

INTERVIEW WITH ARCHITECTURE: CASE OF RICHARD SERRA

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Summary: *To many beginning of the 20th century marked the culmination of the struggle of different fields of human knowledge for the competency to tell the truth. This phenomenon has been discussed in many cases and was a particular starting point for phenomenology; it seemed that science, instrumental thinking and aesthetic differentiation two hundred years old turned the “world picture“ into a space dominated by logos. The idea of functionality and discussing architecture as formal exercise developed as a consequence of this kind of reasoning, informed by scientific and philosophical projects, enabled architecture certain social validity. The paper discusses how urban works of American artist Richard Serra question the notion of function and redefines notion space in the context of architecture and creates site specific environmental conditions that are in constant dialogue with architecture. Sometimes complementing it, sometimes opposing it, but always creating what he calls “behavioral space”: space that is continually asking for viewer's engagement. Once he disregarded traditional sculpture as possibility in his work and decided to relate to historical precedents in non-representational manner, Serra came very close to architectural language. For us it is important to show in this paper how his work contributes to the idea of the architecture as an event, as action, architecture that goes above purely functional concerns and comes close to experiencing space through movement, something that much of the contemporary architectural production aspires to do.*

Keywords: *Richard Serra, Sculpture, Form, Architecture*

Beginning of the 20th century marked the culmination of the struggle of different fields of human knowledge for the competency to tell the truth. Architecture played its role too: “We no longer live in the age of unconscious and spontaneous creation, through which earlier architectural orders came into existence, but in the age of thinking, research and self-conscious reflection.”² The idea of functionality developed as a consequence of this kind of reasoning, informed by scientific and philosophical projects, enabled architecture social validity that other arts could not always achieve. Once the instrumental representation took over the symbolic representation and, in those cases where art was established as aesthetic pleasure, it had nothing to offer in terms of measurable values and necessities of life.

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² E. Dreüke, Quoted in Dalibor Vesely, “Architecture and the Conflict or Representation,” AA Files (London) 8 (Spring 1985), p. 30.

In 1984 Donald Judd wrote:

“art and architecture have been developing separately for some time and today the split is total. The simplest reason for this is that architecture, by virtue of its utilitarian function, is fully integrated into society, to its conventions, to its institutions and to its respective bureaucracies and unhesitatingly involves itself in the world of business, while in revenge art is in general on the periphery of society, made by individuals estranged from institutions...”³

According to Judd, relationship between art and architecture is heavily burdened by their own essences: inherent necessity of architecture and inherent necessity of visual art are different. Here we want to look at the works of artist Richard Serra and the ways he argues his case with architecture. He claims that “when sculpture and painting rely on their own necessities and motivations, they have the potential to alter the construction, function and meaning of architecture.”⁴ As we will see, in this particular case, the relationship between (visual) art and architecture is sometimes of communication, sometimes of violence over the space, systematic imposition and occupation on the side of sculpture, sometimes ironic commentary on the architecture’s imperial intentions. But in many cases, Serra’s sculpture is preoccupied with architecture in a way that reminds us of thousands of years of sculpture being in the service of urban space, interior space or architectural surface. This is not to say that sculpture in the past did not have any other role but that aspect of the problem is not the subject of this investigation. We are interested in deconstruction of the relationship between arts and architecture that is present in Serra’s work. Interestingly enough, as it establishes the relationship, Serra’s work becomes more of architecture, the one that Adolf Loos argued for, definitely not a monument but, a building with no functional concerns.

Minimal in art and architecture cannot be discussed on the level of epistemological parallelism. Minimalism as one of the movements in the sixties was born out of reaction to Abstract Expressionism; it found its roots in Duchamp’s ready-made projects, announcement of the death of painting and Malevich’s monochromatic canvases. Both artists were posing the question of the meaning of the peace of art and what constitutes it. Minimal art’s request for reduction of meaning is different from the same request in the late 20th century architecture which often implies processes of silencing and smoothing the space. Minimal architecture has its own tradition but its history contains of different singular architectural practices and did not establish itself as a movement as much as an aesthetic and philosophical set of principles. Claudio Silvestrin, for example, in his discussion on architecture, reintroduces the notion of beauty as a “timeless” phenomenon; something in which a minimal artist would not be interested at all. Furthermore, minimal architecture carries with it the aura of ‘sophistication’ which sometimes contributes to the cultural phenomenon of spiritualization of shopping and fast-food eating through design.

³ Quoted in Gloria Picazo, “Minimalist Space and Time,” ed. Vittorio Savi, *Less is More* (Barcelona: Collegi d’Arquitectes de Catalunya y ACTAR, 1996), p. 125.

⁴ Richard Serra, *Writings and Interviews* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 142.

Minimal object is homogeneous, plain unit; it asserts its own existence that relates to the environment and the beholder without corresponding to any kind of inner structure. Therefore, on the level of an object as the key concern of both architecture and art there can be no direct association. The relationship starts to develop once the movement, perception, and time are introduced in the understanding of the „real“. Before we get into discussion of Serra's work we want to discuss how these concepts become operative in the visual arts.

It is the moment when painting was 'removed' from the wall and sculpture lost anthropomorphic qualities that space became questioned and architectural space looked as inclusive in the process of art making. Minimal artists tended to move as far as possible from pictorial impute of the frame of the painting and what Serra names 'easy imagery'. For Judd changing the shape of canvas was not enough removed from the reality of the wall painting. Minimal art disrupted the traditional representational forms and by activating both object and beholder introduced perceptual processes and performativity that were close to the music and dance of that time. The third dimension was crucial for this performativity, or theatricality, the same one that Michael Fried attacked in his very much discussed essay "Art and Objecthood." However, this is not to say that space of canvas did not continue to fascinate some of minimal artists. The two dimensional experiments also worked on redefining the relationship between space of the painting and viewer. Rosalind Krauss discussion on minimal art attacks Kantian "abstract sublime" as possible parameter for interpretation used in the terminology of the critics. She rejects structuralists' and post-structuralists' readings of minimal art, looking at pieces as heaving hidden center or being centerless platonic solids. According to Krauss, Martin's grids, on which the artist has been working for last twenty years, are something to be looked through relocations of human body. In other words, by placing yourself on different distances from the canvas one will be able to see the same piece taking different formats: from carefully defined grid and materiality of the canvas to monolith steal-like piece seen from the far. The involvement of body reception proved phenomenology to be a good source for interpretation of the minimal art. However, as Hall Foster claims, we cannot completely exclude aspects of structural linguistics in interpretation of this art because it would be another simplification of the phenomena at hand. According to Foster "just as phenomenology undercuts the idealism of the Cartesian "I think", so Minimalism undercuts the existentialism of the Abstract Expressionist "I express", but both substitute "I perceive" that leaves meaning lodged in the subject."⁵ Foster claims that minimal artists developed different forms of critique and that structural analysis of "pictorial and sculptural signifiers" is a part of their operation. In other words, inherent to minimalist processes is decoding of the systems of signification characteristic to the art of the past.

Minimal art's request for zero degree of meaning, its disregard of content, and finally, silencing of the aesthetic differentiation was very much discussed by art scholars. It is the art preoccupied with constitution of self and individual relationship with the world. Its activism showed itself as a response to consumer's world of 60's in America but also in the way it wanted to involve individual in the world of the artwork. In one of his

⁵ Hal Foster, "The Crux of Minimalism" ed. James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p. 271.

interviews Serra claims: “What interests me is the opportunity for all of us to become something different from what we are, by constructing spaces that contribute something to the experience of who we are.”⁶ *Minimalism’s seemingly apolitical agenda was basically modernist faith in possibility to improve individual’s life with art and belief in his awareness of events in which he participates. By shifting the momentum from the object to the process artists such as Serra insisted on perception that is independent of artist’s intentions. As Kenneth Baker states: “These artists thought of art as a phenomenon that works effects on us because to be alive is to be subject to phenomena. (from the weather, and mental states, such as onslaughts of emotion and memory, to the cycles of day and night, and the irreversibility of aging).”*⁷

Minimalism introduces the aesthetics of ‘almost nothing,’ removes content from art object, carefully establishes the surface of the object, since that is the point of ‘interaction’ between beholder and object, and removes all the metaphorical potential from the work of art. John Cage’s remarks “there is too much there,” and “there is not enough of nothing in it,”⁸ point to request for simplicity that implies a complex procedure of minimalizing environment and reduction of meaning as we know it. Understanding of simplicity is equally problematic because it involves, once again, uneasiness of interpreting simplicity: “For the spectator this is often all very bewildering. In the face of so much nothing, he is still experiencing something.”⁹ Frenk Stella’s “what you see is what you see” removes any consideration of content from the ‘reading’ of the work. There is nothing to be read. But as Krauss claims “The simple denial of content can in itself constitute the content of such a work.”¹⁰ ‘What you see is what you see’ involves complexity of not believing which means exclusion of or prevention against analytical thinking. As Merleau-Ponty explains, analytical reflection puts forward “instead of the absolute existence of the object, the thought of an absolute object, and, through trying to dominate the object and think of it from no point of view, it destroys the object’s internal structure.”¹¹ In other words, analytical reasoning will immediately give us information on the cube we have in front of us: six sides, approximate dimensions, color, material. What minimal object will make us do, since it is supposedly an art object and has privileged status in the world, is to force us to walk around the object to prove that we are actually seeing a simple geometrical solid. Here we want to include Perce’s definition of epistemological firstness which Maurice Berger interprets as pre-reflective and thus non-cognitive, it is “an experience fully dependent on literal feelings and perceptions and hence wholly incompatible with the collapsed, harmonic, and idealized time of modernist painting and sculpture.”¹² Through reduction of meaning and psychological block, minimal art creates space for activating senses or what Krauss names ‘operation in space’ and Serra calls ‘behavioral space.’ In one of his interviews

⁶ Lynne Cooke, *Richard Serra: Torqued Ellipses*, See <http://www.diabeacon.org/exhibis/serra/ellipses/index.html>

⁷ Kenneth Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstances* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), p. 109.

⁸ Quoted in Samuel J. Wagstaff, “Paintings to Think About,” ed. James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p. 202.

⁹ Barbara Rose, *Minimalism*, ed. Michael Craig Martin (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1989), p. 10.

¹⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, “Allusion and Illusion in Donald Judd,” ed. James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p.211.

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 235.

¹² Maurice Berger, *Minimal Politics* (Maryland: University of Maryland, 1997), p. 14.

Serra comments: “Basically, what you really want to do is try to engage the viewer’s body relation to his thinking and walking and looking, without being overly heavy-handed about it.”¹³ In *Minimalism: The Art of Circumstance* Katherin Baker explains:

“To Morris, Judd, Smithson, and especially Tony Smith, among others, it was a point of pride that their works did not reveal themselves in an instant but forced the viewer to decide how much time was needed to comprehend them and how that should be spent. They saw such a decision as operative always in experiences of art, but suppressed-kept unconscious-by the decorative seductions of color field painting and of “constructed” sculpture such as Anthony Caro’s.”¹⁴

We should not forget, as Baker states, that the relationship between the body and the work of art on which minimal art insists always existed as such. However, it was usually covered by layers of meanings that art as such was suppose to communicate. In her influential text *Against Interpretation* from 1964 Susan Sontag advocates transparency in art that will make the art piece independent of readings of different kinds. Interpretation takes the “sensory experience of the work of art for granted, and proceeds from there...What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.”¹⁵ Sontag knew she had to push the limit and write a manifesto-like text in order to move the boundary of the current art practice. Art, even when it became minimal and ‘transparent,’ had a lot to offer for interpretation. Baker writes: “The younger artists’ works of this period argue that the emotional force we ascribe to art is not an excrescence of the artist’s sensibility but a phenomenon in a field where everything is interpretable. The language, space, and history we have in common and our very visibility (and audibility) to each other engender a field of signifying forces.”¹⁶ For us here the debate between structural and post-structural and is not crucial. Our intention here is to, through description of Serra’s projects, show the way architecture and art can communicate by opposing each other or complementing each other. What we had to do is to give the background and context within which Serra operates no matter how much he does not want to be categorized. As Baker notes, Serra’s work does have certain psychological and experiential impact that artists such as Judd or Stella excluded from their work but it still belongs to the tradition of art that questioned basic aesthetic premises.

Richard Serra explains how he got interested in sculpture:

“I stood up the four lead plates which I had been using as props. The plates overlapped each other for about 5 cm, and weighed 220 kgs. It all at once became clear to me that it was not exclusively the properties of the materials which interested me, but that my work would fulfill all the criteria of a sculpture: it had volume, weight, mass and one could walk around it. From this moment onwards I was concerned with the nature of sculpture.”¹⁷

¹³ Interview with art 21. See <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/serra/>

¹⁴ Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstances*, p. 71.

¹⁵ Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” ed. James Meyer, *Minimalism* (London: Phaidon, 2000), p.202.

¹⁶ Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstances*, p. 111.

¹⁷ Richard Serra, *Minimalism*, ed. Michael Craig Martin (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1989), p. 13.

Richard Serra operates with language that seems to be familiar to architects. He insists on the process of making:

“in all my work construction process is revealed. Material, formal, contextual decisions are self-evident. The fact that the technological process is revealed demythologizes the idealization of the sculptor’s craft. The work does not enter into the fictitious realm of the ‘master.’¹⁸

He is constantly involved with industrial production of his steel pieces, his work is site-specific and responds to space in a way that challenges architecture by its scale, location and weathering of the material. Furthermore, he keeps referring to how things are put together, how they respond to gravity and how their sculptural quality does not rely on their function. Baker comments on this aspect of Serra’s work:

“Gravity bound and gravity threatened, Serra’s prop pieces asserted the identity in time of their structural integrity and their meaning as art, not unlike Flavin’s fluorescents. When one of them falls apart or is dismantled, it reverts to meaningless raw material, for its structural logic collapses with it. Unlike, say, a painting, a Serra sculpture cannot be moved without loss of meaning.”¹⁹

Once he disregarded traditional sculpture as possibility and at the same time decided to relate to historical precedents, Serra came very close to architecture. This is, if we assume here that architecture is not representational, and disregard elaborate debate on the role of representation in architecture. Let us assume that it presents rather than represents any form of reality. Then we will come to the conclusion Serra did in his sculpture: architecture is an event that has to do with experience of space, the same way his sculpture does. However, architecture does depend on signification and representation. If Serra want a debate, he can always find his case in the fact that one of architecture’s inherent necessities is its function. Serra explained: “I am interested in sculpture which is nonutilitarian, nonfunctional...any use is misuse.”²⁰

Serra’s sculptures have to be experienced by the body. He is against photographic representation of his work precisely because photography substitutes sequencing or wondering in space for the stillness of the moment. Presence, the same presence Fried feared of, is necessary for understanding of his art. Serra’s work requests ‘intelligent embodiment’ in Merleau-Ponty’s terms. In *Phenomenology of Perception* Ponty discusses: “...the system of experience is not arrayed before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator, I am involved, and it is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception.”²¹ According to phenomenological project, body is in the mere center of our

¹⁸ Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstances*, p. 140.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁰ Richard Serra and Peter Eisenman, “Interview,” *Writings, Interviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 142.

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 326.

experience. Or, experience is corporeally constituted. Compare this to Martin Craig's discussion on Minimalism:

Minimalism seeks the meaning of art in the immediate and personal experience of the viewer in the presence of a specific work. There is no reference to another previous experience (no representation), no implication of a higher level of experience (no metaphysics), no promise of a deeper intellectual experience (no metaphor.)"²²

The ways in which Serra involves beholders with his work vary in form and scale. Baker explains her experience with Serra's props: "To move close to Serra's prop pieces was to feel yourself in danger of bodily harm...Their threat of collapse was an aggressive reminder of mortality."²³ Sometimes it is a fear of a structure falling apart, sometimes it is forcing the body to move in certain direction or blocking its movement that Serra operate with. When his project for BeauBourg was rejected and Richard Rogers commented that people would not be able to reach the entrance door because of his sculpture, Serra replied: "You mean they'll have to walk around the sculpture."²⁴ Serra's work also points out to estrangement, his pieces are deliberately unfamiliar. Part of it is making a piece "ambiguous, indeterminable, unknowable as an entity."²⁵ It is as if a piece is placed in the context it did initially not belong to; the actual meaning comes forth. And this could be an introduction to Serra's notion of site-specificity which is not based on contextual presented as blending into environment. If there is no intentionality in the making process which is what Serra claims, there is definitely intentionality in a way in which he redefines space and disturbs beholders by the presence of his sculpture.

In 1967 Serra started working on the list of actions that can be involved in creating sculpture without taking responsibility for its formal or aesthetic outcome. He put together a list of verbs: "to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist," etc. One has to give credits to Serra for one thing: he started talking about 'processing' instead of form-giving much before architects involved themselves with dismantling binary oppositions, one of the major ones being distinction between body and mind. His splashing pieces are product of thinking about action and method of 'creation': they are physically undefined pieces; they are molded by the joint between wall and the floor. We can apply here Judd's description of non-specific objects: they are "neither painting nor sculpture." Serra eliminates the author's participation (to a certain extent) in the creation of a shape, and institutes the process of making a form. He cannot predict the shape these pieces will have. Splashing is a comment on Pollock's action painting but is also a comment on architecture: it is a comment on space that used to 'shape' painting and sculpture. Also, pieces are literally shaped by the space between wall and the floor. In other words, the metaphorical paint, (even Serra later saw pictorial reference in these pieces) got removed from the canvas and by the force of gravity, like fresco painting,

²² Michael Craig Martin, *Minimalism*, ed. Michael Craig Martin (Liverpool: Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1989), p. 7.

²³ Baker, *Minimalism: Art of Circumstances*, p. 114.

²⁴ Richard Serra and Douglas Crimp, "Richard Serra's Urban Sculpture," *Writings, Interviews* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 132.

²⁵ Yve-Alain Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara," ed. Hall Foster and Gordon Hughes, *Richard Serra* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 60.

slid down to the floor. To make sure that this process does not become a metaphor for painting, Serra uses lead, material that is poisoned and it itself different from the paint. The splash does not only remove the painting from the wall, it blurs the joint between horizontal and vertical.

As we already mentioned, Serra works with gravity, mass, equilibrium, disjunction, site. He believes that sculpture creates its own space that can parallel architecture. In *Writings* he states:

“I think that the sculpture, if it has any potential at all, has the potential to create its own place and space, and to work in contradiction to the spaces and places where it is created in this sense... I am not interested in work which is structurally ambiguous, or in sculpture which satisfies urban design principles.”²⁶

TILTED ARC

Tilted Arc was one of Serra's urban projects; it was dismantled in the middle of the night in March 1989, seven years after it was built. It was a 120 feet long, 16 feet high curving wall made out of raw steel juxtaposing the federal building. Serra explains his method: “I construct a kind of disjunction with a structure that will locate the place that relates to and at the same time separates itself from the surrounding architecture.”²⁷ Much has been said about *Tilted Arc* and, although it raises important issue of public reception and rights of the artist, we are not going to discuss the public affair that this piece provoked. We want to elaborate on couple of notions that seem to be operating in Serra's work that establish relationship between architecture and his piece of art. Serra notes in his *Writings*: “When sculpture is placed in front of a corporate building, it runs the risk of being coopted by the building, it is hard to avoid the morality of the context. I would rather stay within my own backyard of thinking. But every artist is always asked to betray himself, constantly.”²⁸ Tilted arc divided public plaza in front of the Federal building in two parts, forcing pedestrians to walk around it. It was blocking the view and it was preventing people from walking in all possible directions (what we would call democratic orienting) around the plaza. Serra's intention was to “bring the viewer into the sculpture. The placement of the sculpture will change the space of the plaza. After the piece is created, the space will be understood primarily as a function of the sculpture.”²⁹ Serra wants surrounding space to be absorbed by his long black wall. Something that is disturbing our perception, breaks the habit, reintroduces itself to us and enters our perceptual field. To explain this we will quote Serra in his discussion on the concept behind *Torqued Ellipse* and its role in the public space:

“I think that one is really like an intrusion. Right into an urban complex which pushes people to the sidewalk or forces them directly to walk into the street-level piece so it really occupies the street as its functional aesthetic and it kind of barricades the street at

²⁶ Richard Serra, “Rigging,” *Writings, Interviews*, p. 100.

²⁷ Richard Serra and Alfred Pacquement, “Interview,” *Writings, Interviews*, p. 160.

²⁸ Serra, “Rigging,” *Writings, Interviews*, p. 100.

²⁹ Serra, “Urban Sculpture,” *Writings, Interviews*, p. 100.

the same time. So in some sense it's a real intervention within an urban context to take over the street."³⁰

Serra by preventing passers from taking their usual route redefines the space and asks for attention but also contemplation on: why is this piece here. That is how Serra introduces the notion of function of the piece of art and excludes the aesthetic concern. Object as an object does not have any other ambition than to make a comment on human condition and architecture that constitutes the plaza. According to Serra, this is the point, "The viewer becomes aware of himself and of his movement through the plaza. As he moves, the sculpture changes. Contraction and expansion of the sculpture result from the viewer's movement. Step by step the perception not only of the sculpture but of the entire environment changes."³¹ In the comment on the *St. John's Rotary Arc* he explains these changes in perception of the sculpture:

"...see how the upper edge of *St. John's Rotary Arc* seems sometimes to curve towards the sky, sometimes toward the ground, how its concavity is curtailed before the moving spectator discovers a convexity whose end he cannot see, how this convexity is then flattened to the point of becoming a barely rounded wall, until this regularity is suddenly broken and in some way turned inside out like a glove when the spectator ascends a flight of steps."³²

So much for the concept: the fragility of the *Tilted Arc* was in its reaction to architecture and public space. What seemed to be the strength of the sculpture turned out to be its most vulnerable point: if art questions contemporary human condition, beholders are still not sensitive to the way Serra's sculpture interprets it, and instead of perceiving the object through movement they see it as an obstacle to their movement. In other words, *Tilted Arc* did not succeed in establishing itself as a piece of art that even for the superficial reasons could be appreciated by the passers by. Whether it is a failure of phenomenological project to communicate with beholder is a matter to discuss somewhere else. But, Serra claims, art is not democratic, it is not its concern to satisfy people. In Serra's work there is always a contradiction operating: on one hand he knows that his sculpture depends on people's participation and openly states: "I'm really interested in the urban capacity,...my pieces need people to fill them out."³³ On the other hand, he does not want to acknowledge importance of the public opinion. And that is perfectly understandable taking into consideration that his art, (as many other 'arts') even when it inhabits public space, is primarily concerned with individual and private performance between beholder and his environment.

CHAPLIN

The second piece of art we want to discuss here is Chaplin, a 72 tones heavy cube

³⁰ Interview with Mark Simmons, See <http://www.coagula.com/serra.html>.

³¹ Serra, "Tilted Arc Destroyed," *Writings, Interviews*, p. 194.

³² Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara," p. 66.

³³ Serra, "Urban Sculpture," *Writings, Interviews*, p. 100.

inclined 2.5 inches that Serra done in 1977, nine years after Mies van der Rohe's last building, National Gallery, was erected. The cube was located in front of the gallery. The pillar had to be put up in the basement of the gallery to support the object above. Serra commented: "They had to reassemble the architecture to hold the piece." But if you take another reading, Serra employed architecture in the most traditional way; it used it to support a piece of art which is the traditional gallery's primary concern. Furthermore, Serra explains his intention: "I wanted to find a way of holding in place the gravitational load, a force, a mass, contrary to the center of the architecture, so that it would contradict the architecture."³⁴ The first step is removing the cube from the gallery. Serra's work once again enters into the dialogue with architecture. Instead of sculpture depicting or glorifying an important event, it creates performance not only with the beholder but also with architecture. Serra puts into operation gravity and disruption of horizontality. "The criticism can come into effect only when architectural scale, methods, materials, and procedures are being used."³⁵ He juxtaposes his work by using language of the traditional architecture and its dependence on the load and heaviness of the structural system. Paradoxically, Mies was more interested in lightness and sometimes, transparency, than classical heaviness.

Another question is posed by introduction of site-specificity or, as Serra puts it, 'redefinition of the site.' Mies did not see his building as site-specific. Mies did not share the idea that a specific building should have a particular character: „I believe it must exhibit a universal character determined by the global problem which architecture must strive to solve."³⁶ To the modernist project of 'non-specific', Serra opposes 'site-specific.' He places heaviness on the Mies's floating building as if he wants to anchor it in the history. It would be hard to find better companion for Mies's glass box than massive solid steel box. Interestingly enough, Serra is much closer to Mies than he thinks. Mies spent his career exploring possibilities of steel. He was also many times interpreted as the architect of platonic solids, the same way minimal art was discussed as being preoccupied with rigid geometry. Finally, Serra's insistence on the movement and different perceptual sensations caused by sequential viewing of an object is not at all removed from Mies's vocabulary. In his *Writings* Serra claims: "Because a change in the viewer's position provides a change in the sculptural object, the space of the viewer becomes part of the space of the object."³⁷

Serra's preoccupation with movement and 'behavioral spaces' has several roots. He traveled to Japan in 1970 and was much influenced by Japanese Zen Gardens: "The relationship of time, space, walking, and looking—particularly in arcs and circles—constitutes the only way you can see certain Japanese gardens."³⁸ **In early 70's he got familiar with dancing techniques of Ivonne Rainer. He explains:**

³⁴ Serra, "Rigging," *Writings*, Interviews, p. 99.

³⁵ Serra and Eisenman, "Interview," *Writings*, Interviews, p. 146.

³⁶ Quoted in Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, "Mies Van Der Rohe and Minimalism," ed. Detlef Martins, *The Presence of Mies* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), p. 117.

³⁷ Serra and Eisenman, "Interview," *Writings*, Interviews, p. 146.

³⁸ Cooke, *Richard Serra: Torqued Ellipses*, See

<http://www.diabeacon.org/exhibis/serra/ellipses/index.html>

"ways of relating movement to material and space, allowing me to think about sculpture in an open and extended field in a way that is precluded when dealing with sculpture as an autonomous object... I found very important the idea of the body passing through space, and the body's movement not being predicated totally on image or sight or optical awareness, but on physical awareness in relation to space, place, time, movement."³⁹

Yve-Alain Bois quotes Peter Collins as introducing parallax as the key concept in creating the modern space. Bois gives the dictionary meaning of the word: "Parallax, from Greek *parallaxis*, "change": "the apparent change in the position of an object resulting from the change in the...position from which it is viewed."⁴⁰ In this context, history of the modern space is related to the 18th century art of gardens and concept of pointing and negotiating the subject's view in process of movement. With *Chaplin* view is controlled by the object; there is no possibility of grasping the object in its entirety which is, in this case, a critique of a static wall – painting, situation. New readings of Mies's architecture consider the same possible relationship between movement and perception. Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio explains:

"In Mies, the realities are, from the very outset, material for the work of architecture, and his calls to understand architecture solely as a building, as *bauen*, are no more than paying of lip-service to a fashionable functionalism, but rather are proof that for creator of the Tugendhaut house, the perceptual conditions established by the materiality of the building are at the very origins of its spiritual signification."⁴¹

If one forgets for a moment about 'spiritual signification' and focus on 'perceptual conditions established by materiality' in Morales's statement, we will find that Mies's architecture and especially his open plan interiors are examples of the same phenomenological disruption of the duality between body and mind, between what you see and how your body locates itself within environment. However, Mies achieves the effect of 'strolling' as essential for experiencing interior space while Serra is focused on revolving around a single object, situation pretty common for classical sculpture. The principle of parallax is going to become more prominent in his other works such as spirals and torqued ellipses.

Finally, we can find, if we look hard enough, correspondence with architecture in all Serra's urban pieces: architecture is his anchor, something he himself might not agree with. Insistence on site-specificity and involvement with architectural space enables Serra legitimacy to critique architecture. And this relationship is something that belongs to the 20th century. The pieces he has been working on in the last decade, torqued ellipses and spirals, once again deconstruct space, this time central and 'maternal' baroque space of Borromini's San Carlo in Rome.⁴² In *Torqued Ellipses* he introduces centerless, directionless space characteristic of late 20th and early 21st century architecture. He comments on this piece of art:

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Bois, "A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara," p. 67.

⁴¹ Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, "Mies Van Der Rohe and Minimalism," p. 151.

⁴² Serra started working with torqued ellipses after his visit to Borromini's San Carlo in Rome. He conceived of taking the cylindrical spatial volume of the nave and torquing it in elevation.

“So the whole play between which way—Alice In Wonderland, Hansel and Gretel, or whatever—becomes part of that piece. And what's interesting about that piece for me, it has no ending and no beginning. There's no main access....And it's nonlinear in that sense. It's open to any kind of discourse that you want in terms of walking and looking and involvement. And it gives you certain feedback, psychological or otherwise, that are different in kind.”⁴³

Perhaps, in terms of the language they speak, at least in case of Serra, art and architecture were never closer to each other.

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INTERVJU SA ARHITEKTUROM: SLUČAJ RIČARDA SERE

Rezime: Za mnoge početak 20. veka je obeležio kulminaciju u borbi različitih polja ljudskog znanja u kompetentnosti da iznesu istinu. Ovaj fenomen je diskutovan u mnogo navrata i bio je specifična polazna tačka za fenomenologiju; činilo se da su nauka, instrumentalno razmišljanje i estetska diferencijacija pretvorili sliku sveta u prostor dominaran logosom. Ideja funkcije i razmatranje arhitekture kao formalne vežbe nastale kao produkt ovakvog razmišljanja, poduprte naučnim i filozofskim projektima, obezbedile su arhitekturi određenu socijalnu validnost. Ovaj rad diskutuje način na koji urbani radovi američkog umetnika Ričarda Sere postavljaju pitanje funkcije i redefinišu pojam prostora u kontekstu arhitekture i kreiraju specifične uslove okruženja koja su u konstantnom odnosu sa arhitekturom. Nekad u odnosu slaganja, nekad u suprotnosti, ali uvek kreirajući ono što on naziva „prostor ponašanja“: prostor koji konstanto zahteva posmatračev angažman. Jednom kada je odbio tradicionalnu skulpturu kao mogućnost u svom radu i odlučio da se odnosi prema istorijskim pretečama na ne-reprezentativni način, Sera se značajno približio jeziku arhitekture. Za nas je značajno da u ovom radu pokažemo na koji način njegov rad doprinosi pojmu arhitekture kao događaja, akcije, arhitekture koja ide iznad funkcionalnih zahteva i približava se iskustvenom razumevanju prostora kroz pokret, nešto čemu veliki deo savremene arhitektonske produkcije teži.

Ključne reči: Ričard Sera, Skulptura, Forma, Arhitektura