

Minimalist Architecture and the Concept of Less is More: The Place of Hellenistic Cynicism in the Architectural Concept of Mies Van Der Rohe

Ikenna Emmanuel Idoko¹, Onyeka Emmanuel Uzowulu², Ikenna Michael Onuorah³

^{1,3}Department of Architecture, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria.

²Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Historically, cynicism as a philosophical movement started and soared in the Hellenistic period. Disquisition on cynicism concerning architecture and architectural philosophy has been relatively neglected. This article addresses cynicism, delving into the philosophy of the cynics' lifestyle and beliefs vis-à-vis less is more (minimalism), which was an epigram adopted by Mies Van Der Rohe in his architectural designs and buildings. Standing on the shoulder of simplicity, as the common denominator between cynicism and minimalism, the authors create an intercourse between philosophy and architecture through the appraisal of the philosophy of the Cynics and the architectural works of Mies Van Der Rohe. This further buttresses the innate need for continual interdisciplinary research works to unearth and expound more interesting synergy in human architectural and philosophical experiences.

Keywords: Minimalism, Architecture, Philosophy, Cynicism, Concept.

INTRODUCTION

Stemming from the sands of history, the deaths of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.E. and Aristotle in 322 B.C.E. mark the end of the Hellenic period, an era in which Greek civilisation was primarily self-contained. These dates also birthed the beginning of the Hellenistic period during which Greek civilisation intermixed with other cultures, particularly those of Egypt and Near East territories. Although the Hellenistic philosophers dealt with metaphysical issues, they had much interest in practical and ethical concerns. Cynicism as a movement began in the Socratic epoch, but the Cynics are important to this era owing to their influence on the Stoics. The movement was founded by Antisthenes (about 445–365 B.C.E.), who originally was a student of the Sophist Gorgias but later became a pious adherent of Socrates. Cynicism is more of a stance toward life than a carefully designed philosophy. The Cynics' main concern was the opposition of nature and convention, a theme they borrowed from the Sophists. The Cynics glorified doing what is natural and refuting all of society's conventions, stating they were artificial, bossy and masterful. They taught that happiness is found in virtue and simplicity and that virtue is attained by setting oneself free from all earthly possessions and gratifications.

Antisthenes said that he would rather fall victim to madness than to desire or crave. The panacea to life is to stick with what is natural—namely, to cherish only your native mental and spiritual possessions—for all

else is worthless. Antisthenes further opined that external and physical possessions such as wealth, reputation, freedom, and pleasure are not of value, nor are poverty, shame, loss of freedom, illness, and death thought evil. Diogenes of Sinope (412–323 B.C.E.) was the most famous of the Cynic. A well-known story relates that when Alexander made his grand entrance into Corinth, he came on Diogenes relaxed and sunning himself on the street. Moved by Diogenes’s supposedly pitiable condition, the ruler asked him if he could grant him any royal favours, to which the Cynic replied, “Stand out of my light.” Such stories reflect the contemporary meaning of cynicism. However, the Cynics’ more extreme behaviours should not be allowed to eclipse the highly spiritual and admirable ethical concerns at the core of their outlook. They were a people who promoted simplicity in all ramifications.

Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe was born in the year 1886 in the town of Aachen, Germany. He is considered the most influential architect of the 20th Century. His apprenticeship with Peter Behrens, a German architect and designer, was one of the turning points in his life. Under him he discovered a new way of looking at architecture, especially learning the use of materials like steel, and glass. The adage “less is more” was unveiled to him in Behren’s office. In 1930, Mies became the Director of Bauhaus School – a German art school, which later added architecture as a medium of art in its program, and developed the Bauhaus style of Architecture. Mies adopted this new style which favoured the use of steel, glass, and reinforced concrete. In the year 1933, the Nazi regime closed the art school, making Mies relocate to the United States in 1938. Clemence (2006) opined that in the United States, he eventually became one of the most innovative leaders of this modern movement in architecture called minimalism, which could be christened less is more.

CYNICISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE CYNICS

The root of cynicism is dated back to actions of a small group – apparently, cynicism was founded by Antisthenes, Diogenes of Sinope Crates of Thebes and Hipparachia of Maroneia. On the origin and meaning of the name ‘cynicism’, there are two versions. According to the first version, cynicism co-exists with other classical schools. The name ‘cynicism’ is derived from the area where Antisthenes would typically live – the Cynosarges (a public gymnasium outside of Athens that is reserved for those deemed “unworthy” to be citizens of Athens). This first version has two implications. Firstly, it establishes cynicism as a ‘school’ on par with others like Plato’s Academy, Aristotle’s Lyceum, the Porches and the Garden. Secondly, it validates the cynic’s status by signifying their exclusion from others (society).

However, the name cynicism is frequently associated with its etymological closeness to *kynos* which means *dogs*. Schutijser (2017) points out several ramifications below;

There are four reasons why the Cynics are so named. First, because of the indifference of their way of life, they make a cult of indifference and, like dogs, eat and make love in public, go barefoot, and sleep in tubs and at crossroads. The second reason is that the dog is a shameless animal, and they make a cult of shamelessness, not as being beneath modesty, but as superior to it. The third reason is that the dog is a good guard, and they guard the tenets of their philosophy. The fourth reason is that the dog is a discriminating animal which can distinguish between its friends and enemies. So do they recognize as friends those who are suited to philosophy, and receive them kindly, while those unfitted drive away, like dogs, by barking at them (Schutijser, 2017).

Schutijser (2017) last two arguments, in particular, evoke the same mental image that Plato’s Guardian in the Republic does. The dog, as an animal is violent against its adversaries and devoted to its friends which is a prerequisite for Plato’s “Men of Spiritedness”. He regards the cynic as a man of *Thumos*, which sets him apart from the Epicurean (*eros*) and stoic (*Logos*) contemporaries. He is seen as being simple and concise. Furthermore, developing on Schutijser’s analysis, one could argue that while the cynic ultimately proposes a life of shamelessness and indifference, these aspects are very much intentional and therefore a product of

culture rather than a simple return to nature; the cynic position is the purposely push away from boundaries and norms of society and not of being unaware. For example, rather than living in the wilderness or the woods, the cynics decided to settle on the outskirts of Athens because they did not want to be so attached to material aggrandizement. The cynics conveyed an overtly insulting attitude towards society and its customs especially in their mode of appearance.

The doctrine is believed to be a classical Socratic school which had its interest in the pursuit of virtue via a simple and unelaborate lifestyle. Later on, it took a negative attitude which gave birth to the idea of absurdity. Kudriavtseva (2014) observed that three factors contributed to the negative interpretation that gave birth to the rise of cynicism. Firstly, the idea of the early cynics was misinterpreted because of their particular way of life; which led to the second reason; the popularity of pseudo-cynicism in ancient times which happens to be a perverted version of cynicism that promotes absurdity; Third, the name of the school had negative connotation. Today, cynicism is regarded as a moral phenomenon which is popular during periods of crisis and amid breakdowns of ideologies and religious doctrine. To some scholars, cynicism is described as a way of life, a worldview, or a unique set of beliefs predicted by the reflection of rules and conventions. One major characteristic of cynicism is the disregard for prevailing ideologies.

The key to understanding modern cynicism is revealed by Peter Sloterdijk, who claims that the enlightened man is only a hypocrite who upholds the principles of consumer culture while hiding the high moral standards of the Enlightenment. The cynics do not conceal the reality that they are consumers who seek happiness and pleasure in their lives. Dettloff (2015) wrote that Peter Sloterdijk, in his work 'Critique of Cynical Reason' identified the historical evolution of cynicism. Peter considered three perspectives on what is meant by cynicism; (1) through intuitive perspective, he defined cynicism as an enlightened false consciousness. (2). the historical perspective depicts cynicism as a tool of power politics, with a distinction between cynicism, and the idea that one must 'know what they are doing'. (3) According to the phenomenology perspective cynicism arises from a debate between several awareness types. Giroux (2001) noted that the philosophy of cynicism took a different turn in the 20th and 21st centuries. This is because, during this period, there was a contradiction, a clash between the ordinary and enlightened consciousness. According to him, contemporary cynicism arises due to the contradiction between the systems of humanistic values and the scale of consumer values (where spirituality does not exist). Notably, Lloyd and Pennington (2020) in their work, "Towards a Theory of Minimalism and Wellbeing" opined that consumerism and materialistic values have potentially negative repercussions for individuals and society (Kasser 2002). Additionally, studies have shown a connection between materialism and a lack of concern about the environment (Hurst et al. 2013), higher financial debt (Gardarsdóttir and Dittmar 2012), and most relevant to this study, lower levels of personal well-being (Dittmar et al. 2014). Low-consumption lifestyles have surged in popularity over the past decade, as people attempt to compensate for the above. A lifestyle that exudes such is minimalism, which is made distinctive by anti-consumerist attitudes and behaviours, including a conscious decision to live with fewer possessions (Dopierała 2017). Important to this study, advocates of minimalism suggest the lifestyle leads to happiness, fulfilment, and freedom (Fields Milburn and Nicodemus, 2018).

Taking cynicism to be an enlightened false consciousness, implies that one is equipped with humanistic ideas about truth, beauty, justice and goodness but rather wishes not to associate with these ideas because they are motivated by consumer values. Thus, a person may not adopt any clear stance in society because there is a gap between what is real and what is reasonable; between knowing how to do something and doing it. By implication, modern man has an embattled consciousness where on one hand, enlightenment with its ideals of equality brotherhood, justice and a reasonable and meaningful life; on the other hand, the realization that we must live against these ideals and rules to feed and forces man to live the opposite of the rules.

According to Kudriavtseva (2014), cynicism is a philosophy that originated in antiquity and borrows from the philosophical school of *knyisism*. He noted that cynicism is related to conflicts between ideologies. He viewed cynicism as the first philosophical assault on culture because it offered the chance to debate from a position of strong positivity as well as disclose the truth. The cynics are mostly ascetics and mostly have been regarded as revolts against world systems. According to MacCunn (1904), extreme cynics divided mankind into ‘a handful of wise men’ and ‘innumerable fools. In support, Schutijser (2017) viewed cynicism as probably, merely a way of life and nothing much more, or at least nothing deserving of significant historical analysis from a philosophical stance.

From the above, it becomes more difficult to distinguish cynicism as a school of thought than it is for some of its peers. The earliest group of cynicism remains the most significant representative who articulated and assimilated the core ideals and concepts. The cynics drew great attention because of the infamous “shock effect”. However, this initial influence was less felt immediately cynicism became an acknowledged phenomenon. Unlike other theories which experienced symbiotic mutual exclusion, cynicism refused to reduce into an accepted school with a direct dogma. This is an invite to consider the ancient Cynics to be little more than a group of thugs with the gift of gab who, through sheer happenstance, persuaded themselves into the history of philosophy. (Steinmüller, 2014).

Cynicism has a new, maybe less negative connotation these days. A cynic in the modern day is someone who exhibits a personality or temperament that belies or mistrusts the goodness or sincerity of human motives and acts, and who wishes to convey this through sarcasm and jeers; a sneering fault-finder. The idea that cynics of today have of human nature is manifestly incorrect since they doubt the altruism of any human deed. Thus, it appears that modern cynics hardly ever trust other actors. The critique of modern cynics stems from a deep mistrust of human nature.

Lastly, some may argue that there is a connection between cynicism and scepticism – having a sense of doubt. However, there are important philosophical distinctions between the two. Where the cynics lack open-mindedness, the skeptics are open-minded. A sceptic is a person who assesses the information currently available and aspires to discover the truth. They can therefore choose to change their pessimistic thoughts. This cannot be said about the cynics who have already made their judgment and determined that they hate something. Thus, the term “functioning cynicism” rather than “scepticism” is more suitable in this study.

THE CONCEPT OF LESS IS MORE IN MIES VAN DER ROHE’S ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS

Akin to time and events, cynicism witnessed a disappearance from ancient Rome. However, it witnessed a re-emergence in the Renaissance era. As opined by Caldwell (2006), writers in the Renaissance used cynicism in satire and parody as a means to reprehend the values of society. These resurgent cynics resembled the ancient Cynic philosophers in their scorn toward pleasure, and in their disposition to expose the faults of the society. Just like the ancient Cynics, they preached simplicity, and minimalism and believed that virtue lies in the middle and, hence, should be upheld. The minimalist movement started in the 1950s. At its inception, it was first visible in visual art, like sculpture and painting. These artworks were characterized by the use of simple and massive forms, which were aesthetically pleasing. In the words of Mertins (2014), the artistic creation was not conceived within any pre-determined for bonding but was self-contained. Minimalism is to strip something down to its elementary essentials and requirements, to add simplicity to space, product, art, and as mentioned earlier even as a lifestyle. It strives to achieve harmony through simplicity. Minimalism in architecture was adopted by Mies van der Rohe at a time when it was the age of rationalization, structural rigidity, and mass production. His architectural designs and buildings had simple forms, and minimum use of materials like steel, glass, and concrete, yet were aesthetically

immaculate. His works were original, hence, having no imitation of any works from the past nor were they based on any social ideas or individual emotions. The works were like a moment in history. They were self-referential, like any work of art (Mertins, 2014). It was Jyotsana and Ankita (2020), who stated that minimalism is about owning fewer possessions and believing less is more. According to a great minimalist, Joshua Becker, minimalism is ‘‘the intentional promotion of the things we most value by getting rid of those things that distract us from it’’.

As stated by Chave (2008), Minimalism in art has two branches – materialistic and idealistic, wherein the idealist adopts a spiritual approach, which is almost mood-inclined in nature. Mies adopted both these branches and created a minimalist vogue of his own, which for almost a century, proved very popular and acceptable. For him, architecture was ‘‘sacrosanct’’, hence divine and meant for a secular society, but absorbed by science and embraced to the ever-evolving aspect of the universe. Mies’ buildings were appreciable physical objects that when looked at, charted one’s insight and fondness towards them. Vasilski (2016) juxtaposes that the simplicity of objects that minimalist art postulates, is also seen in Mies’ works and designs. For him, the simplicity lay in the built form, relying only on the essential, using minimum or the least material for his structures, but without marring the utility (Chave 2008). As averred by Jyotsana and Ankita (2020), quite a majority of us master a lifestyle that starts with unscheduled plans and moves forward with a flow that has become inevitable including a simple routine of waking up, freshening, eating, working and sleeping. Minimalism puts forward the notion that owning fewer values and possessions is the supposedly unrevealed secret to a peaceful and meaningful life. This research unveils how the concept of less is more, adopted by the architect Mies van der Rohe could be a benchmark for minimalist architecture, and by extension tied to the minimalist nature of the Hellenistic Cynics. From one medium of expression, that is minimalist art, Mies rose above it, evolving minimalist architecture as a movement in modern architecture. Citing one of Mies’ famous architectural pieces, the Farnsworth House, it could be seen how ‘‘less is more’’ was amazingly fused in the building, thereby exemplifying the harmony, agreement and similarity between the minimalistic nature of the work and cynicism. In the words of MacArthur (2002), the look of the building connected with the people, thereby becoming a masterly artwork.



The Farnsworth House, Chicago.

Source: Adam and David (2015).

Farnsworth House, seen as the temple of domestic modernism designed by Mies Van Der Rohe as a weekend retreat for a Chicago doctor, Dr Edith Farnsworth, is one of the most paradoxical houses of the 20th century. Dr Edith Farnsworth, a prominent nephrologist, commissioned the house from Mies for a property and living place on a (then) relatively isolated floodplain on the Fox River. As the early letters between the client and architect attest, the house was to be a relaxed refuge for the cultivation of the self, with the prerogative, for translating poetry, playing music, and general relaxation. Albeit the materials used do not conceal their industrial origins, the accuracy of the composition and the level of finish is designed to exude a sense of carefully controlled luxury – minimalism. Everything is done to make the building appear weightless and simple. The white metal stanchions used as columns do not reach the line of the roof, spotting the aesthetic order of a Greek temple, whose columns sit below the entablature.

Designed to be a weekend retreat abode, this glass box pavilion, containing ‘almost nothing’, but just one room, provided a clear and unobstructed space that was flexible in its utility. The space contains certain freestanding components and one central wood core that provides seemingly veiled spaces designed for sleeping, cooking, sitting, dressing, and eating. Interestingly, the house was in 2006 listed as a National historic landmark (Clemence, 2006). Looking at the visual artfulness that Mies employed: the roof itself is exactly as thick as the floor plate, 15 inches (approximately 375mm). Yet the floor, filled with aggregate and dressed in travertine, is much heavier than the roof. There was no structural reason to make them the same depth, but it helps reinforce the illusion that the building floats in the landscape, that it is attached to the ground by its white columns, rather than held up by them. The Farnsworth house has an outstanding photogenic and elegant outlook. It basks in perfect symbiosis with photography, the interior revealing itself to the alluring x-ray eye of the camera. MacArthur (2002) juxtaposes that modern art, which considers architecture as a form of art, sees the emergence of minimalist architecture, which assumes that, like in visual art, buildings are physical objects and the “look” of the object is very important. Irrespective of the fact that buildings are seen as simple objects, whereas other visual arts like paintings and sculptural works are seen as real artwork, minimalist architecture sees the building as an aesthetically created object, which is considered artistic by the look they provide, thus making them a critical object and not just a material one. However, some architects believe that a building can aspire to be a form of artwork only if it is not designed for utility. This of course slightly contradicts the canonical statement of Vitruvius where he made it clear that every architectural piece must have three makeups: *firmitas* (firmness), *venustas* (aesthetics) and *utilitas* (utility). In an occasion where one argues Mies’ architecture and his adopted concept of minimalism as being philosophical, then it could mean that it also aspires to make the world a better place. It decrees that the space we live in should be inspiring and endearing. Importantly, architecture is something that should be experienced to be understood, hence its utility. The astute German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, opines that minimalism in architecture and the philosophy of experience of life, go hand in hand. It means that the space one lives in is essential to understand architecture. The conglomeration of what we perceive and what we feel in a living space is of great importance (Vasilski, 2016).

Additionally, if our living space is essential to understanding architecture, then understanding the different structural elements of the building is important to perceive and have a feeling of the space we live in. In this context, Vasilski (2016) avers that light is also an important structural element in minimalism. Since light is an intrinsic part of nature, an account of the narrative of the encounter between Diogenes and Alexander the Great as opined by Lawhead (2015), calls to mind. There Diogenes asked Alexander the Great to stand out of his light which he as a Cynic considered natural and highly needed for his simple lifestyle. In our living space, one can experience this light in proximity to time. And at the same time, in the silence and simplicity, one feels the space. Riding on this assertion, Youssef (2014) averred that one of the remarkable phases of Modern Architecture is “Minimalism” which is concerned with stripping away unwanted details and defining the true essence of any given architectural element. It prevailed among architects who proposed simplicity, transparency, and spirituality. Its spaces interact with nature which makes users enter an

atmosphere of reverence, asceticism, and silence. Providing purity, harmony, transparency, and simplicity of life is the ultimate goal of minimalist architecture. According to Mertins (2014), Mies van der Rohe also adheres to this notion and his architecture and thought processes were viewed as being philosophical. At a point, he made a postulation that it was possible to fuse the cosmos with humanity's place in it. According to him, just as in the philosophy held by the Cynics, simple fluidity of space and continuity from interior to exterior was a true illustration of harmony between nature and the living world (Venkatesh, 2017). Hence, minimalism in architecture furnished Mies with an idea of sensation to insight through tangible physical objects, which were pure and simple. To this end, Mies' buildings align perfectly with the aphorism he adopted in the wake of his career, "less is more": a canon for minimalist design and architecture.

Moreover, a precise review of the innate materials used in Mies' designs and buildings vis-à-vis minimalism would be of importance in helping to understand the philosophy of "less is more". In the words of Vasilski (2016), all the elements associated with minimalism that we enumerated above, like simplicity in design over complexity are visible in Mies' works. Chave (2008) opines that those buildings built with essential elements, like steel and glass, create harmony with free-flowing open spaces, and provide clarity, utility, and effect through the aesthetic appeal that they carry, by making use of hidden qualities like natural light, sky, earth, and air, thus providing the sublime spiritual experience. In agreement, Vasilski (2016) states that these conditions are observed in Mies' magnum opus. These were opulent in the Barcelona Pavilion, the Farnsworth house or the Seagram Building, which are pure and open "skin and bone" architecture, wherein the steel structure is the "bone" and the glass about it is the skin (Mertins, 2014). It could be said that Mies' motto, "less is more" reached one of its ultimate crescendos in the design and construction of the Farnsworth building. In fact, it almost seems part of nature. As stated by Clemence (2006), quoting Mies, "...we should attempt to bring nature, houses, and human beings together into a higher unity and conformity. If you view nature through the glass walls of Farnsworth House, it gains a more profound significance than if viewed from outside, hence, it becomes a part of a larger whole".

AN APPRAISAL OF MIES' MINIMALIST ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF CYNICISM

Notably, owing to the outstandingly simple nature of Mies' architectural pieces, his designs and buildings, are often referred to as "skin and bone" architecture. This stems from his use of glass enclosures on steel structures, which pioneered the very act of minimalist architectural expressionism.

Minimalist architecture is commonly characterised by:

- Pure geometric forms
- Clean and straight lines
- Plain materials and colours
- Visual simplicity
- Repetition of forms
- Solids and voids

As averred by Rosenfield (2016), it is significant to state that Mies' various architectural typologies, such as the skyscraper typology, shown in the skyscraper, the Seagram building; the pavilion typology, prominent in buildings like the Barcelona pavilion and Farnsworth house, and a combined typology of both skyscraper and pavilion typologies, celebrated in the Chicago Federal Centre, have set a remarkable standard in the world of minimalist architecture. Mies thought that it was not about fabricating new forms or building as an expression of art and architecture. It was, however, his goal to evolve a clear and austere structure, firmly grounded by the principles of architecture in its simplest form, and to stay consistent with the form of its constructability. In Mies' designs, subjective and merely decorative trimmings and finishes are shunned

with the view to allowing the structure to articulate the grace inherent in itself, and the minimalism and vibrancy of the materials convey refinement. It is through these objectives that Mies erected his projects, some of the most beautiful and lucid buildings around the world, that have helped to define the very essence of simplicity and modernity for the 20th century (Chen, 2022).

Having studied the Farnsworth House and its architectural relativity with the Cynical philosophy, it would also be a boost to this research if the structural components and spatial synergy in Mies' Van Der Rohe's other architectural works were studied. This is of great advantage as it would facilitate a better understanding of the simple, yet amazing composition of elements put in by Mies in his thought process and conceptualisations, and its eventual unveiling as it affects a live revelation of the ideas. As a minimalist architect, Mies endeavoured to see that he brought nature and the built space together in such a manner that the true form shines in the eyes of the beholder unhindered. These were exceptionally portrayed in the following ways:

Suspended Roof of The Crown Hall at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) building



A view of the Illinois Institute of Technology building, showing the four-steel truss construction, which holds up the roof.

Source: <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/restoring-mies-van-der-rohe-sr-crown-hall>

The Crown Hall houses the College of Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago. Truss construction with a suspended roof was an idea conceptualized by Mies in the bid to have a building that provides the requisite flexibility. With such an idea, the design gives an open hall-like structure which is free of any internally erected columns. This gives room for the roof to be freely suspended from a system of

trusses that are supported by outside columns. Looking at the interior space, it would be observed that the interior walls were simple and moveable for an arrangement with unbounded possibilities.



Interior views of the Illinois Institute of Technology, showing the unobstructed interior space.

Source: <https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/restoring-mies-van-der-rohe-sr-crown-hall>

The non-load-bearing walls in the interior are used to segment the space and are moveable to allow for unbounded arrangements. In tandem with Vitruvius' held opinion that every piece of architecture must have a sense of utility, the IIT building is extremely versatile and modern, hence, the structure can be used for school buildings, business purposes, or theatres. The unobstructed nature of the interior of the glass and steel hall creates ample working space for the staff and students in a simple, yet, friendly arrangement. The lower panels of the glass and steel wall-enclosed building glass are sandblasted while the upper and those at the entrance are transparent, to maximize the level of daylight. For the sake of maximizing functional spatial integration, the lecture rooms and workshops are located on the floor below, making the raised main floor allow for natural light and ventilation into these lower rooms. The white acoustic ceiling of the hall is 5.4m above the terrazzo-finished floor. The interior was partitioned by freestanding, non-load-bearing walls, made of oak.

Structure and Space-Definition interrelationship as showcased in the Barcelona Pavilion:

In 1929 during the International Exposition in Barcelona, the German government commissioned Mies to design a Pavilion for Germany which would be used during the International Exposition, accommodating King Alphonso XIII and other dignitaries; hence he designed the famous German Pavilion. Most historical and architectural works of literature refer to this structure as the Barcelona Pavilion which in its entirety, shouldn't be its title. In essence, its title should be the German Pavilion in Barcelona. The Pavilion was

dismantled after the Exposition, though it was rebuilt in 1986 at the original site by architects Cristian Cirici and Fernando Ramos using Mies Van Der Rohe's plans.



A three-dimensional view of the Pavilion.

Source: <https://www.ebay.co.uk/shop>

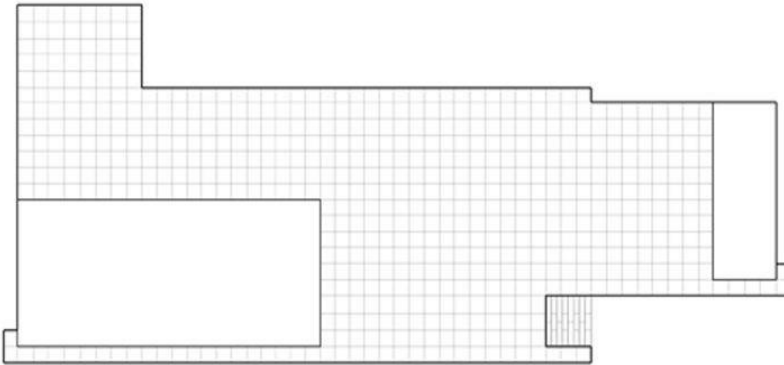
It could be said that during this time in Mies' career, he unexpectedly became aware that structural elements of a building and space-defining elements could be entirely separate entities in their composition and utilization. This was spurred by the modernist spirit in him, hence challenging the general belief that walls must support a building.

The Pavilion stands elegantly on a terrace with two pools, one partly roofed. It constitutes two horizontal planes: the roof held above the raised terrace. The marble and glass walls, freely placed between the two planes, are set free of structural obligation, revealing its cynical simplicity. Structurally, the roof slab of the house is supported on eight steel, cruciform columns, encased in chromium covers. The glass walls of the Pavilion were all not for enclosure, but rather, to bare the house to its surroundings, brandishing its simplicity and natural state.

BARCELONA PAVILION
BARCELONA, SPAIN
LUDWIG MIES VAN DER ROHE
1929

BASE FLOOR PLAN OF GRID SYSTEM

THE BARCELONA PAVILION WAS DESIGNED IN 1929 BY MIES VAN DER ROHE FOR THE 1929 INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION IN BARCELONA, SPAIN. IT IS CHARACTERIZED BY ITS SIMPLE STEEL AND GLASS STRUCTURE SYSTEM AND USE OF EXTRAVAGANT STONES SUCH AS MARBLE AND TRAVERTINE. VAN DER ROHE'S CONCEPT WAS TO CREATE A TRANQUIL PLACE THAT BLURRED OUTSIDE AND INSIDE. BY USING CRUCIFORM COLUMNS AS THE MAIN LOAD BEARERS OF THE LARGE OVERHUNG ROOF, THIS ALLOWED HIM TO USE GLASS AND HIGH POLISHED STONES TO CONVEY HIS IDEA.

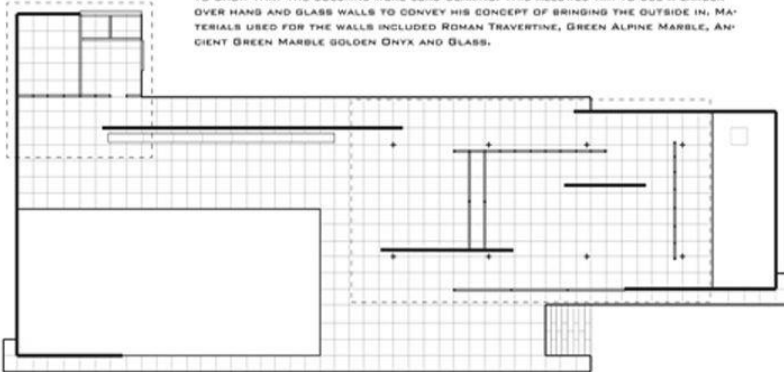


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THE WALLS THAT APPEAR TO BE MONOLITHIC STONES ARE ACTUALLY CONCRETE AT THE CORE. MIES HAD MARBLE CUT AS THIN AS POSSIBLE TO LOWER COST AND FOR EASIER CONSTRUCTION. THEY WERE THEN LINED UP AND PLACED OVER THE CONCRETE WALLS.

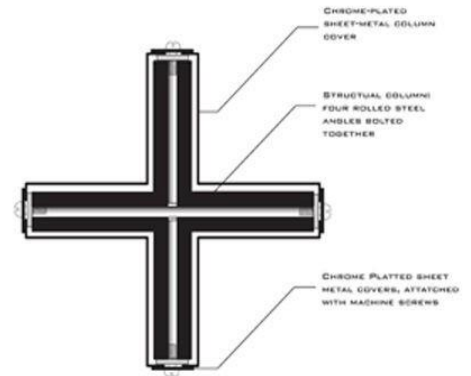
FLOOR PLAN WITH STONE WALLS AND CRUCIFORM COLUMNS

VAN DER ROHE INTENTIONALLY OFFSET THE CRUCIFORM COLUMNS FROM THE STONE WALLS TO SHOW THAT THE COLUMNS WERE LOAD BEARING. THIS ALLOWED HIM TO USE A LARGER OVER HANG AND GLASS WALLS TO CONVEY HIS CONCEPT OF BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN. MATERIALS USED FOR THE WALLS INCLUDED ROMAN TRAVERTINE, GREEN ALPINE MARBLE, ANCIENT GREEN MARBLE GOLDEN ONYX AND GLASS.

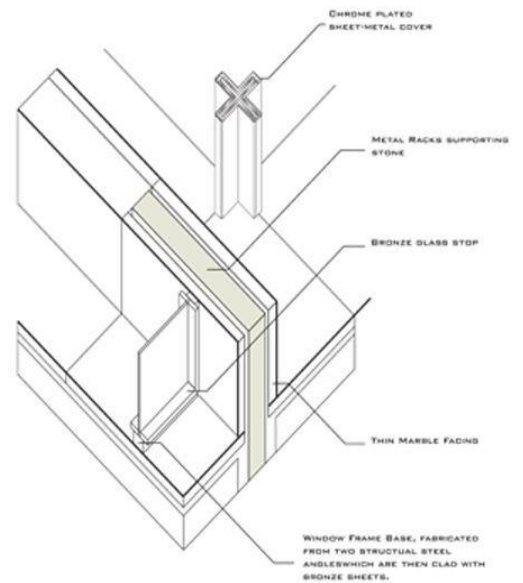


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DETAIL OF CRUCIFORM COLUMN



WALL DETAIL



Structural members of the Pavilion, showing the cruciform columns. Source: <http://www.e-architect.co.uk/barcelona/barcelona-pavilion>.

The structure had a unique flow pattern, such that no area was closed. Each area is made to become a natural part of adjacent sections of the house. A visual observation of the structure shows that it was not a compartmentalized plan; instead, the separation into rooms was sensed by the individual. A variety of precious materials, marble and onyx walls, travertine-faced podium, and tinted glass, also helped to bring a certain ambiguity and poetic flare to the generously aerated pavilion.



The interior space of the Pavilion shows the marble wall, different designs of the Barcelona chairs and the sculptural work of Georg Kolbe standing in the water court.

Source: <https://www.naturalstoneisbetter.com/en/category/editorial-en/architecture/page/2/>

Having compatibility and conformity in mind, Mies thought it wise to use a kind of furniture that would be in agreement with the Pavilion in terms of simplicity and fluidity of the space. This led to him designing the legendary Barcelona chair, table and stool. The furniture was almost entirely hand-made. The table has a top of black opal glass, while the chairs have white-leathered upholstery with flat chromium-plated steel bars. In a bid to properly scale and give a good proportion to the water court, Mies selected a sculptural piece from George Kolbe and placed it there.

CONCLUSION

It is entirely not of essence how much we own. It is more of the essence of how significant what we own is. That is what a simple lifestyle anchored on the tenets of cynicism preaches. Cynicism enunciates the philosophy of being voluntarily simple and unassuming in all facets.

So far, we have carried out an inquiry on cynicism and how their philosophy relates to minimalism (less is more) as captured in the architectural works of Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. There, we have been able to point out simplicity as a common factor which binds the two. The reason is that the works so studied on the lives and times of the cynics point out that they believed so much in simplicity as a means to attaining eternal happiness and fulfilment. On the other hand, Mies Van Der Rohe in his works showcased that a building does not need plenty of embellishments to be certified aesthetically pleasing, durable or have a functional use. Mies as a propagator of modernism in architecture adopted the epigram, “minimalism” and replicated it in his designs, thus, making the concept more popular during the movement of Rationalism.

Architecture uses various media for communication. Since Mies preaches minimalism, he used: non-

detailed walls, monochromic grey (and sometimes white) colour, transparent glass with minimum mullions, and contact with outside nature through green and water elements. The fact that Mies reduced the supposed details on the buildings does not juxtapose a means to an end. It is rather a means of achieving a congenial fusion between architecture and nature.

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