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BY FEATHER AND STONE.

The memorial architecture by Bogdan Bogdanović

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ABSTRACT

Since the very first years after the Second World War, there has been a rethink about the issue of public space and in particular the need to reconfigure the theme of monumentality as a mean of empowering the masses (Gideion, Sert, Leger in Nine points on monumentality, 1956).In Jugoslavia some architects took a path on theoretical and design experiences that established the interpretation of the theme of memory spaces as public space interacting with the landscape and the trauma places, laying the foundations for the construction of memorials.The focus on Jugoslavian memorials is the result of a clear intention of exploring an almostly unknown case within the European context and above all, to establish the terms of a renewed sense of monumentality and an anti-rhetoric narrative of self-managed socialism.The necessity for a deeper study into monumentality from a compositional and spatial point of view comes into relation with a phenomenological approach towards the discipline.

INTRODUCTION

The paper is a brief exposition about the research project developed during the PhD study years in Politecnico di Milano.

The title is quoting Steven Holl's definition about phenomenological architecture and is used to describe the dual aspect of the visible and tangible appearance of a building and its invisible, symbolic value and it is a metaphor applied to Bogdanović's memorials as they embody both the material and the immaterial.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MONUMENTS IN THE POST-WWII

Since the very first years after the Second World War, there has been a rethink about the issue of public space and in particular the need to reconfigure the theme of monumentality as a mean of empowering the masses (Gideion, Sert, Leger in *Nine points on monumentality*, 1956). The importance stressed out by the authors related to a quest into the synthesis of the arts relating to monuments rather than the representation of political themes that were mainly derived from the previous totalitarian regimes and which developed the big scale rather than the narrative.

If we think about the history of architecture memorial architecture has always been at stake since the building of pyramids and particularly oriented towards funeral buildings and entire cities devoted to the remembrance of dead.

The importance of burial places and memorial architecture in general transcends political or religious beliefs and marks one of the most important moments in life.

The WWII established the necessity for the creation of memorials as such, with the specific purpose of keeping and shaping the collective memory. In the architectural field such a purpose marked the creation of a spatial typology on its own and a field of a plural disciplinary research. In terms of architectural expression, monuments and memorials in particular have no function if we adhere to the Functionalist definitions and divisions. The Athens Charter never mentions a function for memorial purposes and partially leaves behind an ever present theme on architect's drawing desks. The urban monument became ancillary to the most impelling (compelling) necessities of the post-WWII reconstruction and sometimes left the architectural field in order to show up in the plastic-arts. In relation to this, The Nine points on monumentality that establishes the necessity of *something more than strictly functional* - relating to monumental architecture - advocating a lyrical and not simply utilitarian.

Rosalind Krauss in her 1979 text *Sculpture in the expanded field* wrote:

The logic of sculpture, it would seem, is inseparable from the logic of the

monument. And: *Because they [sculptures] thus function in relation to the logic of representation and marking, sculptures are normally figurative and vertical, their pedestals an important part of the structure since they mediate between actual site and representational sign.* The Krauss article recognizes this eminently vertical configuration of monuments in relation with the context.

The verticality of classical monuments has a relation with the urban fabric and particularly in the articulation of the public spaces. The representational value of monuments acquires in value as it configures to be an exceptional-outscaled element within the city, placed in the public space. The role of the sculptural i.e. artistic element is predominant in the urban monuments even during the XXth century leading to the predominant importance of the static viewpoint.

It is arguable that the post-WWII questioned the pre-existing cornerstones of monumental architecture and particularly due to the fact that art and architecture start to focus on the landscape and the territory advocating in *expanding the field* (Krauss, 1979) of action for architects and artists.

Jugoslavia represents a newly established country within the European continent and the importance of the creation of a national identity was driven by the Partisan movement which assumed a heroic and legendary contours. The Liberation War, and the Socialist Revolution led to the construction of an epic narration of the WWII battles, offensives, personalities and tragedies. The extent of such an identity re-shaping was huge and allowed art, architecture and urbanism to develop and work together in order to establish a synthesis.

A monument being the integration of the work of the planner, architect, painter, sculptor, and landscapist demands close collaboration between all of them.

The importance of Jugoslavia as a case study lays in the fact that historically it set a third way amid opposed Blocks, flirting with West and ideologically looking east.

The Non-alignment of Jugoslavia politically opened to the possibility of searching into monumentality as a quality not mimicking the classical elements from the past and creating a laic sacrality linked to the idea of people's struggle and sacrifice. The theme of the sacrality became a recurrent theme in the architecture-critic circles and marked also the success of Yugoslavian memorials in the journals and Bogdanović's personal recognition among Western architects. The monographic number of *L'architecture d'aujourd'hui* 108 dedicated to sacred architecture from 1963 numbers the Jugoslavia's memorials among the post-war sacred architectures and focuses on Bogdanović's work with a particular attention.

Relating to this in an article published in *Borba* that relates to the *L'archi-*

ecture d'aujourd'hui article Bogdanović says:

[...] our sacred buildings are atheistic. But they find values in our architecture because we are stepping back to ancient, archaic and elementary human symbols..

[...] Even the man who has materialistic visions is facing the matter of death. In this case it's a violent death, A human suffering or a conscious victim, and these extraordinary ethical values of our time, our revolution seek for their spiritualized, artistic creation..

And more:

The French didn't miss the fact that it is a new type of memorial entity with spatial features which integrate architecture and sculptures in a single whole, just like it happened in ancient architecture.

JUGOSLAVIA AND ITS GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY

The focus on Yugoslavian memorials is the result of a clear intention of exploring a particular case within the European context, first of all for the reforming agenda in the field of architecture and urbanism - manifested by the will to create a new way (in particular compared to the question of non-aligned countries as the third path between the opposing Western and Eastern Blocks) - and above all, to establish the terms of a renewed sense of monumentality and an anti-rhetoric narrative of self-managed socialism.

The Non-alignment in political views played an important role in the development of a certain kind of 'imagery' in different fields such as art, architecture and particularly in monument building. This search for a new monumentality relied on the theory of the synthesis of the arts as a mean for broadening the field of architecture and set the ground for a more complex thinking about monuments and monumentality itself.

In 1958 (year of the National Competition for *Jajinci*), in Yugoslavia the architects took a path on theoretical and design experiences that established the interpretation of the theme of memory spaces as public space interacting with the landscape and the trauma places, rooting the foundation for what can be called Memorial.

The pan-Yugoslavian competition for the *Jajinci* area in Belgrade was among the first ones to deal with the theme of a trauma-site and can be considered an important event in establishing some of the features of a new monumentality that had to be clearly distinguished from the totalitarian regimes of the past and in particular from the Soviet social-realism.

As Josip Seissel, member of the judging commission, wrote:

The competition has demonstrated the primary importance of the memorial and the need of emphasizing the eminently memorial character of this site.

The symbolical meaning of the great memorial transcends everything utilitarian to such an extent that all our attention must be concentrated on this one aspect. [...]Modern monumentality! Two terms until recently mutually exclusive. Today we pronounce them together again. The development of modern architecture was bound to proceed in a direction opposite to the monumental. It was just in the name of monumentality that violence was committed in this area not long ago.....

The Jajinci competition is a breaking point due to the fact that among the participants there were the most important memorialist architects of Yugoslavia of the time. The most prominent figures were obviously the Croatian members representing the winning groups (NOTA) and Bogdanović's group for the newness of the proposal and its open refusal to adhere to the most functional aspects of the competition requirements.

Bogdanović's proposal started from the poetic concept of the death - taking as inspiration a verse from Garcia Lorca - and its translation into spatial dramatization as a tool for visitors to *re-live* an experience through perception. The modernity of such a proposal lies in the fact that the architectural composition of space had to be narrative not to simply inform or educate the visitor but to make the experience of the space memorable.

Bogdanović and his group wrote in the submitted brief:

A possible and frequent error in memorials of this type is that they may be approached from different quarters. Our is an opposite attitude: we have closed the whole area and lead the visitor along a definite route, so that he may realize the essence and the entirety of the memorial in the shortest time. The principles of exposition are similar to the principles of museum display but, of course, on a large scale. [...] our aim is to preserve with the aid of impressive strokes the character of this area which devoured a hundred thousand victims. The original topography is preserved and by being remodelled it is even accentuated. [...] the configuration of the terrain is dramatized, given greater stress, and rendered more sensitized, than as it was found.

In this unrealized project as in many others the positioning of a plastic object in the landscape works with the theme of the *classical monument* (Violi, 2014) but with an architectural approach to the verticality involving not only the sculptural element but the space in general.

BOGDAN BOGDANOVIĆ AND THE CREATION OF MEMORIALS

The focus on Bogdanović will be placed on the period between 1955 and 1965 as it can be considered the period of the creation of the idea of memorial as a specific "typology" of architecture and space. This period coincides with the publication of a trilogy about the city and the Bogdanović's open

opposition towards the reconstruction and re-foundation of the new Yugoslavian cities. The criticism is ever present in Bogdanović's both cultural-theoretical standpoints and his architecture. Infact the Avala worker's colony shows clearly such an attitude and moreover it gives an insightful hint about the closeness to the so-called picturesque and vernacular re-birth in Bogdanović interests. The importance of this period is marked also by the periodical publication of columns called Mali Urbanizam (i.e. The Small Urbanism) dealing with the themes of urban design as a possible alternative to Functionalism and CIAM-driven rules towards urbanism.

The focus into the ouvere of Belgrade-born architect Bogdan Bogdanović (1922-2010) and his own anti-modernist parable represents the paradigm of non-dogmatic modernity, aiming to explore the symbolic values of the memorial as a spatial figure of the traditional monument.

One of the most eminent features that a memorial achievements is undoubtedly the narrative construction of its architecture. In Bogdanović case this narrative traces back to the history of ancient cities and antropological values in establishing sacred places within the cities. Rather then beeing outspoken, the narrative is personal, relied on the experience that architecture and the interaction with landscape are able to create.

In a couple of very succesful texts entitled *O postavljanju spomenika* (About the disposition of Monuments), appearing both in an article for Delo (1956) and in an article for Arhitektura Urbanizam (n.10, 1961) Bogdanović deals with the formal aspects of monuments from a spatial point of view. In particular the Belgrade architect focuses on the perception of monuments and the sprial-time whirl that plasticity should acheive (as advocated also in the Nine Points) through movement-wise disposition of elements. In these texts he stresses out the crafted staging of sculptural elements wich is an architects ability rather than artist's one that creates its art within an atelier and not amid the urban landscape. Such an approach implies necessarily the manipulation of the surroundings of the monument itself thus creating a total embodied experience of sensual perception.

Infact since the Jajinci competition the idea of designing the whole execution ground as a single memorial, taken as a whole has been present in Bogdanović's opus.

The monument is usually perceived by the sight but the experience of it interacts with the landscape in the most poetic way. The creation of such an experience is the memorial itself because establishes a certain relation from the subject to the object and it is capable of making feel (Violi, 2014) rather than making know (idem).

The artful construction of archetypical experiences (Holl, 1996) through design is one of the basis of Bogdanović's work and represents one of the

main aspects involving the transformation of landscape through the artificialization of the ground.

Such an approach enables the creation of certain experiences capable of establishing the process of memorialization. Entering, ascending, descending, wandering are just some of those archetypical experiences mentioned before and they are related to a skillfull design of the section line of the ground and the positioning of plastic elements within the memorials.

The formal configuration of Bogdan Bogdanović's memorials have an undoubtly symbolic meaning which interpretations are not always univocal. Rather than trying to develop an interpretation it is arguable that Bogdanović's memorials all achieve in developing a ritual use of the space likewise their designing process that follows a precise pattern.

It is not a matter of style rather the principle of re-shaping the landscape in order to re-create a certain type of experience and re-establish a balance between nature and artifice so common in the ancient sacral buildings.

BUILDING MEANINGFUL DISTANCES: THE CASE STUDIES

Mali Urbanizam was a column published by Bogdanović during the late 50s of the XXth century and unquestionably marks the early stage of the serbian architect's career. This period is characterized by the curiosity of Bogdan Bogdanović towards the British revival of the XVIII century Picturesque in Urbanism and landscape.

In fact it's not an interest for Picturesque as a style rather as an aesthetic movement intertwining the natural beauty and the artificial man-made one. The so-called Picturesque garden was a highly artificial landscape yet leaving the impression of being more natural than nature itself and made perceptible only by moving through it. The main tool to achieve the artificialization of the ground was through the creation of an artificial section of the ground called ha-ha wall that divided the garden from the park. Such an artificial section established the creation of a meaningful distance that allows to see from great distance while being far from the landscape park (called the Theory of Appropriation by)

The *characteristicness* of Picturesque tradition is defined by the relation between horizontal construction and vertical counterpoints. Such a feature has been achieved since the XVIII century by the positioning of temples, monumental trees and vertical artifacts in the picturesque park and by towers and steeple-like structures in picturesque architecture.

The importance of Picturesque aesthetic background for Bogdanović memorial architecture lies in the artful manipulation of ground section and in the choice for a peripathetic experiential space over the abstract geometry

and moreover the creation of a cultural landscape.

Three out of many Bogdanović memorials have been taken as case-studies.

They are: Slobodište in Kruševac, Partizan Necropolis in Mostar and the Memorial of the Concentration Camp in Jasenovac.

Each case study develops a particular relation with the ground: by modifying its surface, overlapping or mimicking it and by rooting in it and each turns to be a theme of the vertical line and section as a compositional element.

The case-studies have been approached in a very physical way avoiding a symbolical interpretation.

The importance of studying them from the section point of view, lies in the methodology of a research that considers itself anatomical somehow.

For instance Slobodište is an excavated field where the verticality is achieved through the idea of descending and carving out the horizon. In the Partizan Necropolis a raising ramp and a cascade of open-air terraces create an uphill viewpoint facing Mostar and the Neretva. In Jasenovac the verticality of the Flower sculpture contrasts with the flatness of the ground and creates an ideal axis (sky-ground) through its reflection in the water beneath.

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