime" (Beidler 1995: 2), certainly one of the leading "paradigm architecture of XXI Century" (Vasilski 2008: 14), which is the highest value as it allows the basic elements to come into play, and the search for the essence of which "explains why something is the way it is", according to Aristotle (Bertoni 2002: 21).

In the dialogue between different art forms, architecture achieved a richer work and status in a sense that it has always existed. At the beginning of our century there was a notion of
archisculpture. What is archisculpture? Is it that architecture becomes a sculpture or is it a sculpture that becomes an architecture? The answer will vary from example to example in the juxtaposition of both disciplines (Bruderlin 2005). The creative work of leading architects today confirms the existence of the concept for the justification of the archisculpture. There is Zaha Hadid or Santiago Calatrava, whose every project can be seen as almost a sculptural work. "Proper architecture is sculpture," uttered Constantin Brancusi 1.

Can buildings be independent sculptures? Can sculptures be functional objects? In an attempt to define the relationship between architecture and sculpture, it is important to establish a clear boundary. But is it even that possible? Richard Serra's Grand Palace from Paris is in constant dialogue with the architecture of the building, but at the same time remains clearly distant from it (Fig. 1).

What can we say about the apartment complex in Denmark (Fig. 2)? It is often very difficult to establish a clear boundary between architecture and sculpture. On the other hand, in the urban city tissue sculptures are sometimes placed with a specific function, as it is a case with architecture. By its very existence we are faced with a dilemma. For example, the massive statue entitled Mae West on Effner platz in Munich (Fig. 3), by sculptress Rita McBride, caused much controversy over whether it represents a work of art. Is it an egg stand or a vase for flowers? How about the sculpture of Souto de Moura on the Rio Douro in Porto (Fig. 4)?

---

1 “Real architecture is sculpture”- the famous sentence of Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), an artist who has developed from archaic to free cubist conception, was completely independent at the end and has influenced contemporary sculptors of abstract expression.
So, there is the question about the proximity of sculpture and architecture and their interaction. It explores the phenomenon of this relationship that was particularly expressed in the twentieth century since it has been long neglected. There is no other artistic medium so familiar with the architecture as it is the sculpture: both are three-dimensional, both changing as the viewer moves around and through them and both with common materials and common authors.

What can we say about the basic differences between sculpture and architecture? Above all, the architecture is functional. It exists to be "settled", i.e. its validity is achieved through its usefulness and usability. This is not a priori the case with a sculpture. Traditionally, the architecture creates a place, while sculpture creates subject, resulting in significant differences in volume between the two disciplines, to the extent that the sculpture can often exists as an integral element of architecture (e.g. statues on the facade of Roman basilicas and Gothic cathedrals). The opposite phenomenon is extremely rare. In addition, architectural works is rarely made as a spontaneous act of the individual (such as a Postman Cheval's Ideal Palace) and not in the absence of the formal commission, as opposed to the sculpture as a more autonomous medium.

"The main difference between architecture and sculpture derives clear from the examples used the ambiguity between the two," cites Arhajm (1990: 190-191). Regarding the question: "Is this a sculpture" he cites two examples, the water fountain and exhaust roof tower, of Corbusier's Unité d'habitation in Marseilles. For the 1st example he says: "When the fountain becomes a sculpture ... it ceases to serve the water ... it uses water for their own purposes. Water becomes a component of the fountain as its integral expression
part." For the other example, „exhaust tower ... can be seen as a successful sculpture that dominates the configuration of other sculptural objects ... form of the object changes depending on whether it is viewed as a sculpture or a chimney. As a sculpture, it was completely alone ... as a chimney, this form becomes hollow."

Sculptural works contain a void or shared space in such way that the area becomes just as important as the work itself. Many realizations of these sculptures can be included into what is traditionally known as architecture. This overlap can occur in the reverse direction, so that it seems that some of the buildings look like a sculpture on an urban scale. This was also the Opera House in Oslo: linking land and sea were implemented so that the new opera looks like a sculpture created in the fjord (Fig. 5). In order to complete the experience, sculpture in the fjord is floating in front of the opera (Fig. 6). Globe arena in Stockholm, Sweden (Fig. 7), the world's largest spherical building, also acts as a giant sculpture providing the views of the city from the top. Need for an artistic intervention is institutionalized today (like the form of raising sculpture) in the fully built environment. This can be assessed in the works seen on the streets or in the parks. One of the most famous example in Europe is certainly Vigeland Sculpture Arrangement, with 227 sculptures by a Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland as a part of Frogner Park in Oslo (Fig. 8).

Fig. 5. Tarald Lundevall: Opera House, Oslo, Norway, 2007.

Fig. 6. Sculpture in the fjord (in front of the Opera House)
FROM MINIMAL VISUAL ART AND SCULPTURE TO MINIMALISM IN ARCHITECTURE

There is widely recognized attitude that one of the decisive influence on the occurrence of minimalism in architecture, spoken about the last thirty years, came from minimal art (VASILSKI 2010b: 227-251) in the way that, dated from the 1960s, a number of American artists drew attention in a different way to the subtle line between sculpture and architecture. Transitioning from one artistic medium to another i.e. leaving the two-dimensional form and transiting to three-dimensional became a common trend in the minimalist visual art.

The artists such as Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Sol LeWitt leave the painting of their interest diverting to work on/or with objects in the real space. They are moving from the wall and turning to the room pointing out to a new way of art that is no longer in line with the traditional conventions of modernism (RORIMER 2004: 79). Since the artists mainly were simultaneously painters as well the sculptors, the substitute alone did not have to provoke a crisis and the collapse of the modernist form of autonomous systems and technical means of art realization. Staying somewhere between the two media certainly was. In this respect it is important Levit’s decision in his works, from the early 1960s, to consider and mean "no pictures or sculptures, but the structures" (RORIMER 2004: 79). For contemporary artists such as Carl Andre, Dan Graham and Richard Serra, we can say that they are abstract sculptors, but their work is nevertheless marked as breaking up with
tradition since it is not placed on a pedestal. Carl Andre (Fig. 9) in particular, plays with the boundaries of sculpture as a medium: rectangular or square surface laid directly on the ground, which is barely visible to the viewer, who may see them as part of the architectural setting. Dan Graham’s work is said to blur the line between sculpture and architecture. Back in the 1970s he has transformed the art of installations; sculpture's input (enterable) in the architecture offered to viewers a completely new perception of their own body. His way of achieving a combination of art and architecture are seen in his pavilions: the sculpture of glass and steel create a variety of spaces that confuse the viewer, because it did not fit in their normal environment or in their existing area of knowledge. Pavilions form an unique experience for the audience, forming a public experience (Fig. 10). One of the first such examples were the Satellite Towers (Torres de Satelite) - sculptures of five triangular prisms of different color and size, arranged in a square north of Mexico City; the idea of the architect Luis Barragan and sculptor Mathias Goeritz (Fig. 11). Richard Serra (Fig. 12) created in such a way that his works are closely integrated into the space of its environment. The issue of the relationship of his work and sculpture media is resulting for the observer in a wonder: is there a difference between sculpture and architecture. What happens to the architectural creation in the presence of Richard Serra’ sculpture? And vice-versa? The observer is asked to actually "settle" area of work, to "take part in it" in the true physical sense as if he will live there. His sculptures are no longer work which can be held in hand, or be accepted by reviewing it from one angle only: the spaces through which one moves are quasi - architectural spaces in which life takes place.

Fig. 9. Carl Andre: Pyramid, 1959. (reconstruction, 1970).

Fig. 10. Dan Graham: Pavilion in Berlin, Germany, 2005.
A monolithic appearance of minimalist object is achieved by the basis of radical simplicity of the object, which is subject to constant changing depending on the light, the weather or times of the day or year. In minimalism, the architecture is searching through simplicity for the essence (VASILSKI 2010a: 29). The fundamental questions of architecture and sculpture are set through simplicity, such as location, context, process, psychology and aesthetics of the building, and explore issues of interpretation and user interaction.


For example, *Le Stadium* in Vitrolles (Fig. 13), which is a kind of hermetically closed, huge monolith that we consider several elements in which the building is so clearly the product of a sculptural approach. „... stands out disturbingly against the landscape. A building so hermetic that it is impossible to guess its function from outside“ (CERVER 1997: 110).
Indeed, the exterior appearance of Le Stadium is conceived in the same way as the great landscape works of Donald Judd (Fig. 14). Object and its surroundings are given equal importance. The landscape is transformed, acquires gravity and is intellectualized and constrained. As in the case of Paleolithic menhirs, the first step to be taken in the creation of work of art is to determine the place where it is to be produced. And then an artist introduces substance that is the "arch" in architecture. Richard Serra has this approach, too. He is taking us through a massive metal coils and gracefully curved rectangles, which seem in defiance of gravity that explains the philosophy behind each piece of startling physical composition. "We start with the emptiness," he says. The style can be minimalistic, but the vision is maximized.
Minimalism in sculpture or music comes from a clear restraint and form reducing expressive elements in order not to pollute the essence of the work. In many cases this essence is to be found outside the work itself, because its meaning lies in the relationship to the surroundings, such as in sculpture. It would be pointless to comment on a work by Dan Flavin or John Cage on the sole basis of the object alone. „Unlike other artistic movements, such as Abstract Expressionism, when referring to Minimalism it is important not to confuse the artist's performance with the overall sense of the work“ (CERVER 1997: 30). The building is minimalist not only in form but in the choice of materials and finishes, and how the light is controlled in the interior spaces. And the Aveiro Geosciences Department building transmits austerity (Fig. 15), as well as the installation of Dan Flavin: An Artificial Barrier of Blue, Red and Blue, Fluorescent Light (Fig. 16).

Herzog & de Meuron: Signal Box, Basel, Switzerland, 1994.

One of the central questions of Minimal Art dominating the discussions, was the discussion in regard to scale. Attitudes formed in these discussions culminated in the exhibition Scale as content (1967.). The museum of architecture become a point of reference for the sculpture, since the protagonists of Minimal Art never succeeded in achieving urban dimensions in their work. Exceptions are made up of Mathias Goeritz’s photo-minimalist interventions. An important role in this context plays The Signal Box, Auf dem Wolf in Basel (1994.), by Herzog & de Meuron. As the control of rail traffic today is conducted exclusively by means of monitors, it was possible to dispense almost completely with windows (Fig.17). „The building is monolithic, almost „blind“ and resembles the Black Box, so popular with the creators of Minimal Art in which the interior remains mysterious. Like a solenoid, the entire building is wrapped by a band of copper ten centimetres wide. On one hand are metal screens of the inside electronic
systems much like a Faraday cage, on the other this simple, easy to follow procedure creates an endless source of visual effects: light reflections and nuances of color that change according to the time of a day. Last but not the least important: the signal box functions as a monumental landmark linking the broad expanse of the tracks to the urban landscape" (RUBY 2003: 70).


One of the qualities of Minimal Art as „post industrial“ art was that it evokes memories of the world of heavy industry that in the 1960s was slowly disappearing. Hence its affinity to technoid structures i.e. to metal, rust, prefabricated materials and industrial production processes. Hence the fact that the works of Minimal Art are particularly effective when displayed in factory halls empty of their machinery. One reason for the great success of Herzog & de Meuron Tate Modern in London is that the architects essentially did nothing other than empty the modernist power station. They conducted a rehabilitation facility such as left the brick facade largely intact, only the striking light beam placed on top of the building marks its transformation and underlines the horizontal extent of the complex.

The authors concentrated primarily on the interior, increasing the height of the empty hall by lowering the floor and leading the visitors into the building over a spectacular ramp. Similar to the way some minimalist sculptures articulate the spatial quality of a vanished industrial production or indeed even stage it. By just a few interventions Herzog/de Meuron evoked the memories of the old power station. Visitors can look through narrow bay windows into the depths of empty hall and thereby experience the fascination of the „industrial sublime“ that in the 1960s was so important for artists such as Tonny Smith. However, in the Tate Modern the issue is not to preserve the earlier substance or to make a fetish of it by the use of certain details and materials. „The primary concern is to transform it into a theatre of life that relates to the here and now and as part of the flow of time“ (RUBY 2003: 70) (Fig.18).

Dominique Perrault explicitly emphasises his interest in Minimal Art. His work expresses the commitment of grid structures, industrial materials and geometric primary forms clearly so close to sculptures by artists such as Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and Carl Andre. His criticism of narrative tendencies in architecture recalls the minimalist tradition of giving works the name Untitled, which is consistent in the effort to have architecture completed by its users. This is related to the minimalist idea of an aesthetics of participation (involvement). It is the three-dimensional form, measurable but dynamic art volume where the observers interact among themselves as well as with the environment (MARZONA 2004: 42).

However, in contrast to many of his colleagues, Perrault is not interested in the idea of reduction nor in any kind of authenticity of materials, as he is far more concerned with reflecting the direct violent act of architectural intervention. In this case this is called authority or physical reality. Minimal artists have used the term presence. And indeed Tehnical Book Centre for Higher Education in Bussy-Saint-Georges, Paris, France (1995), positioned art along the highway and/or suburban railway where it „achieves its greatest effect when blocks suddenly materialise in front of the eyes of those travelling by. The additive use of cubes of different sizes, clad with aluminium panels and movable louvers are placed on the site without the use of a plinth. It seems at first glance like a monumental enlargement of a minimalist sculpture“ (RUBY 2003: 100) (Fig.19). Realization of presence via the whole. Or, quoting Donald Judd: „Yes. The whole’s it. The big problem is to maintain the sense of the whole thing“ (MARZONA 2004: 19).

Fig. 17. Herzog&de Meuron:  
Fig. 18. Herzog&de Meuron:
When Perrault emphasises that his primary interest lies in positioning buildings „between presence and disappearance“ he touches on another crucial theme of Minimal Art (although previously seldom theoretically analysed): „the play with visual deception and revelation, with distortion and its correction“ (RUBY 2003: 102). His project assists in arriving at a new reading of minimal art from a current architectural perspective and it can be viewed as a productive development of minimalist principles. Perrault’s Aplex factory in Nantes (fig.20) achieves a similar effect as Donald Judd’s sculptures in Texas (fig.14). Both objects fascinate the viewer by the way they seem to disappear into their surroundings only to emerge again. In this crucial role of the scale and proportion, Judd used to say that the proportion has the "reason made visible“ (RUBY 2003: 100).

However, here we come to the essential difference between sculpture and architecture: whereas in the case of Judd’s work nature was the dominant reference, in Perrault’s case there is no immovable point of reference but at best a flexible mesh of relationships that alter over the course of time. This object, „crossword puzzle grid“, as the author describes it, with facades of metal panels that like Fresnel lenses refract and reflect their
surroundings does not need a spectacular landscape as a frame. It is not designed for a specific site, it neither follows a definite typology nor it embodies the complex facets of characteristic of such constantly changing industrial buildings in relation to surroundings. What goes on inside remains still mysterious.

CONCLUSION

"The buildings are sculptures in the city. Each has its own character. It can be grumpy, happy, boring or serious. It can be low, narrow or wide. They have a torso, back, head or tail. Therefore, we work as sculptors: the object slowly carves blocks of polystyrene in our modelling premises. Facilities primarily imagine solid bodies, solids. Gabarit is particularly solid. The volume of the object is gradually taking shape from one trial to another. First - the bulge on the left then the right side of the recess at the end of the cut on the top. Our facilities have never compilation walls enclosing an empty space, they are pure mass, weight. Architecture is an expression of the magnificent sculptured weight. Fulfilling the volume of the object is irrelevant because the function changes over time. Lines of the building will remain unchanged over time persistently defying the changes in society over the years ... "...

Constant interaction of sculpture and architecture still represents certainly a major form of communication. The creative energy that permeates sculptural and architectural works, inspires writers to shape our world and thereby in some way abolishes the essential difference between sculpture and architecture. Thus, the value realized in sculpture as well in architecture resonates beyond the time of their creation because they have integrated meaning. The values still have enough depth and passion to rise above the dignity of all time and each space.

Combining different phenomena, the interaction of time and space, are looking for the answer to each installed object: how much of sculpture contains an arch in architecture? The relationship between architecture and sculpture, which has been prolific over the centuries, continues to be and will continue to be. In minimalism, as a way of thinking...

and attempt to walk to the future in accordance with the time, the sculptural form itself says a lot, because it leads us to find the essence. The dialogue between architecture and sculpture has brought a new sensibility to the architecture of the XXI century, showing that architectural sculpture characterizes our movement to the future. Thus, the constant juxtaposition of architecture and sculpture lasts through time. It seems that this is the "loop that can not be disentangled and therefore, probably, that there are many possible meanings and varying from the simple surface relationship that promises a complex illusion of depth. One can not exit out of the loop" (ŠUVAKOVIĆ 2001: 92).

References:


ВАСИЛСКИ, Драгана. „Утицај различитих мотивација на настанак и развој минимализма у архитектури.“ *Наслеђе*, бр. 7 (2010б): 227-251.


Monograph available on-line:
NEUTELINGS, Riedijk: *Monograph At work*, 2005: 10

Photo source

1. Internet
2. Internet
3. - 8. Photos by author
10. Internet
11. Internet
12. Internet
13. Cerver 1997: 111
15. Cerver 1997: 32
16. Marzona 2004: 16
17. I. and A. Ruby, A. Sachs, P. Ursprung 2003: 70
18. I. and A. Ruby, A. Sachs, P. Ursprung 2003: 75