

DOKTORI TÉZISEK

EGY STÍLUS TÖRTÉNETEI MINIMALIZMUS A MODERN ÉS POSZTMODERN KORBAN

BONÉ FERENC



2015

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem
Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Doktori Tézisek

Boné Ferenc

Egy stílus története
Minimalizmus a modern és posztmodern korban

Filozófiatudományi Doktori Iskola
Dr. Boros Gábor

Esztétika Doktori Program
Dr. Radnóti Sándor

Elnök
Dr. György Péter

Titkár
Dr. Strausz László

Bíráló
Dr. Gelencsér Gábor
Dr. Virginás Andrea

Tag
Dr. Sággy Miklós

Témavezető
Dr. Kovács András Bálint

Budapest
2015

The Stories of Minimalism

From Modern Art to Global Practice

The subject of the present work is relatively straightforward: minimalism in the arts. The most common use of minimalism in relation to art is in the term Minimal Art. The first official documented appearance of Minimal Art occurred around the year 1960 and was surrounded by a general pursuit in postwar America towards an art, especially visual, but also musical and literary, which made its statement with limited resources, eschewed compositional detail, and refused representation. Minimal Art is usually not regarded as a modernist development, but as a movement that breaks with the principles of modern art and modernism. However, as a postmodernist – and later perhaps global – practice minimalism wasn't devoid of pastiche, that is, the reinventing of modernist styles, especially those associated in Europe with geometric abstraction. As such, many critics have pointed out similarities between aspects of high-modernist developments, like Constructivism, Neoplasticism, or Suprematism, and Minimal Art. At all events, the present work locates the origins of Minimal Art in the phenomenon of the transatlantic exchange; the multiple waves of immigration of the modernist masters – and ideas – to the United States, motivated especially by the widespread persecution of modern art during World War II. The historical and socioeconomic reality of Minimal Art – as presented here – rests in the double-faced logic underlying the modernist work of art: the utopian rationality of the modernist geometric form doubles into the rationality of the capitalist production; organization and planning are the 'passwords' of both democratic socialism and democratic capitalism. Therefore it won't come as a surprise that the industrial forms of geometric abstraction are major points of interest for the present work. It is sometimes suggested that the sense of proportion characteristic of modern architecture made its ways into Minimal Art, and this is exactly the path the present inquiry follows, arguing that architecture and design have a much more important role in the emergence of Minimal Art than it is usually outlined, for it was specific mainly to architecture that the autonomous form of the modernist work was also non-relational. The autonomous and non-relational form of the modernist work acquired the essential seriality of the mass produced object, ending up as the origin of the non-referential simulacrum, which corresponded to the moment of the specific object of Minimal Art. This story of minimalism already signals the historical methodology employed, which has as its major point of departure in the works of

Fredric Jameson, principally his 1991 book, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

However, Minimal Art was not the only minimalism triggered by modernist geometric abstraction. In his 2007 book, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema 1950-1980*, András Bálint Kovács reinforced the idea that modernist cinema is cinema's reflection on the modernist artistic traditions, shortly a form of modern art. Modernist cinema, for Kovács, belongs to modern art as evidently as, for instance, modernist painting. The different modernist art movements have engendered their own cinematic versions, called by Kovács modernist film styles. The modernist movements commonly associated with geometric abstraction produced, accordingly, the modernist film style defined by Kovács as minimalism. Although he never specified exactly which modernist art movement is responsible for engendering minimalism in cinema, the most obvious answer is that it wasn't one particular style, or movement, or medium, but whichever transmitted best the general modernist ambition of getting down to the most elementary mental patterns through a stripped and abstract geometric expression; it's not impossible that all of them together. However, as it happened in all the arts, modernist cinema soon backed out and was replaced by a new, postmodernist practice, and postmodernist cinema has also developed a strong preference for pastiche, the reworking of past, mostly modernist film styles. In consequence, the minimalist styles have returned to the screen, but this time employed in a different manner. As for the use of the term minimalism in relation to these latter developments, David Bordwell has himself admitted that he cannot think of another that sums up the techniques that became common in many countries during the last decades of the twentieth century.

There is a certain amount of confusion about the return of minimalism in the postmodernist or global cinema, as sometimes it is not clear whether this is the comeback of the old modernist aesthetic or it signals a new artistic approach. Indeed, the emergence of a belated modernism is an idea that every now and then generates debates among the critics; Bordwell, for instance, was reluctant to use the term modernism or postmodernism in his strategic work. It takes a historical argument to decide whether or not the employment of a certain technique decades after its invention is still based on the initial aesthetic principles and Bordwell was correct in the respect that the formalist approach is hardly qualified to provide such an argument. Also, historical arguments for some time now are closely related to postcolonial discourses resulting in a 'geopolitical aesthetic' and a plurality of conflicting positions. In line with its

historical methodology the present work will try to demonstrate that minimalist cinema at the end of the century indeed reinvented some of the techniques and styles of the modernist auteurs, but the aesthetic underlying this reinvention is already of another sort. Instead of depicting the structural hiatus of social experience echoed by the inner mental world of the alienated individual, these films rather speak otherwise, alongside palimpsestic and allegorical impulses, which constantly attempt to read one text through another. To prove this, one needs to identify the minimalist techniques of modernist cinema, to locate the same methods in the later developments, and finally to evidence that these later trends are propelled by a different machinery of representation and also a new configuration of social determinants. The overall situation is then relatively straightforward. The forms of modernist geometric abstraction in fine art led to the later postmodernist developments of Minimal Art, which reinvented some of the modernist forms of geometric abstraction. Also, the forms of modernist geometric abstraction have triggered the modernist styles of minimalism in cinema. Cinema later developed its postmodernist forms of minimalism, which recycled the older, modernist styles of minimalism. To make the circle complete one could argue that postmodernist minimalism in cinema was also triggered by postmodernist minimalism in art, that is Minimal Art, or minimal music, or minimal literature. Albeit to some extent true, this step seems methodologically unnecessary, since in postmodernism these areas doesn't possess the older sort of autonomy anymore, instead they are rather continuous and complementary fields of the same network of global cultural and economic exchange.