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**Concept, Site and Material, a Contemporary Strategy in Art
and Architecture**

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Concept, Site and Material, a Contemporary Strategy in Art and Architecture

Carlos Manuel Lampreia da Silva

Abstract

In the beginning of the 60's something changes in the art world suspending modernism and abstract expressionism. Donald Judd invented the concept of 'specific objects' (Judd, 65), where artistic objects should be adapted to galleries, the 'white cube' space. Robert Morris, wrote about it in his 'notes on sculpture' (Morris, 66). Critics call this type of art minimalism, but none of those artists recognize the term. In the second half of the 60's, some artists, extended their activities towards the exterior and abstract spaces, and the American deserts became witnesses of experiments that had minimized minimalistic spatial expansion. 'Sculpture in an expanded field' (Krauss, 79) replaced 'white cube' abstract space for real wide space. At the end of the 60's, artists get conscious about some approaches they have made about human behaviour in society, and following the ideas of Henry Flint (Flint, 61), they have started measuring and collecting evidence about that behaviour. They started to worry about ideas (concepts), defending that it should be art's essence, decreasing and refusing objects. These ideas coming from art field concerning strategies evolving site, materiality and concept, also spread into architecture field, as post-modernist and contextualist ideas, and more recently by the emphasis in tectonics and materials. One of these particular approaches in contemporary architecture, can be found in the critic regionalist (Tzonis 81, Frampton 83) attitude of Alvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, the first exploring site and possible connections with his projects and the second concerned about materials that build the site, and the relations with the design. Abstraction and concepts are also tools that we can find in the work of Carrilho da Graça abstract and geometric connections to the site, or in the sculptural and massive abstract matter of Aires Mateus. But it is in Switzerland where we can find a full tectonical and conceptual approach to materiality trough the work of Peter Zumthor and Herzog & de Meuron. So this text will reflect about connections between art and architecture, concerning Minimal and Land art, but also the architectural strategic aspects regarding the strong connection between idea and concept in Conceptual art.

Keywords: Aires Mateus, Carrilho da Graça, Conceptual art, Herzog & de Meuron, Land art, Minimal art, Minimalism, Portuguese Architecture, Siza, Souto de Moura, Swiss Architecture, Zumthor.

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Initial Considerations

This text is divided in two, the first part concerning art, and the other half about architecture, it's a transdisciplinary exercise, growing out of traditional architecture theoretical autonomy, where, more based on texts than in objects, by six artists and six architects relevant for the theme, we studied how our way of thinking, normally by concepts, shapes matter and a site.

The curiosity about the subject was triggered by our interest in artistic experiences known as Land art, carried out by a group of artists who invaded deserted landscapes in the 60's, and was the reason why we had the pleasure of studying in a broad sense the artistic experiences of those days.

This approach reveals a coincidence with architecture pursued for a long time, about strategic aspects that changes a site. We called this approach a SITE, CONCEPT and MATERIALITY trilogy.

Such coincidence was focused in the fact that this restricted group of American artists, when concerned about changing art paradigm, also used the trilogy in three interconnected moments known as MINIMAL ART, LAND ART and CONCEPTUAL ART.

What led us to Land art was an admiration by architectural moments like the house built by Curzio Malaparte for himself in Capri; an iconic and exceptional house for an exceptional site, where territory is completed by the human presence. A house like a gesture completing the top of a cliff through a platform and a stairway, although defined by a few intense and mysterious strong architectural moments.

The house is a simple extension of the site, and of the man who built it like if it is his own world, his urgency and solitude. He gently refers to the house as 'casa comme me', and it represents for us the type of synthesis we are looking for in the Land art interventions on the American deserts.¹

Art

To understand what Land art movement was, we need to go back a few years and look at the revolution started by minimal artists.

After World War II, art's world core shifts from Europe to the US, where a new directionality of refugees, as well as the return of the winners, also brought with them a group of artists and architects who would influence American art.

The so-called abstract expressionism, where we can enter names like Jackson Pollock or Mark Rothko, was in those days, the expression of a liberated and uncommitted America.

But in 1959 in the artistic circle of NY, Frank Stella started questioning this subjectivity and begun to paint obsessively stripes in his 'black paintings' looking for a painting in which he could reach unit between image and support, causing reflexive changes in canvas form following the different geometric patterns. Stella is one of the precursors of what would come to be named minimalism.

¹TALAMONA, M. 1997. *Casa Malaparte*. Princeton Architectural Pr. New York.

Minimal Art, from Canvas to Gallery

And suddenly in the early 60's, suspending modernism and abstract expressionism, something change in the art world. Donald Judd proclaims that a painting is not a rectangle with an image, but rather a surface more or less away from the wall, that is, an object within a relation. In this way, he invents the concept of 'specific objects',² where artistic objects must be adapted to the gallery, the so-called 'white cube' space, which would cause their interventions to gain volume coming out of the wall or occupying the floor.

Robert Morris, an artist related to dance, who builds and test the space between volumes, wrote 'Notes on Sculpture'³ where he reflects about perception in between platonic solids and his materiality, a dynamic perspective appealing to all the senses guided by a strong gestalt guaranteeing perceptual strongness, and recognizing the importance of regular forms as a morpheme to build.

Art, against the idea of a flat illusionist painting, begins to become spatial and contextual, since it should be related to everything else. Carl Andre and also Dan Flavin also contributed to develop these principles by activating the entire space of the gallery, either through a focus on materiality or in the manipulation of light. Critics would call this type of space art minimalism, but none of the artists would recognize themselves as minimalists.

Land Art, from Gallery to Site

In the second half of the 60's, some of them, inspired by the spirit of the 'beat generation' and new ecological ideals, extended their activities from the gallery into outer abstract space, and the American deserts became a witness of experiences that made minimalist spatial expansion ridiculous. Sculpture in the expanded field replaced the abstract space of the 'white cube' with huge real spaces.

Walter de Maria launched the principles in 1960, through a set of texts such as 'Art yard' and 'On the importance of natural disasters',⁴ where he proposes spatial actions to be carried out outdoors, like an artistic performance where an immense courtyard was excavated by bulldozers, and, declaring his entropic passion for the great natural disasters says that nature is always greater than art. Later it will move to the desert to make its territorial marks like 'Mile long drawing', geometric marks that guided us through nature, and the 'Lightning field', a full work of art that only nature is able to complete, in which a grid of steel spikes placed in the desert awaits for a storm.

In the meantime, his young friend Michael Heizer, who had anticipated his interventions, but not his ideas, working on small inserts of wood or metal geometric solids buried in the desert, simulating cuts that he also did directly in the terrain, in

²JUDD, D. 1965. *Arts Yearbook 8* or Thomas Kellein, 2002. *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955-1968*, New York: D.A.P.

³MORRIS, R. 1966-67. *Art Forum* or MORRIS, R. 1994. *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, The MIT Press, Cambridge.

⁴De MARIA, W. in YOUNG, L. M. 1963. *An anthology of chance operations*. L. Young & J. MacLow. New York.

both testing materials resistance through time and weather. His great synthesis is the 'double negative', where through a 450 m long and 8m wide deep cut in the Nevada desert builds and marks a place connecting two hills.

In 1966, Robert Smithson, the most consistent of all, begins regular work with his Earthworks, and after his studies and photographs about the entropic processes in New York suburbs industrial landscape, produces the exhibition 'Earthworks', featuring several artists, and writes his seminal text 'The sedimentation of the mind, earthprojects'⁵ where he says that all art corresponds to a denaturalization, dubbing the interventions he performs in the desert as 'in -site ', and as ' non-site' when he moves natural materials to the gallery. He will argue that everything is condemned to cracking and oxidation, and use to produce its leaks of raw matter into nature trying to accelerate entropy.

Minimalism and Land art expanded the concept of context, site, and matter from the abstract space of the white cube to the desert, but this expansion would soon move to the urban place.

Conceptual Art, from Objects to Ideas

In the end of the 60's, mainly due to the difficulties that Land art presented in terms of exhibition and art communication, the object's idea, its registration or representation, would become more important.

Artists pushed their concerns about context to the limit and became aware that the great human transformation took place in the urban context beginning to monitorize their behaviour in society, began to measuring and collecting evidence of these behaviours, generally using informal and commons registration process. Following the ideas of Henry Flint,⁶ who used the word as Artistic form, producing the first approximations to concept art, dividing it, into linguistic approaches and mathematical approximations.

Sol Lewitt invented the term conceptual art, while producing mathematical generated cubic structures and said that the concept is the machine that makes art.

Choosing language and not numbers, Joseph Kosuth wrote in 69 that art should replace philosophy,⁷ pursuing an artistic shift from an objectual production into concepts, he began to write in 'art & language', a magazine and also a group of artists using words as tools. They use media press like a gallery, as Dan Graham did before.

Lawrence Weiner, another artist from New York, sold linguistic descriptions of actions as art, which he wrote on the walls of the galleries, and the buyer himself could produce the art. He used to say that the artist may not build or have his work built, he just needs to talk about it.⁸

⁵SMITHSON, R. 1968. Art Forum or SMITHSON, R. and J.D. Flam, *Robert Smithson, the collected writings*. 1996. University of California Press. Berkeley.

⁶FLINT, H. in YOUNG, L. M. 1963. *An anthology of chance operations*. L. Young & J. MacLow. New York.

⁷KOSUTH, J. 1969. *Art after Philosophy* in Studio International or KOSUTH, J. and G. Guercio, 1991. *Art after Philosophy and after: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*. MIT Press. Cambridge.

⁸WEINER, L. 1968. *Statement*, S.S.e.T.L.K. Foundation, Editor. New York.

Conceptual art abolishes the object. Conceptual art was concerned about objects and situations man produce in society, a compromise between the passion for conception and doing, something between Lewitt statement that the 'concept is the machine that makes art.' and Huebler's saying that he 'does not want to add any object to the world'.⁹

Thus, if minimal art approaches architecture producing also artificial space inside the white cube, and Land art approaches urbanism by questioning how we mark and structure the territory in order to travel and inhabit it, conceptual art questions processes of conception and things we produce.

Architecture

Site, a Regionalist Approach

Despite limitations architecture facing art has as critical vehicle, these ideas developed in the field of art related to the site, matter and concept, somehow also evolve in architecture in modernism aftermath, as accurate contextualist strategies, first increasing the importance of site information producing architecture, and later by the emphasis on materiality and tectonics.

In that sense, we purpose a reflexion about a few examples of regionalist architectures that could lead us through a comparative approach to the subject.

Not being so abstract and widely considered in the sense of the natural space and matter that constitutes the planet, as the artists of Land art considered it, the concept of site in architecture has always been more related to the Heideggerian perspective of the term,¹⁰ that is, site is the space that in nature man marks constructing, the humanized place, thus becoming a significant moment in planets geography.

Still, according to him, a site also influences and characterizes man, defining our particular cultural environment. This point was very important to choose examples for this text, which should be close to us. As site relationships, following Tzonis and Frampton concept of critical regionalism,¹¹ a compromise between universal and local facing modernism, are usually characteristics attributed to Portuguese and also extended to Swiss Architecture, we choose them inside this limit.

Though in Portugal, my site, is mainly due to the approaches of the so-called 'Oporto school', led by Fernando Távora, Portuguese delegate to CIAM modernist Congress, and one of the mentors of 1961's Popular Architecture Survey in Portugal,¹² which promoted a compromise between modern and context, that Álvaro Siza and Eduardo Souto de Moura, among others, develop giving visibility and projection to the architecture produced in Portugal.

⁹LEWITT, S. 1967. *Paragraphs on conceptual art*. in Art forum. New York; HUEBLER, D. in RORIMER, A. *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality*. 2001: Thames & Hudson. London and New York.

¹⁰HEIDEGGER, M. 1964. *Construir, habitar, pensar*. La Oficina. 2015 Madrid.

¹¹FRAMPTON, K. 1980. *História crítica da arquitectura moderna*. ed. Martins Fontes. 1997. S. Paulo.

¹²TAVORA, F. AMARAL, Keil et al.; 1961, Roseta, H. - *Arquitectura popular em Portugal*. Ordem dos Arquitectos. 2004. Lisboa.

Siza argues that pre-existences begin a drawing plan, and it is what can make rationalist straight line inflate, shaping its buildings through regulating lines accommodating tensions generated by the site¹³ and making the Project seems to have been carefully inserted into the site, as it happens in Boa Nova Teahouse, a roof floating over the rocks, or the walls extruded from a massive avenue facing the sea in Leça da Palmeira swimming pools, both towards contact with the rocks and the water, in a perfect articulation between constructed and natural elements.

On the other hand, Souto de Moura will produce a synthesis between the modernist neoplasticism using plans and the local materials, especially the granitic walls of the northern landscape, adapting abstract strategic lines to site,¹⁴ as in the case of the market of Braga where a new path connects neighborhoods, or as in the system of walls shaping balconies in stepped Minho Hills landscape at Moledo's house and where a single concrete slab on top of the walls defines the house.

Abstraction and Site

Throughout the 20th century, abstraction has been one of the preferred tools of architecture, but it is also the way for the concept, when isolating one thing or property from others to be taken into account in itself, an essential reduction is allowed providing a concept, the essence of things.¹⁵

The abstract experience of the Lisbon school takes advantage of the Beaux-arts tradition to produce plastic experiences bounded by the modern legacy and the perception of the site and the project, used in buildings that acquire an abstract logic both in the natural and urban territory.

Supported by territorial analysis and large-scale regulating tracings, Carrilho da Graça's work, normally establishes geometric connections with the site¹⁶ as in Campo Maior pools, strategically and conceptually connected to the city's ancient walls, framing and facing the vast deserts territory of southern Portugal like a castle.

Aires Mateus assumes earth matter as a natural and telluric entity in continuity¹⁷ like in the sculptural and abstract solid materials excavated inside Sines urban massive density conquering streets and spaces of the cultural center. In both architects, concepts are generally presented by words.

As in the work of Aires Mateus, generally matter is assumed as a whole, since matter is according to Plato the mother of all things, and has no form; it is like wax receiving a mark.¹⁸ At our scale, fully compressed and forming our planet, it gains dimension and can be worked on.

¹³SIZA, A. 2007, in SOMOZA, M., *Álvaro Siza: conversas no obradoiro*. Verlibros. Ourense.

¹⁴SOUTO MOURA, E. in Gilli, M. 2001. "*Eduardo Souto de Moura: Obra Reciente*." 2G N.5 p.130. Barcelona.

¹⁵KANT, HEGEL and PLATO in ABBAGNANO, N., *Dicionário de Filosofia*: Ed.1998: WMF Martins Fontes. S. Paulo.

¹⁶CARRILHO DA GRAÇA, pedro ravara, nuno vidigal e tiago oliveira. 1988. '*chi non vuole delle foglie non ci venga di maggio*'. UTOPICA. n.º 2. Venice.

¹⁷GILLI, Monica, AIRES MATEUS, Manuel e Francisco, Gonçalo Byrne e Valentino Sousa -*Conversa Informal*. 2G N.28. Vol. portuguese attachment. n.º N.28, Barcelona.

¹⁸PLATO in ABBAGNANO, N. *Dicionário de Filosofia*: Ed.1998: WMF Martins Fontes. S. Paulo.

Matter, Concepts and Tectonics

It is in Switzerland where we can find more clearly tectonic and conceptual approaches connected to the site. Here memories of an artisanal and ancestral expressive tectonic, together with modernist Germanic heritage, enables rigorous and self-evident constructive approaches in, the work of Peter Zumthor and Herzog & de Meuron, among others.

For Peter Zumthor, this is one of the best ways to establish connections to the site holding a common cultural heritage. His conceptual discourse is based on the real and in materiality using images of inside or outside architectural atmospheres as conceptual language approaching his projects.¹⁹

Materiality and references from ancestral constructive processes are reflected in constructive logics he adopts, which is always apparent revealing its composition.²⁰ This process makes his buildings seem to be always standing in their sites, as in the case of his offices in Chur, or the Spa erupting from the mountains at Vals.

Otherwise, in Herzog & de Meuron buildings, images of the site represents a non-tectonic starting point, they are sensitive reads on the site, manipulated towards a construction of new tectonic logics and dialogues, thus allowing the introduction of innovative materials, then treated with the same constructive transparency of the Alpine tradition.

His buildings complete each place through volumetric strategical insertions in dialogue with the site, as in the case of Swiss train company Signal Box's, in which they assume railways metallic nature of a pile of rails, or the compact volume made of fiber-cement sheets, filling the void of an old quarry in Ricola factory warehouses.

Just as in minimalism, its buildings acquire an objectual sense revealing their materiality, as if they were an artificial nature that is in continuity with the materials of each site like in Land art. In both Swiss architects concepts are presented by images and models.

Conclusions

Minimal Art, Space and Matter in Architecture

Minimalist abstract space, produced between artistic object and gallery's space, intensified the experience taken by the observer, shifting the focus from the device to the global perception of space, leading to experiences related to architecture when it's free of its functionality.

This explains the contemporary taste of both disciplines for an abstract, space emptiness. This need, lead these artists towards a gestalt of well-defined elements able to intensify phenomenological expression, creating a space universe that relates

¹⁹ZUMTHOR, Peter. 1998. *Thinking Architecture*. Lars Muller Publishers. Baden.

²⁰HERZOG, J.e.Z. 1993. Alejandro *Continuidades*. Interview with Herzog & de Meuron. El Croquis. Herzog & de Meuron 1983-1993. Madrid.

to white cube, the gallery's architecture. Therefore in Minimal art, we can find relations with the cartesian abstract space of human constructions.

Abstraction was one of the most used conceptual tools in the 20th century, which, as opposed to classical mimesis, allowed a zero-degree investigation process. Also allowing the great artistic revolution began in the 60's with Minimal Art, abstraction is generally understood as a style and not as a tool, one of the biggest limitations we can put to it.

Abstraction, just as a knife serves to peel a fruit, but can also hurt, is an instrument to aid reason and intuition controlling and developing things, and also architecture, but it could not be a style.

Architectural syntheses running on minimal vocabularies are therefore generally wrongly related to issues about simple forms fundamentalism.

These opinions are based on the objectual reading of things, a prejudice which classifies the term minimalism by looking at the works of these artists as an attempt to minimise elements through Cartesian and Platonic logics. This principle overflows for architecture.

The emphasis placed in the space surrounding the objects and not on the object, the context, is the way these approaches should be understood, and the architectures that use these strategies are also the ones that are most concerned about spatial atmospheres and systems of contextual relation.

Thus, and as far as relations with architecture are concerned, we can affirm that Minimal art establishes some points of contact pointing to an abstract way of understanding architecture.

As Carl Andre points out, a site is that one which sculpture defines. Art begins to become contextualist because objects are related to their immediate surroundings, a manipulation of matter and site, promoting breaks and changes inside gallery's space, such as the relationship between elements in architecture, both inside and outside.

Materials and shapes of these constructions are gestaltic shaped and therefore well-defined geometrically, ranging from the most artisanal to the most processed ones, such as in the bricks or metal low-tech standard metal parts of Carl Andre or in the standard high-tech materials in the lamps of Dan Flavin, or the perfect constructions produced industrially by Donald Judd. The constructive sense of the parts felt in materials joints can be more or less expressive, emphasizing the formal plastic unity, or its constitution.

There is an abstract minimalism and a material one underlining construction. In order to preserve perceptual separation, there is a strong relation between form and matter, preferring monomaterial objects, without any visible support structures, or other constructive traits that could compromise reading the whole. A sense of perfection is present in the use of materials processed with great care either artisanal or industrial.

As in architecture, the gestaltic Cartesian construction system is the most used because of its formal reasonableness, the use of the right angle as a 'morpheme' to build and the cubic module optimizing their use and relationships.

In the late minimalistic approach the work of Robert Morris, following Carl Andre's experiences, shifts from the importance of strong gestaltic platonic volumes to putting materials in evidence, following the most natural forms they could provide.

In the case of architecture, all the authors mentioned above refer in a direct way to a relationship with the minimal art of the 60's, except for Siza who is older and relies on the modernist rationalist tradition strongly connected to nature. In any case, his attention to space and context, and the way these elements determine his work is a deeply minimalist attitude.

By his side, Souto Moura, assuming neoplastic and abstract elements, easily articulated and adapting well to the sites, is already much closer to Judd than to Mies, manipulating the elements with great clarity and simplicity, always reducing them to the essential minimum and taking advantage of the space between them to circulate.

Carrilho da Graça, which directly assumes a relationship with the arts, specifically with the movements we are referring to, look for a strategic relationship, first with territorial context, but also about the architectural elements that define the spaces.

In his interventions, he assumes to seek the minimum of means for maximum intensity of perception, both in the relationship between buildings and territory and the relation between elements defining interior space; and this is clearly a minimalist gestalt tool.

The projects are affirmed as a response but also an alternative to the place in the sense that the high degrees of abstraction make the objects generally rise from the ground exhibiting their autonomy, pursuing a perfection and plastic cohesion that resembles the specific objects of Judd.

Aires Mateus, assumes a clearer and radical position towards an approach to minimal art, preferring the fascination of the white cube constraining functional elements, avoiding compromise the whole.

There is also a detail effort towards volumetric abstraction, though their proposals are clearly gestalts and abstract on site, and as well in interior spaces.

The understanding of matter as a whole, whether in a territory or defining volumes and walls, causes its architecture to be assumed in a generalised way as a system of compressed materials and voids, unifying natural matter and processed matter.

Regarding the Swiss, and although their projects and buildings are related in a well-defined monolithic way with the context, their approach will be more important in the way they assume materiality, always self-evident in their naturalness and essentiality, revealing Carl Andre's clastic principles in generally monomaterial buildings.

Land Art and Site in Architecture

When in 65 first Land art experiences happen, there is a desire in the air about connections to earth. These experiences, which relates to new ecological concerns about ecology and consumer's society, are directed towards an idealistically and abstract natural space, the desert, questioning the way we built the planet.

Sculpture in the expanded field, or sculpture in large context, will try to extend to the exterior the effects of perception achieved by minimal art in white cube's gallery space, contributing to exteriorization in art world.

These actions involve the use of large means, and if in the gallery standard objects and materials were been used, here, machines that man generally uses to manipulate and construct the planet, will carry out interventions on the territory, usually introducing cartesian systems of lines and strategic alignments relating man to territory and natural matter.

These interventions brought art and architecture closer, and sometimes also revealing in these gestures the way architects construct and manipulate a site.

The relation between these interventions and architecture happens mainly at two levels, territorial morphology and its constitution, highlighting the confrontation between the Cartesian system that man generally uses to structure the planet and the complex organicity of natural systems, questioning how to mark and manipulate the Earth.

Also matter processing that is, constructive systems, were questioned, counterposing the most industrial to the ones nearest of each site, allowing a greater harmonization and continuity. There is a latent criticism on industrialized systems in an effort that promotes a greater sense of responsibility and environmental awareness.

Therefore there is a process in which artists are concerned about site and strategies manipulating Earth's matter. Their interventions, dividing constructions in two types, the concept of non-site, when there is a raw matter 'recontentorization' outside the original location and a denaturalization of sites when they are intervened, the in situ concept.

In these transformations gestaltic efforts of orthogonal systems are useless because they cannot resist 'organic cracking', always being victims of entropy.

The presence of natural and organic materials in the galleries is a manifesto that can refer to a connection to natural, but also revealing that all human construction is a manipulation of planet's original matter, suffering a displacement between geographies to satisfy his desire.

The fact that interventions in the desert are generally incisions and direct manipulations of the organic mineral or vegetal matter of the sites, causes a strong bond between art and site, the context. Transportation will destroy the work and the site, and vice-versa.

Some artists emphasize the qualities of intervened places, such as Heizer's or Long's strategic marks, or Christo's monomaterial involvements; Man and nature are forced in a relation, underlining that both belong to the same chain of events occurring at various scales, as in the work of Walter De Maria.

The planet becomes the space and matter of the action, and digging and walking a metaphor of that action, the man belonging to the whole valuing the act in detriment of the mark (object), both from artists and observers point of view.

With Robert Smithson, the world will be understood not only from the morphology of the territory but also from his material composition. The way as man relates to, and the matter he moves, is underlining in his interest by mineral forms and crystalline structures, such as mirrors, trying to establishing a relation between both.

Accepting time factor and therefore sedimentation and compression of materials that compose the planet leads him to consider that entropy is also a building material, which helps reinsertion of processed materials in the natural cycle. In this way there is praise for a patine over materials, preferring roughness opposing to the industrial

standard and rationalistic perfection, through simple solutions of construction like the stacking.

Inside architecture field, the presence and use of pre-existences in Álvaro Siza's interventions, which could be constructed or natural elements, determine a strategic regulatory tracing for the foundation of the project. It is the site, which causes an inflection on cartesian straight line inflecting its direction, as he says, trying to adapt to artificial or constructed nature.

In his initial projects there is a strong dependence on the natural, as in Leça, where architecture is limited to enable a site to be used emphasizing existing natural situations.

In Souto de Moura's work, the neo-plastic and abstract articulable elements are strategically adapted to the sites, as in Long or Heizer alignments.

Architecture manipulates and uses nature, preparing a good ruin, accepting the entropic principles of Smithson. Architecture wants to be natural and nature wants to be artificial.

Carrilho seeks to understand the strategic relations with the territory context, both with natural presences and with those imposed by man, marking the site, such as hill or valley lines that are in the origin of many roads and settlements, the basis generating places. An effort to quantify the real in syntheses revealing his understanding implying an identification of the forces in presence, which are guaranteed through the use of abstract and essential drawings and models.

On the other hand, as a consequence of his understanding of matter as an abstract whole, Aires Mateus assumes built territory, as a full or emptiness of matter, positive or negative spaces that produce a continuity between architecture and territory.

Thus man through architecture, reads and completes what nature puts in evidence, standing in the site the conditions and possibilities of his transformation, appearing the project as a site's extension.

Zumthor's relation with memory and ancestral constructive processes and materials are a way of resistance, but also of integration in the place, that is, after matters organisation by nature, man follows a chain in his own reorganization. Buildings are related to morphology in a monolithic but cultural way, in strategic positions and material continuity with the site.

In Herzog these constructive systems of continuity are generally very clear, generally low-tech, but also possibly acquiring great complexity, producing monometric and monolithic buildings that stand out for being always different and particular from one site to another.

There is thus an attempt to a fusion between construction and site, or ultimately between artificial systems and natural systems, its ultimate goal, a preparation to entropy as Smithson would say.

Conceptual Art and Concept in Architecture

Conceptual artists are generally concerned about three subjects, all of them strategic. Primarily a desire about monitorizing and measuring human and spatial action, secondly a reflection about languages, that is, how communicational theories

and human thoughts works, leading them questioning the forms and the role of art, and finally the third, a desire to establish the primacy of the idea over the form.

Conceptual artists can be organized into two large groups, those that measure, record or conceive repetitive systems generally related to human life, but which can also become deeply abstract, based on mathematical or geometric systems, in which the word concept is understood as conception, assuming that a concept is as a mathematical or geometric rule producing objects, as if the idea were a machine that makes art, as Sol Lewitt would say.

On the other hand, since concepts are mostly defined through written language, another group of artists renounces the need to produce objects using the word and the communicational system to establish the primacy of the idea in which their communication will be the only function of art.

Both perspectives were based on the bicephaly enunciated by Flint saying that in one hand conceptual art was the art of concepts, and language should be the art that describes them, and on the other saying that what was important in language was structure, as in music or in mathematics, underlining mathematical compositional rules.

The separation between object and idea, or content and meaning, where pushed to the limit, demonstrating, against the artistic stereotype, that intentionality is something present in any creative act.

Tough, in the present text conceptual objectual art was considered a misunderstanding, and therefore we prefer to underline art as an idea expressed through actions or language, present mainly in the work of Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner.

Conceptual art as an idea is anti-objectual, assuming produced morphologies as an essential extension of the idea, or as Kosuth will say, "All I make are models'.

Opening the possibility of using any means of registration and presentation of a concept, that is, any language, it denies artistic craft and using informal languages, written language would become the most used, as in Weiner work, considering object redundant in relation to the concept, being a title or description more perfect and indestructible. 'The work existed purely and simply by virtue of its having been made public...language was sufficient'.

The title or description of the work becomes more important and more perfect than the work itself, the object is reduced to an idea. The matter or the object of art becomes the word, an idealistic attitude in which words describe an action, adapting to a situation or a site resounding its intentionality.

Writing instead of producing objects represents a critical approach willing to add nothing more to sites and to consumption society, and an art could remain in its language version as an idea or project, not needing to be executed.

The whole creative process, from an idea, to his presentation, become more important than the final object, defining each artist at each moment which is their concept of art, because art it is an autonomous process of knowledge.

In all these processes, in terms of matter, and against current artistic craft, standard elements, such as fonts, photographs, or other more or less abstract types of signs are adopted; everything can be art.

In Architecture, conceptual or strategic issues are usually more intuitive, and therefore less rationalized, as in Siza's case, which states that the language of the project is defined by each situation and site conjecture; An empiric process successively tested as Souto says, but that nevertheless assumes the importance of a 'first idea' relying on site and his conditions sensitive observation.

This is a pragmatic discourse of those who want to 'embrace the simple things of architecture' methodologically supporting the development of this idea through a process of empirical search, which counts on the support of sketches but also, in Souto's case his book of images.

For his side, Carrilho tries to rationalize strategic processes about his interventions, generally through a clear idea expressed in words, believing that these rationalization efforts will allow him to gain expressive economy and greater project intensity in his own handmade conceptual models.

Concepts and ideas become clear in Aires Mateus works, being expressed through synthetic sentences defining project and materials, usually aided by abstract and strong contrast drawings or monolithic models.

Swiss architects could be more specific about their projects. In Peter Zumthors case, strategies or design concepts are defined through reference images about selected spaces which he calls atmospheres, but could also be defined by schematic drawings or strategic models, objects that represent the project before the project.

Herzog and de Meuron develop their projects clearly as conceptual operations, where the end result is always the consequence of these processes, beginning with site images as abstractions that could lead to a concept. From these images arise new languages and constructive systems, which define a relation of between project and site.

Final Considerations

Concept site and matter trilogy, here approached as a tool, which man operates in his process of interaction with the world, is a very common phenomenon.

Man exists and always thinks about a certain place, where his actions, good or bad, always end up manifesting.

Inhabited and manipulated places are the expression of distinct cultures and their sum is part of what we call the world, a changing structure manipulated by its own organics. Mankind is part of this and his interaction is the one that affects it most.

When we think, we think about something, therefore our interiority is a process of internal reflection, ourselves awareness towards what is external, preparing to act, creating a universe of concepts and ideas that characterize ourselves as autonomous and unique.

Our interaction with the surrounding place, people and things, determines the expression of this interiority, a dialectical process of perception and expression, an interaction more or less conditioning our dwelling site. We leave our interiority making our existence tangible and more or less expressed when we mark that place conditioning it.

This expression does not depend exclusively on us, but from amplified and circumstantial factors, particularities of each place, as a group of people and matters, determining this set intensity, our contribution to the characterization and functioning of the global world, and our contribution to matters transformation.

Man thus constituted as an idea, place and matter, and this trilogy as an operative tool develops in three distinct moments, the self, the place and the world.

These aspects in the case of an architect become more relevant, inscribing a more expressive self in a global sense, a consciousness, a strategy and a transforming act of universal matter in continuous processing.

This trilogy was approached by studying artistic and architectural field and comparing their contemporary status regarding the theme, and if in the first case it happened in a well-defined way, since artists developed methodologies approaching site, matter and artistic conception questioning the need of producing artistic objects, in Architecture, the theme seems to be still very closed to minimalist paradigm of abstraction and its extension to the external site, duly tempered by recent preoccupations and advances in terms of the manipulation of the matter, that is tectonics.

The greatest difficulty lay in the absence of studies concerning ideas and concepts applied to the exercise of the project, it seems that here we are, for an obvious lack of transparency, without confrontation announced in paradigms that arose in the art world in the mid-60s.

Will the cycle close and will we still see a real conceptual and strategic era in architecture?!

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