10. ‘Polychromie architecturale’

Architectural polychromy

A study made by an architect (also involved in the adventure of contemporary painting) for architects.

‘There is no accounting for tastes...’, a popular adage expressing the multiplicity of sensorial and psychic outcomes provided by the innumerable combinations of a few fundamental elements. It is, in this imperative verdict of ‘personal taste’, the proof of the impossibility to pretend to bend men under a unique rule. Countless harmonies are therefore possible, are licit, are exact, equivalent of fundamental values of the individual. Groping along, at the wallpaper merchant, this instinctive awareness with its own law drives each individual towards a choice which, at a certain point, asserts itself, is invariable. This choice is perhaps judicious and legitimate: ‘I am like that!’

It was therefore, in the present undertaking, to discover the way to provide, to this fatality tucked away in the impenetrable folds of the individual, the opportunity, the pretext, the means, the tool by which it would reveal itself. As here it is about architecture, it had furthermore to master the innumerable combinations of laws of a precise and restrictive nature which are those of architecture. The light shines on walls frontally, as low-angled daylight, in contre-jour, situations which call for decisions each time in accordance; these lit walls affirm themselves in their dimensions; these dimensions fixed by the architect in a voluntary relationship constitutes the architectural game. It had to be prohibited that colours by a kind of vibration came to disqualify the wall. Such a misadventure is always possible; at this particular moment, the wall becomes tapestry and the architect, tapestry maker. I react against such a lowering. From there a dictatorial intervention: to eliminate the colours that one can qualify as being non-architectural; better than that: to research, to choose the colours that one can name eminently architectural, and restrict to them by saying to oneself:

‘There are enough of those, already!’

(I admit that in this research, the personality can sometimes appear tyrannical; about this, there is nothing one can do!)

To the legitimate claim of the client that ‘there is no accounting for tastes’, the architect replies: ‘Agreed, I shall respect your opinions in the field of architecture, where I more or less consciously consider the facts.’

Beside colours (tones), there are the values, that is, the limitless scale which extends from full light to black shadow. The painter intervenes here. Each colour (vermilion differently from carmine, black differently from ultramarine, etc ...) possesses degrees where its richness, its opulence on the one hand, its signification on the other, attain an obvious qualification; expressed otherwise, this observation can be formulated: each colour, during its transition from lighter to darker, possesses drab, or unpleasant, hollow, non-expressive regions, that the painter carefully avoids. In the painting of a picture, the choice can be more extensive, because a tone is strongly influenced by numerous other colours or values which immediately surround it. As in architecture, two or three colours or values are present, the choice of expressive values is more categorical; a

341 The translation of this article has been taken from Rüegg, A., Le Corbusier- Polychromie architecturale (Basle, 1997), 94 ff.
342 Above the title, written by hand, there is: ‘ten coloured line cliches with template’.
judgement intervenes: this ‘tone-value’ is more mural and its specific quality is fully attained. Thus, the author of this collection intervenes with the degree of security that he holds from his own experience. Moreover, in order to make his work useful in practice, he consents to bend to very restrictive conditions. The choice of colours responds to a manifestation of individuality (red, or green, or blue, or yellow, or grey, etc.). The limitation of each of these colours to certain values is dictated by the law of the polychrome wall (architecture, law of light). The renunciation to the many other colours provided by industry is motivated by the same law of the polychrome wall (architecture, law of light). Confronted with this selection so strongly restricted, very characteristic reactions nonetheless intervene upon our sensitivity; these reactions are the very product of the colours: specific virtues. Blue creates space. The architect will take this into account! Red fixes the presence of the wall, and so on. Other effects: profound physiological reactions. Blue is calming, red is exciting. Such authentic events, modern medicine seizes and hopes to favour the treatment of certain illnesses, through coloured surroundings in which the patient will be placed.

Some conditions of the environment accompany the use of colour. To exist genuinely, some tones call for full light (red); half-light kills them. Others withstand twilight, better than that; they vibrate intensely in it (some blues).

To fix rules would be perilous; however the classification into two large categories of warm tones and of cold tones brings order: every colour (tone & value) heads either towards the light side (warmth, gaiety, joy, violence), or towards the shadow side (freshness, serenity, melancholy, sadness).

It is with awareness of these general rules that the architect composes upon the emotional, sensorial, and intellectual levels. It is under the effect of these fatal, specific, virtues, that the client (the spectator) tests his sensation, clarifies the quality of his emotion. Colour is therefore an incredibly effective triggering tool.\textsuperscript{343} Colour is a factor of our existence. We do not remember it anymore, because the industry, by launching onto the market a torrent of coloured objects, has plunged us into confusion, disarray and imbalance. Colour has to be used with wisdom. The life of a painter is a permanent struggle against ‘the innumerable’ and by consequence against the indefinite, the imperceptible; these ‘innumerable’ are the limitless combinations that solicit his interest, it is the seduction of all the possible unpublished work. Wisdom guides them little by little towards a choice which is a limitation, but which is also a concentration. The restriction to which the painter consents is none other than the choice of an effective tool. It is useful to take a look around oneself, in time and in space, and to try to discern if man has not, in his places and in his moments of equilibrium, used colours (tone-values) which have satisfied his physiological needs and his conscious or unconscious lyrical aspirations. This enquiry brings formal responses: in all civilizations, folklore or apogee and in all places of the earth, we see the same ambient colours appear. (I do not speak of fabrics, nor bibelots; I speak of architecture, that is, the wall on which the eye lingers.) These colours are blue, in 3 or 4 values; red or pink; pale or dark green; yellow of ochres or of the earth. What is most striking is the predominance of harsh white which truly constitutes the very base of the surroundings. In the atmosphere of harsh

\textsuperscript{343} This is where the original ‘Salabra’ text ends.
white, the above-named colours take on an intense, precise, qualified signification: these are characters, they become characters. And to this signification automatically is attached a certain degree of lyricism, as the evasion of an environment strictly useful towards a region which is of the order of sentimental well-being.

This inquiry reveals more to us, manifested by colours, the character of a society: youthfulness, power, physical action, vitality and optimism revel in strongly characterized colours, ringing in a harsh white environment. Joys of the body are interdependent to intellectual sensations in a symbolism having strong, sober, even basic roots: physiology and lyricism.

At the other extreme, where the mind game predominates, where the intellectual debate for or against intervenes at each occasion, there where the idea stands in its immense complexity, where wisdom has led to the admission of a relativity of all the factors present, the colour loses its gaudiness, fades, even disappears totally; grey, indifferent install: calm, search for calm, need of calm.

Of this glance thrown into time, we have kept the presence in ‘forte’ or in ‘pianissimo’ of some clearly characterized colours, which are and have always been so unanimously employed, that one could qualify as being eternal. The qualifier of eternal is all the more defensible in that these few constant colours are products of a primary industry that was born since the most basic civilizations and has been maintained through all of them; raw materials of this distant industry exist at all points of the globe; earth and fire, the mortar for pulverizing, have preceded any conscious notion of chemistry. These colours accompanied existence. Fernand Léger has written with a clear conscience, this strong truth: ‘Man needs colour to live. It is an element as necessary as water or fire.’

Under the invasion of countless chemical products, it is appropriate to remake the part of the profound man, of fundamental man that neither progress nor the machine disturbs. It is right to keep contact with these bases, companions of men, purveyors of normal surroundings. This will denounce quickly the tones that are acid, sharp, resonant, transient, dynamic (true dynamite) produced by modern industry that so violently shakes our nervous system but fatigues it as quickly.

I do not say that new resources, even strident, cannot be used in the making of objects (clothes, fabrics, bibelots). But I think I am able to keep them as non-architecturals.

I also note this: all confusion is tiresome. So everything that is sculpted, modelled, as a game of volumes, lives by the effect of shadow, of half-tone and of light. It is my sculpture, and sculpture (revealed by the very means of light) spreads to a certain architecture as much exterior as interior. If the speech is given to light, it would be unfortunate to give it at the same time to colour. When everybody talks at the same time, we do not hear each other anymore.

The spirit of clarity would drive us therefore to stipulate that polychromy is natural upon smooth surfaces and that it kills volumes conceived under the sign of light (shadow, half-tone, light). Therefore, what is sculpted would be monochrome; what is smooth could be polychrome.
I remember that polychromy kills volumes. It may be that in certain circum-
stances the architect needs to ‘kill’ parasite volumes. It is then camouflage. We
have all observed in the Museum of Natural History that nature, infinitely
diverse, uses to different purposes all the resources: it does it with a clear mind.
Many species (shellfish, butterflies, birds, quadrupeds) offer the complete series
of characteristic variants going from one extreme to the other. It is this richness
which spreads from one extreme to the other that is a lesson for us all: there are
no formulas, fashions or narrow codes; there is this eternal law of characters,
which is that there are explicit products. In this way, the very rough shell, very
sculpted, full of richness in relief, is absolutely monochrome. In the same family,
this shell evolves towards the simple and pure form; at a moment of its growth,
it is smooth and white, then setting out in another direction, its smooth surface
becomes animated by polychromatic decors which go all the way to the greatest
violence: exact counterbalance of the very sculpted shell that we left at the
other extreme.

In the same way one sees the coat deliciously nuanced, from the black spine to
the white belly of the Spanish or African donkey, the pure and plain robe of the
Arabian horse, the disconcerting pattern of the zebra.
Let us note by the way (what will bring us back to certain architectural cases)
the paradoxes of nature: this butterfly which looks like a terrible bird (to defend
itself), this egg which looks like a stone (to hide itself) etc. Clarity of intentions,
defined goals; it is not for nothing that such effects exist.
I find it useful to repeat this: nothing is more demoralizing than uniformity, a
sign of stupidity. Nothing is stronger and more moving than unity. Unity is infi-
nite, it is equilibrium, finite. An underlying equation maintains all the elements
of it. The operation is carried out, exact. The products of nature are all in equi-
librium (why? it is not for me to explain). Human creations sometimes succeed,
and everyone stops and says: this is harmonious.

Therefore one will be able to stop me here and mention that I am in total con-
tradiction with this decision taken a few lines here—before to limit the palette of
the architect. I have wisely put myself only on the ground of architecture. I
have carefully affirmed that it was clever to prefer the ‘best’ to the less good,
and, eventually in the matter that I am considering here, I have proceeded
towards an elected choice that one will be able to qualify as being personal. I do
not mind, but I have begun by examining the past and all places on earth, how-
ever, and I have appreciated that my personal taste rallied to similar manifesta-
tions constant to healthy and strong men. Constant? This word is reassuring!
Moreover (another personal intervention), I have always had an instinctive
repulsion for what is morbid, unsettled, unsound, or unhealthy. It is about
colours as it is about psychologies. Colour moreover, Mister Psychiatrist, is it not
an important tool in diagnosis?

0 0 0

Let us see in what way a new discussion on colour in architecture can intervene
today:
We had arrived, by the effect of the academic spirit of the 19th century, which
slavishly served the most banal demands of a bourgeois spirit that had conquered all layers of society, at the ‘wall’ (the wall of architecture, the architectural wall, this lit plane that the eye appreciated in its dimensions and its proportions, and in which the spirit appreciated something like the meaning of a word); we had arrived at the wall which had lost its architectural functions: from a formal plane, it had become the support of a changing application of fabric or paper tapestries, of a game of panels made of strips of staff. The hall had become a room, the room something like the interior of a lined box. We had lost architecture, we had obtained, however, an undeniable comfort. We had bent its spirit towards a new appreciation; to end, we had (in the great majority of cases) perverted it. In the incoherence of ‘styles’ adopted by the academic architects to flatter the ‘parvenu’ spirit which was blowing cynically or innocently, we had introduced in the forms of architecture an incoherence rampant in the vital notions of a disrupted, unbalanced society. One tendency opposes clearly this ‘civilisation’ of the 19th century to all the anterior ones: the cynical or innocent desire of each man (each woman) to rig oneself with the pomp of the prince. Gift of the industry: tapestries, innumerable paintings, plaster or hard-board moulds, mass production, rubbish, in one word, all the first anarchic effects of the machine. I made myself clear before the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, in 1925, in the book L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui. All cultural states manifest themselves with an appropriate architecture. The academics have given us an architecture (equally also, painting, sculpture, music, and even cinema).

The profound recovery of spirit of this present period had to arrive to a new architectural awareness. It took a hundred years for that; steel, reinforced concrete, new working methods and a flood of new materials; a profoundly disrupted social life, the early signs of a new life in all parts of the world, the giant march of a new society towards a new civilization; precursors, unknown prophets... And after the war, the stunning march of this new idea internationally expressed in architecture, brilliant victory, unanimous; the page is turned. In all, one needs to see clearly, to speak fairly, to make architecture precise. For the time being, modern architecture is caught in a quagmire: reigning urbanism, that of town councillors. Urbanism is in a state of serious deficiency, because decisions still emanate, everywhere, from non-enlightened authorities. But urbanism has become the word of the day: we deal with it, we are obliged to deal with it, we will be obliged to consider it as the first task of modern times. Then the new architecture of the machine age will burst without any hindrance and into a splendour we do not know enough about.

Let us come back to the house, to the dwelling, to architectural polychromy. The past (our actual present) was different from what is coming: the plan of the house was different. It was the plan of the stone house with walls originating from the basement; rooms were square, simple. The traditional house gradually incorporated new organs, innumerable entrails, hot water or hot air heating, cold or hot water, gas, electricity, telephone, etc. Furthermore, tools unknown until now, such as sinks, water-closets, cupboards, storage compartments were scattered at precise places of the residence, where a precise function was carried
out. Thus, it was an entirely new domestic economy. The precarious dwelling of bygone days, deprived of all resources, or the immense dwelling in which long days flowed as comings and goings, is replaced by a habitable cube reduced to the minimum under the pressure of multiple factors and a rapid, active life, which should be sparing, develops here in the rigor of functions.

The plan of the stone house, with its square rooms, cannot bend anymore to the imperative requirements of the limitations of the habitable cube. The new organs evoked here bend, join, insert with a flexibility similar to that of entrails in the human body. The plan is different: on the one hand, the majority of rooms have become very small (and polychromy will allow us to avoid the crushing sensation), on the other hand, numerous rooms of the dwelling communicate directly from one to the other, by curved passages, by walls that stop at mid-height, by fragmentary walls formed by compartments, etc., etc. We could without difficulty make the dwelling all white or trianon-grey. But frequently, it is impossible to make a given room pink or blue or yellow, because such a room is intimately linked to the other; there is no longer ‘the pink room’, ‘the yellow room’, ‘the blue room’. In this influx of inevitable, organic architectural elements, polychromy arises, bringing with it a possible lyricism, magnificent architectural sensations and a way of ordering.

I have said it: ‘A new frame of mind, also, definitely diverts us from the interiors of our grandmother’s boxes.’ The search for space, for light, for joy, for strength, for serenity, invites us to call for colour, daughter of light.

To place oneself in front of a coloured wall is something different to burying oneself in a flowered overcoat. It is the difference between wanting to act and consenting to endure.


I am going to take some examples.
To begin with, I will demonstrate some of the specific qualities of colours.

1. COLOUR MODIFIES SPACE.

Blue and its green combinations creates space, gives dimension, makes an atmosphere, distances the wall, makes it imperceptible, removes its quality of solidarity by interposing a certain atmosphere.

Red (and its brown, orange, etc. combinations) fixes the wall, affirms its exact position, its dimension, its presence.

Moreover, to blue are attached subjective sensations, of softness, calm, of water-landscape, sea or sky.

To red are attached sensations of force, of violence.

Blue acts on the body as a calmative, red as a stimulant. One is at rest, the other is action.

But in this given example, I retain only this: blue-space; red-fixity of the plan.

First example: At Pessac, 1925-26, we had a development of 51 houses in reinforced concrete, extremely dense, each too close to the other. (They had imposed on us a very reduced subdivision of the site.) The cement coatings are
Pessac, axonometry of entire estate in colour, FLC 19895, 1927
1er cas:

Un groupe de maisons d'habitation formant un enchevêtrement de blocs, sous forme de

2ème cas:

Maison rectangulaire, avec des maisons orientées en

3ème cas:

Maison rectangulaire, avec des maisons orientées en

Photo.
of an unbearable sadness. It meant making use of colour to give appeal and mainly to distance each house, one from the other, to open perspectives, to break the grip of too close walls.

First case:
A group of about twenty houses forms a rectangular enclosure. We break the enclosure by painting in blue the houses A (2 = blue; 1 = white); this barrier of houses then collapses towards the horizon. But in order that the outcome be effective, we insist on fixing the two lateral sides of the enclosure, to the left and to the right; we paint these B groups pure burnt sienna earth (dark). The result is conclusive.

On the opposite side of the blue group, two houses block the view of the pine forest. We paint them pale green; they disappear softly, binding their fate to the green cluster of pines.

Second example: The main street is confined, on one side, by a series of high houses whose façades tower above the sidewalk. In perspective, this makes a compact mass, a too dense repetition, a sensation of suffocation.

With colour, we are going to create an optical illusion and, in the mind, another appreciation of the elements in presence.

Alternatively, the façades aligned on the street will be painted white or pure burnt sienna earth — a light tone, a sombre and violent tone. The eye is tricked: it is carried either upon the white façades, or upon the brown ones; in both cases, it only measures distances between white or distances between brown, that is to
say it transmits to the mind the notion of a space double to that of reality. And the spectator, counting sometimes the white, sometimes the brown, has the impression of a considerable number of houses; the street has been extended. This demonstration was striking in 1926 when not one tree had yet been planted. In addition, to sharpen the coloured sensation, one of the two contiguous façades with the brown was painted pale green; the one contiguous with white was painted white. Thus, viewed from one extremity or from another, the avenue was polychromed brown, green, white, and in both cases, green was opposed to brown, but was allied on the other hand to white; the sensation of space between the brown façades was thus carried to the maximum.

**Third example:** Let us take the most simple case, of a small square or rectangular room. If the four walls are painted the same tone, the form of the room remains intact, very affirmed if the tones 'hold the wall' (reds for example), very subdued if the tones break the wall (blues for example). The form of the room will be totally maintained, revealed, if the ceiling is painted white. If the ceiling is of the same tone as the wall, the impression is totally modified; from one categorical thing one moves to something very softened, calmed, entrancing: it is like being under a dome. I have closed up the space.

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344 This 'Third example' is absent from the hand-written version of 'Polychromie architecturale' and was added as the last page, written by hand, to the typed version.
But I can very well destroy the envelope of the four walls and break the ceiling. I can paint a warm tone upon the two walls which touch at a right angle and a cold tone upon the two other walls, or, paint a warm tone (or cold) three walls and a cold tone (or warm) upon the fourth. To link the fate of the ceiling to the unique wall, or on the contrary, to the three other walls and so on. In one word, of a square room, I can modify or accentuate the characters at will: these are the very resources of polychromy.

2. COLOUR CLASSIFIES OBJECTS.
Monochromy allows the exact evaluation of volumes of an object. Polychromy (two colours, three colours, etc.) destroys the pure form of an object, alters its volume, opposes an exact evaluation of this volume and, by reciprocity, allows one to appreciate in one volume only what one wishes to show: house, interior, object, it is the same story.
In the desire to modify the aspect, two opposed cases are presented: to massacre the volume, the form, to completely alter the notion of silhouette. It is camouflage that triumphed during the war: camouflaged ships, camouflaged aeroplanes, camouflaged cannons. (I have already pointed out above this principle in natural phenomenon: birds, insects, quadrupeds, etc. – defensive measures.) In contrast, the other case exists to make a classification, to establish a hierarchy, to make perceptible defaults or bothersome but inevitable complexities; it is to attract the eye to the essential, to what can give the sensation of purity, reveal the pure form; it is to proclaim one’s best intention, beyond tyrannical and fatal necessities of the plan, whose effect was to bring, to provoke an inevitable but evident turmoil. It is to classify, to define.

First example: Here is a hall. It contains a stair, a gallery; it is 5 m x 5 m; it is very small. How to make a vast and impressive room out of it? With architectural stratagems, we will look to ‘steal’ space from everywhere possible; by making the ceiling pass above a gallery containing the bookshelf; by rejecting outside a modest stair, but by arranging that the wall of the stair only makes one with that of the hall. This large reclaimed wall will be painted a light tone, white; we can see it well. But the plan of the house imposes the interior protuberance of a small courtyard; it is a large, cumbersome volume which draws the eye, which distracts from the essential, simple form that we would like to emphasise. The walls of this small courtyard will be painted a sombre colour, almost imperceptible, in absolute contrast to the white which will cover the envelope of the hall. Thus the eye is no longer drawn to this disastrous protuberance. It goes towards the white walls, this white spreads everywhere, as far as possible.

Second example: It has to do with a living room carved out of a narrow space of 3.5 meters, with a window enlargement at the back to the right and to the left, an opening on the dining room.
If this was all painted monochrome (white or blue, pink or green), the tumultuous attitude of the plan would strongly appear, the 3.5 meter width would be clearly revealed. Let us look for a subterfuge, let us plunge the mind into the
Villa La Roche, hall
imperceptible, let us create space by a useful contrast of colours and through their clever arrangement.

The base will be white; but we will paint two of the walls pale pink (clear burnt Sienna earth, another one opposite, pale green; the rest white, the ceiling white. Illusion is born; the walls are no longer facing in a regular way; the eye jumps from a pink surface to a green surface, to other white ones; the form of the room escapes.

In this small living room, we had built, with cement bricks, a chimney and compartments at heights of 75 and 90 cm; these elements useful for comfort make a spine that advances into the room and whose architectural volumes could be cumbersome. In addition, the smoke duct of the chimney joined to that of the central heating connect to it in full round.

Colour can break the unity of the volume: the smoke duct of the chimney is painted white. It is united with the white ceiling; it drowns into it. It no longer exists for the eye, except in its luminous aspect of a light cylinder, with the purity of its half-tones. The chimney and the compartments are painted pure burnt sienna earth which is sombre and which absorbs light; the tumultuous volumes are unified. This long sombre mass, violently opposed to the clear walls and very light ceiling, ceases to belong architecturally to the room. It has become fittings, similar to a piece of furniture. It is independent, it no longer encumbers: the colour has conferred upon it a new attitude.
Third example: Let us return to Pessac.

Many series of eight houses form quadrangular masses, alternately animated by façades aligned with the block, and by façades strongly set back behind a large balcony. Below the balcony, which is at the first level, there is a ‘storehouse’ outside the dwelling itself. Beside this cylindrical storehouse is an outdoor but sheltered laundry facility; behind the storehouse, still protected, one can eat outside. If the group of façades is thus eventful, it is because the plans of the eight grouped houses are staggered, inverted. This is a powerful architectural resource. Moreover, the promiscuities of proximity are avoided.

But the uneven mass of these groups of eight houses gives an impression of being too turbulent, violent, bristled, too sculpted. How to bring back the calm? By making out of this tumult, imposed by the plan, a light and limpid mass. By classifying the elements in presence, with colour. By only letting the diverse elements speak one after the other and without ambiguity. Through colour. In the first place, the exterior envelope – which constitutes a true smooth box, pure, precise – will be painted pure sienna earth. Let us be clear about this: we refer only to the enclosing surface, only what is situated on the same plane, in the same alignment, the ‘naked’ exterior, to use the professional jargon.

Then, all that is perpendicular to this brown façade, what provokes these violent recesses, will be painted white or pale pink. The cylindrical storehouse will be a quite sombre grey, to erase them.
The visual functions operate from this point on successively: 1) brown; 2) pink or white; 3) grey. It is classified; clear reading, ordering, serenity. Calm after the storm.

3. COLOUR ACTS PHYSIOLOGICALLY UPON US AND REACTS STRONGLY UPON OUR SENSITIVITIES.
It is here that the temperaments manifest themselves in the reactions which are their own fatality. An individual is organized on the basis of his own personal response, which classifies him, binds him, ties him to inevitable choices. A colour expresses very particularly this profound nature which is the core of ourselves. Colour is intimately attached to our being; perhaps each one of us has his own colour; if we often ignore it, our instincts are not mistaken.
In the field of an uncontrollable determination, astrology claims to bring explanations. For myself, during twenty years, in my work where colour occupies half of my day, blue seemed to command me: blue and green in echo. Thus, for some time, red appears more and more pressing, abundant, invasive: blue still, but red conquering. I know people organized around red. The other evening, a friend said to me: 'Personally, I am not aware I have colours.' I pointed out that, at his place, his paintings were predominantly green and saffron yellow; that his furniture was green, his table coverings green, his curtains green: 'That is right, he said, I had not thought about it.'
So you see that each of us goes instinctively to the ranges that are constant for us. This hypothesis drove me towards the invention of a colour presentation system which is the subject of this wallpaper factory catalogue.

One day, we painted the walls of the office of Mr Frugès, the apse and lateral walls a harsh white, and the rear wall, that which is the very face of the room, an intense red. Touches of pale blue animated the white-metal frames of the large window and some window accessories. Mister Frugès said to us: 'I like to sit opposite that wall.'

These cases could have ramifications as numerous variants, these examples could be multiplied. We are in full visual debate. We can cover the full range of diverse circumstances and stop at the innumerable manifestations of sensitivity, of invention, of fantasy. Everyone can devote his or her efforts to this. I only wanted to try to show that polychromy is the most animated and topical theme there is. A direct action of colour corresponds to a renaissance of vitality. (We can see by the publicity on the walls, in the city, outside of cities and in the countryside, through automobile publicity, in women’s fashion, in sport, on the beach, etc.) Colour expresses life. We can all be actors in this part. I have also tried to make understandable that there are reasons for polychromy, laws, just as there are for making a good plan, a beautiful section, according to the laws of gravity and requirements of the programme.

Everyone can be an actor in this manifestation of profound and instinctive imperatives.

But to play the part, there needs to be colours, pigments, binders, and brushes. And this is no small affair. Even on a construction site, there are the problems of a more or less qualified workforce, of supply of delicate colours, sometimes doubtful in terms of quality and tonality, problems of obvious discomfort (a construction site is freezing winter in the air draughts or oppressive summer; it is noise, dust, it is improvised).

This being said, I will be able to explain why I have accepted the offer to forge, for an industrial firm, a link between a diverse, differentiated and dispersed clientele, and a constant production, of perfect quality, which cancels all the material difficulties alien to the problem itself.  

SALUBRA makes wallpaper.

Up to this point, I was resistant to wallpaper. I only saw the obsession with confusing designs among the usual decoration. I smelled the architectonic forgery that allows the shameless fickleness. The mediocre quality of conception and of execution was contrary to all that I could research along the line of a new architecture. Wallpaper seemed to me to carry within it the very crimes of the first wave of mechanization, rubbish, pomp, bluff, deception. This refusal to use wallpaper, this heroic attitude, led us to the exclusive use of plain tones, executed directly on the wall with glue or with oil (more with glue than oil, for economic reasons), and we had in this way constantly put ourselves into the most difficult building circumstances.
Every defect of the plan showed up plainly and every construction defect was
evident. On the other hand, the small inevitable fissures of settlement, of
expansion or of contraction of the cement, were against us, like ruthless prose-
cutors. Now, in the reinforced cement house, fissuring still remains a problem.
Our attitude was not without reward, because, during ten years, this discipline
drove us to build not too badly and incited us to obstinately build well.
Just by chance, we received an offer from ‘Salubra’: heavy paper of excellent
fibre, covered by a machine-made oil paint, of an impeccable technique (constant
quality), the first architectural application of a machine to building painting.
Washable, elastic and even heat-retaining (this counts), ‘Salubra’ even kills par-
asites, and this is not to be ignored! My interest as a constructor being awak-
ened, I formally declared however that I would only use the plain papers. That
seemed perfectly possible to me. The colour ranges in the collections are numer-
ous, perhaps even sufficient. I looked at them more closely. The ranges were not
as adequate as they had seemed; the tones scarcely suitable to architecture.
Truly, the wall deserved more than that.
To begin with, I eliminated most of the pigment colours. I kept the ‘noble range’:
white, black, ultramarine, blue, English green, yellow ochre, natural sienna
earth, a vermilion, a carmine, English red, burnt sienna earth. And for each of
these tones, I researched, from the mural point of view, the most efficient val-
ues. For each colour (as I have already said) there are a few areas in which they
are very rich. With the brush or the spatula in my hand, I confined myself
exclusively to what I felt, without forgetting that Mr. Chevreul in his time, had
created more than ten thousand nuances!
In this way, I produced 43 tones.
I could, certainly, have more of them, but I do not wish even more variety.
These forty-three tones are gathered in a pattern book that one can browse
through and which offers successive sensations that are often very contrasting.
But, at the decisive moment of choice, the tones put one in a state of fatigue,
anxiety, totally deplorable nervous tension. To choose, one has to feel not suc-
cessively, but synchronically. To choose, one has to see what it is about and the
eye must be a convenient tool in the service of a deep instinct.
One has to make the task easier, eliminate the sterile fatigues (efforts of the
memory). One has to classify, to spread out a choice. The eye has to see! objec-
tively, truly.
It was thus about discovering the means by which the eye could be stimulated,
be able to judge, be able to compare, to differentiate, to appreciate; the way by
which the sensitivity of individuals, which is so diverse, could proceed to this
choice which brings satiation, which provokes an effusion. In truth, at this pre-
cise moment of choice, a destiny is being realized.
I thus renounced placing 43 samples in one book. I thought about creating
diverse atmospheres, where each corresponds to specific virtues or to specific
actions of colour, and to fundamental manifestations of sensitivity at the same
time.
Serene or happy atmospheres. I find that architecture must never be sad. These
atmospheres will be given by the repetition in three horizontal bands of three
different values of a same fundamental tone: blue, pink, yellow, grey or green.
Between these three bands, each of which has a different effect, there are two strips of fourteen other tones. The palette of colour that we now have before us is full of suggestions. It is a keyboard, and each of us will be touched by some chord or another.

In order to show the importance I attach to these atmospheres which aim to avoid that polychromy declines to the level mere decoration of fashion fabrics or objects, while the assignment is to determine the reality of the architecture of the wall, I thought it was good to give each of the ambiances a name which specifies, which indicates the intention, which expresses the gesture of the polychromy. I have named these palettes ‘Space’, ‘Sky’, ‘Velvet’, ‘Sand’, ‘Wall’, ‘Landscape’.

It is very subjective, I agree, but it is more than a simple mnemonic resource. I think that with these palettes, a great variety of solutions can be spontaneously offered. If one found oneself overwhelmed by the 31 colours on each palette, the two pairs of cardboard spectacles that accompany the collection make it possible to isolate either two or three tones against the background. Also by superposition of the two cardboard spectacles, one will also be able to isolate a single tone against two background hues. Then, the choice can become definitive.

I have however attached to these six fundamental palettes three other palettes that I have called ‘bigarrées’ (motley). One should not look here for order or intention, but content oneself with finding in it arbitrary meetings, curious,
sharp, perhaps even shocking contiguities.
We could leave architecture, and embark towards tapestry or the tumult of advertising ... This is not harmful! Everything is permitted to those who know how to choose.

Discipline is a virtue which comes late. It is an individual virtue which one earns by defeating oneself. As for me, I would hold it terribly against anyone who would claim, on the basis of a very personal discipline, to want to prevent me from making blunders.

Everybody has the right to make mistakes; liberty only constitutes slavery of the stupid or indigent people.

Having thus opened the locks, I could set the gate of the garden of temptation ajar and admit certain elements of pure fantasies, certain particular cases of fragmentary camouflage. I have established a few motifs. Inspiration: what would a painter who holds a brush in his fingers do, points, streaks or patterns at normal scale, at the scale of mural painting.

Here, the danger is unquestionable. Because the retina becomes overloaded and rapidly fatigued, and the mind too, and the search for originality can lead to severe misadventures. Besides, the very establishment of the collection has concluded the question. I had two kinds of stipples, oblique streaks, a diamond-shaped pattern. Five designs in total (and what simplicity!). 43 tones on the printing machine, five designs to work upon: the formula of combinations led us almost to the infinite!! Salubra has only produced a hundred motifs, selected with care. And out of all this infinite amount at my disposal, I have retained ... 10 designs! I have totally eliminated the oblique streaks, the diamond-shaped pattern. I have kept the two stipples and have limited myself to the calmest harmonies. For a passionate colourist, this is simply incredibly wise! I have hastily reclosed the gate of the 'garden of temptations'!

In order to give to this rapid study on polychromy a useful goal, I only have to confront the reader with two extremes: total monochromy or multiple polychromy, this one is even accentuated by the game of motifs. A friend exclaimed when seeing this collection under preparation: They are all going to be poisoned; we are going to endure the worst effects of polychromy! Who were 'They'? Those who are not wise, those who are of a weak character, those who cannot resist dangerous caresses, those who do not know how to dance on the tightrope, etc., etc. I answered: 'I am neither a nurse, nor charity sister, nor schoolteacher, nor policeman. If bad taste is run-of-the-mill, well, it will be a brilliant occasion to unveil it. Everyone has to bear their own sins!'

I conclude by repeating the previously quoted words of Fernand Léger: 'Man needs colours to live, it is an element as necessary as water and fire.'

In the bazaar and in the incoherence of wallpaper nowadays, I have made a selection guided by only architectural preoccupations. I do not believe in tapestry, because with tapestry one can make indifferently Louis XIV, Turkish or Primavera, and thus tell lies at every hour of the day. I believe in a wall that is animated with one colour. I have made it a component of the architectonic symmetry with the very power that is conferred to it by its dimensions and its proportioning, in geometry and in colour.

Examples mentioned during this study show that reasonable reasons form the
basis of what remains entirely attached to the field of architecture: to create for our satisfaction.
To create objects of satisfaction, is not this the very task of the architect? Indeed, there are many degrees in satisfaction: to each the degree that suits him and that is his own and of which he is worthy.