

1. Larry Bell — Cube #2 (1967)
2. Steve Reich — Drumming (1970/1)

\* \* \*

Artur Dobija

Sublime object and Real sound. On minimalism, Bell's *Cubes* and Reich's *Drumming*.

\* \* \*

Comparing aesthetics of visual arts with those of music is a very difficult task. Such is the nature of a situation, when the same stylistic label prescribes qualities of both artistic domains.

One might be found in a situation, where a specific feature of visual art media is looked for its analogue in music or *vice versa*.

Unlike notions like *romanticism*, *expressionism* or *dadaism* which refer to the work's meaning, the term *minimalism* refers more to the work's form as a way of presence. A minimalistic work often consists of one (and only one at a time) graspable manifestation, positioned in such a way, that it (most likely sharply) contrasts with the environment it „visits”.

\* \* \*

This way might be seen the body of the cubic artwork by Larry Bell. Appropriately exposed cube from semi-transparent material invites to adopt a contemplative stance towards the edges an object *qua* object.

At least two elements plays the role of sublime here. First is the already mentioned contrast with the environment. The cube as such does not exist in nature. The work of art, being focused on the shape itself, substantiates something what is alien to the world, but so obvious for perception (a very basic shape).

But there is more sophistication to this simple shape. Each of the Bell's glass cubes contain a playful contradiction: glassy transient and transparency diffract the feeling of presence. The *Cube #2* reflects its own interior *ad infinitum*, questioning its frame shape simplicity.

Classifying Bell's work as *minimalistic* teaches a great lesson about this notion, mainly that „the minimal” is represented by the simplicity and

familiarity of works contours, not of work's modesty in impact. It is the contrary which is true: scarce formal variances should be able to give the impression of sustaining the deep and often contradictory sublime.

\* \* \*

This is even more visible, when comparing a „standing there” visual artefact to *minimal* music, for ear lacks eyelids — sound trespasses daily contextualizations of domesticated sounds and musical motives without any means of defence.

This is the way we should tend to read Steve Reich's association with minimalism movement. In his *Drumming*, each motive is defiantly simple and familiar. How such a piece receives its breathtaking momentum?

Here, the element of sublime is explicitly staged: up to 13 players synchronised within a beat „wear out” on the eyes of the public during a period of time outside convenience. The element that deepened the *rendezvous* between the contours and perception in Bell's cubes, in Reich's art locates more within this active physicality and resistance of motives to alter.

Repetition is often regarded as a key technique of Reich's minimalism. Perhaps from the formal point of view this is indeed the case. But — as Bell's cubes are not encumbered with spectator's gaze fixation only because of the contours themselves — motive repetition is a *mean* rather than *key* to the *Drumming's* endless *tour de force*. This fact is very important for many artists to understand when applying repertoire of compositional techniques associated with minimalism.

\* \* \*

We examined two examples associated with minimalism, one from visual arts, one from music. It was an attempt to chase the notion of minimalism as a special link between the physical carriers and the involved sublimity. If one were to look for a commonplace within the form or a „minimal” technique in those distant domains, medial differences would render it impossible to reconcile them under one label. But — putting aside (or taking diligently into account) — the term's misleading hint toward the pure description of the form of an art is a great example of what it is perhaps all about.