

MINIMALISM IN ARCHITECTURE AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL OF THE TIMES

Dragana Vasilski*

ABSTRACT

Minimalism is now accepted as the definition of culture by way of reasoning, that is, as an aesthetic approach to navigating through the different fields, such as art, architecture, interior decoration, literature, music, fashion design and critical discussions. As origins of a universal style, the minimal is a way of life, as a spirit that impregnates nearly the whole of modern culture. It is a contemporary need for simplicity, order and purity of the individual that come from history, examples which are essential for the growing emergency needs. Architecture can only use cultural symbolization to show that everyday life goes beyond the immediate situation, to form part of the cultural and historical continuity. Minimalism in architecture is a contemporary sensitivity that living beyond all religions, rejects materialism and superior takes the search for spirituality as a new principle of progress.

Key words: minimalism, culture, architecture, universal style, contemporary sensitivity

*Dragana Vasilski, PhD, dvasilski@fgm.edu.rs

INTRODUCTION

"The man is wrong when he thinks that happiness lies in things around him, it depends on the opinions we have about these things" Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus.

Today, the minimal is a way of life, as a spirit that impregnates nearly the whole of modern culture and its surroundings. If we start from the fact that the development of minimalism in architecture began in 90`s of the last century, avoiding individual cases before this period, we can conclude that now for twenty years it is a constant theme for discussion (Vasilski, 2010a:227).

Minimum sensitivity requires a balance between material and spiritual, the physical quality and abstraction, between the everyday and the absolute. It leaves no traces in the present and build a new future or, in the words of Carl Andre: „Art is what we do. Culture is what is done to us.“ (Marzona, 2009:12). Today, we have analogous minimalist tendencies in dance, film, and literature, as well as the incorporation of once-shocking minimalist vocabulary into mass culture, from fashion to advertising.

Minimalism in architecture is characterized by the emphasis on essential elements like light and the way it falls on the volumes and masses that make up buildings and shape space, design and structure (Vasilski, 2010b:2). The architecture champions concrete forms designed to interrelate with their surroundings; thus, functionalism, linear structures and essential geometric forms define identity (Minimalism, 2005:37).

ARCHITECTURE AS A CULTURAL SYMBOL

From birth we are trying to enter a little order in the infinite diversity of our environment. Order that we manage to achieve is a result of cooperation and transfer of information. Achieved order defend itself against all charges, the need for a row puts man at the same time creative and conservative. The common order is called culture (Schulz, 2009:87). To become more common, it should be taught and learned. Therefore, it depends on a common system of symbols or, rather, the culture corresponds to these symbols and their effects on behavior. "Culture has caused or regulated system of symbols that are objects of orientation activities, internationalized elements of individual personality and the agent institutionalized patterns of social systems" (Parsons, 1951: 327)

As the social structure based on shared values and systems of symbols (Parsons, 1951:11), it is obvious that the cultural symbolization is closely linked to creating a social milieu. Architecture can only use cultural symbolization to show that everyday life goes beyond the immediate situation, to form part of the cultural and historical continuity. Cultural objects are shared values of such as: the empirical (scientific) scopes, philosophical ideas, moral codes, religious beliefs, ideological assurances and economic conditions. The architecture itself is a cultural subject, so it has become a significant cultural expression. It is a human product that serves the common activities, as when the architecture, "as the mother of art", merge with the visual art, sometimes with music and drama, into one entity ("Gesamtkunstwerk" - integrated artwork) directly associated with life. As a human product of a very practical feature, the architecture has a special ability to show how our values and our tradition of culture determine our daily life (Schulz, 2009:136).

Minimalism is now accepted as the definition of culture by way of reasoning, that is, as an aesthetic approach to navigating through the different fields, such as art, architecture, music, fashion design and critical discussions. It is a contemporary need for simplicity, order and purity of the individual that come from history, examples of which is essential for the growing emergency needs, and which may be a way to throw a new light.

THE INFLUENCE OF DIFFERENT CULTURES ON THE FORMATION OF MINIMALISM IN ARCHITECTURE

The contemporary architecture of simplicity has its own tradition, which belongs to the history of different peoples and cultures. Japanese culture has a special place. The ideal of simplicity in the Japanese architectural tradition is specific - from The Grand Shines at Ise (Fig.1) or the heroic simplicity of architecture and rituals, as well as aesthetic ideals through the ceremony of tea and Katsura Rikyu Detached Palace (Fig.2) to great names on the international architectural scene: Tadao Ando (Fig.3) or SANAA (Fig.4). Tadao Ando's architecture transmits both Japanese spirituality and his own personal view of nature. His work has the tremendous influence on Japanese architecture, because his personal interpretation of Japanese aesthetics has spread like a new language among architects in Japan. Japanese concept of wabi and sabi (Zen Buddhism), who was in the minimum way of live, always offered a sense of liberation, a chance to be in touch with the essence of being. Recall calligraphy, the art of the total term, as one of the basic cultural values of Japan where art and spirituality merge: to create the artist must be in unity with the emptiness that is the foundation of all things. It is a condition in which I or ego connects with what permeates all things. Ando is influenced by traditional Japanese architecture in a way that not only left an indelible mark in the past, but present a new way today, not only in Japan but also abroad (Vasilski, 2011:16).



Figure 1. The Great Shrine of the Naiku at Ise, viewed from the south / Figure 2. Katsura Rikyu Palace: combination Ise Jingu and traditional construction of the palace / Figure 3. Tadao Ando: Church of the Light, Osaka, Japan, 1989. / Figure 4. SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima / Ryue Nishizawa): New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City, 2007.

Minimalism in architecture, as the most original contribution to the idea of simplicity in architecture today has its roots in traditional vernacular architecture (Vasilski, 2010d: 21). How can we define the nature of Mediterranean vernacular architecture? As an attempt, or some say as an illusion, to be built simply and in harmony, in accordance with the characteristics of the material on the site with a total

lack of excess and noise that comes from full and complete environment. In the Mediterranean vernacular architecture, simplicity is an archetype that has been taken in minimalism. “The Mediterranean... is the void in which things were generated. It is the original place of our cultures. Modernity has always been here: in the capacity to keep different cultures together without standardizing them, in the white house, in the simple complexity of things” (Carmagnola, 1996:149). In the case of Souto de Moura (Fig.5) and Alberto Campo Baeza (Fig.6), the formal rigor, perfect geometric forms, and the whiteness of their buildings undoubtedly stem from a refinement of lessons from the Modern Movement and the Mediterranean vernacular tradition. Both of these Iberians declare themselves heirs to the legacy of some second-generation modern masters, such as Fernando Tavora (Fig.7) or Alejandro de la Sota (Fig.8).



Figure 5. Souto de Moura: Maja House, Maja, Portugal, 1993. / Figure 6. Alberto Campo Baeza: Head Office of the Caja General de Ahorros, Granada, Spain, 2001. / Figure 7. Fernando Tavora: Casa da camara, Porto, Portugal, 1995. / Figure 8. Alejandro de la Sota: Doctor Arce, single family house, Madrid, Spain, 1955.

In the works of Swiss architects such as Peter Zumthor (Fig.9), Gigon and Guyer (Fig.10), Diener and Diener (Fig.11), what strikes us is their unusual asceticism and surprising simplicity. Swiss architecture has inherited the austerity of Calvinism. Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron (Fig.12) have a very specific role in the development of minimalism (Vasilski, 2008b:101). More than any of their contemporaries, they are challenging the boundaries between architecture and art. "A building is a building. It cannot be read like a book; it doesn't have any credits, subtitles or labels like pictures in a gallery. In that sense, we are absolutely anti-representational. The strength of our buildings is the immediate, visceral impact they have on a visitor". Herzog&deMeuron



Figure 9. Peter Zumthor: Kunsthaus, Bregenz, Switzerland, 1997. / Figure 10. Gigon&Guyer: Switching Station, Zurich, Switzerland, 1996-99. / Figure 11. Diener & Diener: KNSM - and Java - Island Apartment Blocks, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1995-2001.

The sobriety and even hardness of works produced in Switzerland derive from culture and character, and this may also be extended to some Austrian architects, such as Eberle Baumschlager (Fig.13), Adolf Krischanits (Fig.14) and others.



Figure 12. Herzog&deMeuron: Signal Box, Auf dem Wolf, Basel, Switzerland, 1994. / Figure 13. Eberle Baumschlager: ETH e-Science Lab, Zürich, Switzerland, 2008. / Figure 14. Adolf Krischanitz: White Cube in Berlin, Berlin, Germany, 2008.

MINIMALISM AS THE MODERN ARCHITECTURE OF SIMPLICITY AND EMPTY SPACE

Today, at the beginning of the XXI century minimalism in architecture is a paradigm, in a world that has become a common global stage. In architecture, we see an obvious tradition of geometric rigor, of formal restraint, and conceptual purity.

The idea of simplicity is touching the areas of honesty, truth and modesty, and extends to the characters. Simplicity is one of the ideas in modern architecture. From rationalists of 18th century to the present day, the scope of the concept is very different, variable and suitable for different interpretations (Vasilski, 2010c:29). Today, most original contribution to the idea of simplicity in architecture is minimalism, which is so called „modern architecture of simplicity“ (Bertoni, 2002:62).

Simplicity is one of the ideas of modern architecture. Equating the life and art was the idea of avant-garde of early modernism. From setting Mies van der Rohe that the basic material of architecture is life itself, came the basic concept of minimalism in architecture. Original explanation of minimalistic creation is how, with a minimum of ingredients, to turn off all unnecessary in the art. Minimalism, a term that has emerged in the sixties in American abstract art, is now widely accepted in different areas of creation: from painting, design, music, literature and fashion, theater, film and architecture. Through it, the area and architects who are completely independent in the ideological and formal sense, contribute to sketching international movement of simplicity (Vasilski, 2008:16). Minimalist expression contains a phantasm of simplicity, which is rational, transparent and understandable, this is not a paradigm that says that something is missing, but it is a product of stopping language (Maksimović, 2008:98). Minimalism in architecture assumes an empty space which fills our senses. Sensuality provides only material phenomena (Liotar, 1991:68).

Idea of simplicity is timeless. In Spinoza's (Benedictus de Spinoza) words, simplicity is the type or quality of disposition of things: „...when things are arranged in such a manner that, as we heard them

play, we can easily imagine and easy to remember, we say to them that they are well arranged, otherwise if they are improperly maintained or tangles“ (Lojanica, 2001:92). Emmanuel Kant simplicity compared to the sublime: „The lofty always has to be big, but beautiful can be a little. Sublime must be simple, beautiful and can be decorated with ornate“ (Kant, 2002:18). According to some definitions simplicity is almost quantitative term and is therefore very important to fulfill the principle of economy. It was still in 13th century when St. Thomas Aquinas thought: “If the thing can be done properly with one, then is unnecessary to do it with a few, because we see that nature does not use two instruments where one is enough” (Pegis, 1945:129). Isaac Newton shows to us an example by nature: “Nature does nothing in vain, needless to what is more, as it is enough what is less. He points out that nature is pleased with simplicity and don’t sound like pomp of superfluous causes” (Radović, 1998:265). Essentially complexity is the highest form of simplicity (Vasilski, 2009:8). It’s where iconic is interesting to us - as the ultimate form of complexity.

The ancient idea of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu was that a house does not make any roof or wall, but empty, the inner space in which to place human life in unrestricted freedom and no constant. Unusual, but mental idea of the empty building as a fact, to this empty space inside the place filled with the inner life.

“What I look for is the excitement of empty space. It has the capacity to bring architecture alive, just as it does a Chinese scroll painting. Emptiness allows us to see space as it is, to see architecture as it is, preventing it from being corrupted or hidden by the incidental debris of the paraphernalia of everyday life. It offers the space, both psychological and physical, for contemplation and the serenity that can encourage meditative quiet and calm, without the jarring distraction of possessions” (Pawson, 1996:15).

In order to organize empty space, humans need to predetermine that organization, that is, they need some idea of how things should be located in space. Therefore, all architecture begins with world view, that is, it begins with a culture's sense of how objects and actions are organized in the world. Notice I stress objects and actions: architecture has as its principle function organizing the space of human actions: eating, cooking, speaking, praying, etc. More than anything else, the language of architecture is permeated with a culture's sense of what humans should do, where they should do it, when they should do it, how important it is, and how these actions relate to the rest of the community, the material world, and the supernatural world. All architecture communicates to the members of a community through the meaning of their actions, that is, how their actions relate to the rest of the human, material, and spiritual worlds.

The definition means that architecture can be "read," that is, one can discover how a culture organizes itself socially, materially, and metaphysically. Architecture is like a book that a culture "writes" for other members of that culture; it is a culture talking to itself about the meaning and organization of the life of that culture. So looking at architecture isn't about pretty buildings, it's about understanding world view. This also means that whenever a member of a culture looks at a work of architecture, they understand that it has meaning and that this meaning governs their actions and understanding of the world.

Minimalism offer contemporary man the chance to rebuild a centre and to re-establish a sense of order and stability in the real world. In minimalism’s architecture, the centre is a place of silence where noise

has been vanquished; a linear place where disorder has been rendered non-existent; a mysterious, almost secret space where the present is suspended, where the sacred appears and the eternal is disclosed. It is a place in which fragmented man can rediscover the roots of his culture and tradition, through earth, water, air, fire, wood, stone and light. In absolute simplicity and complete unity: aplosis. It is a place of purification, in which is possible to rediscover one's own harmony, energy, and unique sense of oneself: one's own essence, and the ability to move beyond.

CONCLUSIONS

In the time of recession it is exactly that kind of architecture that is needed - architecture that creates maximum effect with a minimum of means: maximum comfort with minimal energy consumption, maximum functionality with minimal area, maximum quality of life with a minimal expense of resources.

Architectural examples of minimalism, combined with strict forms of modern movement and the possibilities offered by new materials and technology, contributing to the triumph of aesthetics, which became a symbol of our time. In the modern world, minimalist architecture is one of the most important contribution in an attempt to establish quality through simplicity of life. Today, minimalism in architecture means cultural development. Best summed up what include the term "cultural development" if we quote Whitehead: "Skill progress is to preserve order in the changes, and changes within the order" (Whitehead, 1929:515).

Minimalism in architecture presents the origins of the minimalist aesthetics, it offers simplicity as a personal lifestyle and a road to individual freedom. "The aesthetic value that gives us spiritual wealth, it gives us the title to something immeasurable, inestimable. That force seems not real, but it is certainly the forces affecting the real consciousness, the force has a wide view of the world. Basically, every experience of beauty (aesthetic value) is the importance of seeing the world, just by being shape it for our lives " (Hartman, 1979:484).

Finally, let us remember the words of Martin Heidegger: "Life is to be peace in the area, stay in peace, to preserve peace, taking into account the things that reveal a sense of communication between earth and heaven, between divinity and humanity" (Heidegger, 1999:56). As minimalism in architecture does, as a spirit that impregnates nearly the whole of modern culture.

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