

About Aesthetics of the Collective Housing by the Color, Harmony and Pattern

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Abstract: Comparative analyses of the practices of color and pattern applied to the architecture of the collective housing of the 60s to our days. Perspectives. We shall articulate our intervention around several case studies, in Marseille, Toulouse and in Lille, which will supply so many examples in order to support our demonstration.

Keywords: *color, pattern, harmony*

1 Introduction

The collective housing is an architectural typology which widely worked in the expression of large-scale buildings the formal name of which - little flattering - was able to and can again amount in elementary terms, those of "bar" or "tower". Its expansion is intimately related to new ways of live, in the measure of a modern society in full transformation with colossal social and demographic ambitions, in that of the 60s. The recurrence of these models in the construction of complexes does it give evidence of a renunciation of the singular architectural prejudice subjected to the efficiency of a ready for use model? In France as in Europe, the diffusion of this kind of model introduced creative answers of another order, forced by commonplaces of scale, materials and composition of facade.

These answers formulate thus through plastic interventions on facade, kind of independent processes or almost the architectural gesture, where the color, the pattern take care to get for the building its otherness. The use of the polychromy supplies inexhaustible solutions to the designers in order to feed and integrate to the context the project and limit the formal banality: the colored harmonies get quantity of aesthetics able of remodelling a volume, of creating of the rhythm, of getting the unity...

2 Has the color thus the possibility of renewing the image of this built?

Besides the aesthetics of the color is also the product of time and being made, it is also subdued fashionable, in social and cultural immediate sound, and in its necessary renewal. The 70s and 80s supply many examples of what we shall call „decoration of facade” where the fresco would hold place of major plastic expression. It is variously inspired. Abstracted or representational, it conditions the vision of the built and sometimes frees itself from its structure which becomes secondary.

So as it was seen associating with the specific use of the polychromy on the collective housing the pejorative notion of bariolage in the sense of artificial decoration, of decoration of facade. This aesthetic discrimination marries indirectly the general denial of a bankrupt urban shape.

Is it possible today to rehabilitate the use of the polychromy on the collective housing?

In these "pictorial" interventions substitute themselves today new plastic formulations which make join themselves the know-how of the architect and the designer, those of second skin where shows through the idea to dress naked architecture. A will to give some thickness to the built by the use of other materials, by means of diversified tints, of new associations and by the custom of innovative technique as for example the screenprinting.

The contemporary aesthetic codes, far from the taboos and the cliché ?

The strong visibility of these architectures in the urban fabric set up to them - in spite of them sometimes as real mark in the city and/or as strong symbol of district. In this urban problem correspond important stakes touching the representation of the city.

Do these participate in the renewal of the aesthetics of the collective housing?

3 When paint meets architecture

The beginning of abstraction in painting from the early twentieth century frees artistic expression from pictorial representation based on so-called classic academic foundations. Faced with the scientific definition of harmony that will govern for decades pictorial practices, color and line were at the service of the representation of a "beautiful scene" or "beautiful landscape".

Even if it was practice with a great mastery, color and pattern were primarily used to represent the subject at the fair.

Artists of abstraction and great thinkers of the era questioned the very plastic dimension of painting by using color and its own qualities. Thus, the color becomes a material in itself having its own characteristics. The color is discussed based on its perceptual effects while being associated with a sensation. Red becomes dynamic and move forward and blue becomes static and move backward. This dynamics associated with the color experienced becomes an exercise of shapes and patterns will revive the facade. This is when the wall of the architecture defined as a level surface near to the white sheet becomes a mean for artists architects who implement color in space, beyond the picture. The color is then used in a new intensity with large blocks of color, often red, that seems to take over and try to absorb their current environment and the spectator.

4 The polychrome as an heritage feature of collective housing

Play of colors on the facade composed and recomposed the initial volume by new rhythms, the associations of contrasting colors that are reinventing the surface and give to see a set of shapes that are similar to the pattern.

The appearance of the concrete in the architectural production of 30's generates repetitive architectural forms to meet the imperatives of profitability and productivity. Thus the scale of housing changes and collective housing generates architecture with massive volumes to accommodate the more in less floor space. Concrete is the material that meets those new constructive constraints. Thus in a polychrome architectural environment the concrete impose gray color. The color appears in those volumes to provide visual cues but also to provide humanity and sensitivity in these mainly neutral areas.

We quote one of the most iconic productions of collective housing ie "La Cité Radieuse" in Marseille, bar building designed by the architect Le Corbusier. Completed in 1952, this vertical village is binding in relation with its monumental dimensions and by the use of a vivid color palette: 56 meters high, 137 meters long, 24 meters wide, it contains 337 units of 23 different types, shops, community facilities, a kindergarten, a gymnasium.

From the outside, the unit, to borrow an expression of the architect, has the shape of the bottle rack: designed according to its precepts defining "modern architecture" (including the independent framework of poles and beams in armed

concrete) the overall appearance of the frame is made of a succession of equal size bin which side walls are painted in bright colors from natural pigments: ocher, yellow, red earth, white, black, ultramarine blue and some of their derivatives. The color palette competes with the presence of concrete and its textural qualities so dear to Le Corbusier, as a material "par excellence" of modern architecture.

It says in the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* "The works are made readable and simple and stripped design, organised in ordered structures, generating harmony." Here, the application of color can make it readable the "rack", it does not respond to a systematic logic but to randomness. Less than a dozen colors are used to produce a pattern able to recreate the unity, the mass of the façade through the game of colored dot. This colored dot that designates the famous standard feature, the module of housing, singular, which aggregates to a whole to reform the facade. In sort of metonymy, the part for the whole, the irreducible colorful plan is an kind of brushwork in the thickness of the facade that becomes a pictorial support.

For Le Corbusier, it deals with creating from a basic model, that of the rack, a color shift generating harmony. The superposition of this chromatic partition to the formal structure, as a methodical settlement of colors, creates an overall color vision.

The polychrome palette used for the walls of the loggias, perpendicular to the façade, allows a set of appearance / disappearance featuring the architecture in its environment. This is the plastic of the architecture that is in question, ie. its mode of appearing. We suggest a parallel here with the Dutch art movement *De Stijl*. Indeed, the bar offers a reading of front governed by a principle of orthogonal grid, frame, as a principle of connecting lines and colors together. In the thickness of the architecture is applied solid color. The tension between the clear frame of the facade and its polychrome thickness creates a play of opposition plans in space (or orthogonality) that makes the appearance change according to the position of the observer. This optical game is part of what Theo Van Doesburg called the fourth dimension either the one of the relationship between space and time, either that of the movement. This fourth dimension revealed by the color demonstrates complex concerns of Le Corbusier related with an object being at the same time architectural and spacial designed as a phenomenological device which reinterprets the principles of pictorial composition.

Historic Monument in 1995 and then, *La Cité Radieuse* is the emblematic building of Corbusian theories, it is also a demonstration of intellectual synthesis successfully made by this precursor of important schools of aesthetic and artistic thought of his era.

5 The neutral as the color of the discretion and indistinction?

Here we do not address the neutral in the chromatic sense of the term, this is not the gray as a reference to the "metonymic" material of collective housing,

concrete, this addresses the neutral in the interpretation made by Roland Barthes as indistinction, by the use of one type of color harmony playing with tone on tone shades, which would outlaw any opposition of bold colors able to design, to make sense, to give a contour through chromatic otherness. The "camaieu" by Barthes is a principle of total organization, "the neutral, it is the moire: what's changing fine-looking texture, may be meaningless, according to the inclination of the subject's glaze"

As for colors applied to the collective housing, we also see their ability to mark or not mark the building, to designate or silent the building in its environnement. In France, in the case of many building bars integrated into an existing plot, the patrimonial logic wants indeed to maintain in the historic districts, protected area, where some aesthetic rules maintain a vital heritage identity based primarily on architectural creations and devoted characteristics, such as the use of local materials, typical colors and harmonies that would define its unique urban identity. This high heritage value of the French city, as some would say essential, in an authoritarian dictates of aesthetic logic to preserve and enhance a valuable built heritage, in which collective housing is not "yet" part of. Indeed, in this type of urban setting, because the bar is a figure of a standard non-heritage building, it may paradoxically have a too singular face, the face of the rupture. In this sense, it disturbs the local unit and became a figure of disgrace. The metaphor of visual "wart" that should be erase is quite telling. Failing in removing or to making them transparent, these tall buildings are dissolved in the colored mass: they adopt colors in front close to those of the environmental heritage. Thus, at Toulouse, the "town pink", beige-pink has been a satisfactory answer to visually confuse and create unity : "the thought of neutral is a limit-thought, at the edge of language , as it is to think the non-language, the non-color (but not the absence of color, transparency). " In the district of Saint Cyprien, on the left bank of Garonne, a tower housing 19 floors, built in 1958, maintains with the urban landscape surrounding this dialogue of the indistinct: its facade painted in shades of ocher tones make it disappear in the built fabric dominated by shades of brick. Thus from far, the face of the neighborhood becomes a puddle of pinkish shades where no figure stands out. This recovery of local color on the front rests on a logic of visual camouflage, but this principle is it really serving a heritage preservation and does it manage to reduce the visual weight of the tower? Neutralization of the form by the color does not dissociate an appreciated figure from a depreciated figure. When the tower blends with its environment through the color, it also becomes a component, it can equally well be the part for the whole and become a metonym of the district or the city. This is what we called the principle of integration to prevent differentiation.

6 The color as a power of reincarnation for collective housing

The case of the rehabilitation of the Tour de Bagatelle in Toulouse.

Built in 1956, it lies in a neighborhood in the west of Toulouse in France where

many social housing are concentrated. The search for neutrality is not based on a principle of preservation of local identities but on a desire to break a certain type of chromatic language too characteristic of social housing, kind of discriminant figure: polychromy.

We also address the issue of color in terms of fashion, the renewal of colored appearance according to an updated aesthetic sensibility. And we also deal with the aesthetic socio-cultural bias.

Inventory: the Tour de Bagatelle must be rehabilitated since 2006 because of its age and as part of the "grand projet de ville". Its colorful appearance is still the one defined in the early 80's, as part of a renovation campaign that first had to solve its problems of thermal insulation. Gerard Tine-visual artist in Toulouse, was asked to intervene in the blind gable of the tower of 18 floors and 155 apartments. The idea was to exploit the dimensionality of this plan, to make a signal and enhance the architecture, from a sensitive point of view, thinking the subject not from himself but from the environment. The geometric pattern is deployed a set of color gradation that G. Tine has a compound following a luminous-chromatic logic. The choice of nine colors is based on the presence and discretion and contrast effect "strong but measured" to create a staging effect in the gradual loss of saturation. Verticality fades in the light of heaven. This skin is not used immediately for aesthetic, it creates another skin with another material, he plays on the duality of presence / absence of a mode of appearance. In this sense, this gear is not about architecture, but the space around it. A set of kinetic polychrome pattern should serve the enjoyment of the beholder. As Duchamp said, "it is the viewer who makes the table." Associated with this gear is deployed on the front a game of polychrome pastel colors - pink beige, blue, orange, which describes an abstract monumental fresco where each module is a fragment: the color is not used in a respect of the design logic of the architecture, on the contrary, it seeks to erase in the repetitive and orthogonal, using the diagonal. This is superimposed on the facade, it embodies it and gives it grace. But this ornament is now seen as an admission of architectural poverty that the color attempts to disguise.

As part of the project of residentialisation in the neighborhood, the Public Housing Office of Toulouse wants to shed that infamous image willing to use for the future rehabilitation of the tour de Bagatelle more neutral color. Like the Tour du Parc located in the same neighborhood whose recent whitening gave apparent positive values, the whiteness as source of modernity: the purity, hygiene, light against darkness, truth against lies.

Many answers have been formulated to achieve this ambition of renewing the identity of the Tower. All were not pursued due to a lack of means, unable to solve the difficult equation of color across this iconic building of a not valued neighborhood, on the sidelines of the city.

7 The color in the narrative pattern, the decor as poetic and aesthetic innovation

At Lille, the new district of "Inhabited Woods", located in the heart of Euralille 2 and in the continuity of the business district, wants to cultivate an "original form of metropolitan housing." This is a mixed operation with strong social, architectural and environmental ambitions. The residence La Vérose designed by the architect Dominique Perrault, has been recently delivered there. The facade of this building counting 9 floors was treated according to three functional levels: the ground floor for shops received full glass, the first levels are dressed in dark tinted lenses (offices), the five upper levels for housing are covered with coats of etched glass with floral motifs in shades of green and pink reconstructing an image of flowery meadow. Rewarded by the pyramide de vermeil of the Innovation Award at 40th Congress of the Developers and Builders in June 2011, the aesthetics of the facade is extremely illustrative and imposed by its image as a curiosity in the surrounding cityscape. The Tours of Nanterre designed by architects Emile Aillaud in 1977 wanted to blend their facades with the Parisian sky.

This is not the case here regarding La Vérose which superimposes to the skies of Lille, a flowery picture near the pictorial execution, which almost recalls in its aesthetics, in its colors, some colorful paintings of Klimt where the pattern has an important place for cover the canvas and leave only a visual impression of tingling ("Landscape Italian Garden"). In the manner of a wallpaper pattern that spreads on the four faces of architecture, and then disappear for the benefit of the overall effect produced by this "colored noise". This packaging is not without recalling the conceptual and plastic approach of Christo, this posture close to Land Art, in its way of taking possession of a monumental work to reveal it better at the eyes of the observer. We will also question the ephemeral nature of the subject represented, the flowery meadow, which contradicts the immutability of such a building, and also the scale ratio of this plated decor, virtual. The paradox is huge, it is even cultivated, it aims to reveal first the building in a counter-definition, in a poetic concealment of its true nature: strong, sustainable, imposing, housable, comfortable, contemporary. Dominique Perrault tries to reveal the essence of this architecture by the confrontation of the opposite figures and patterns and using the extreme contrast. The objective of this plastic device does not pursue a plastic aesthetic purpose, it seeks to impress the eye of the walker, to give rise to questions, to arouse their curiosity. In this sense and by its uniqueness it will probably become a visual landmark, and strong symbol of the neighborhood.

In conclusion, the aesthetics of collective accommodation, born of the utopia of an ideal city, result of the industrialization of some type of housing, is no longer a form of renunciation of the architectural choice. Productions of the 50's and 60's revealed the falling of a systematic constructive mode that currently triggers in French cities various issues including social and heritage. The use of color, chromatic harmonies and patterns by their ability to transform the appearance of a

facade can continue to query up the existence of these architectures, and, why not, to make them part of our urban heritage. This type of building has laid the groundwork for a new way of designing housing and the aesthetics of the facade. Its spread will always present a major challenge for the designer. Today, technological advances, the variety of materials open up the field of possibilities. Therefore, architects, artists, colourists, lighting designers should be able to implement creative, sensitive and functional materials to produce the future of our cities.

References

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