



Synesthesia



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Abstract:

The paper is conceived as a chain of images in a world dominated by images. Even if Juhani Pallasmaa in 2005 published *The Eyes of the Skin* offering a new way to interpret perception in Architecture, and Peter Zumthor suggestion to students in architecture is to build atmospheres, this paper deals with an ancestral way to communicate ideas (particularly compositional ideas) through symbols, evocations, traces of images, shades of memories.

Introduction

The colours interact with the human psyche.

"... I sometimes felt the soft chatter of the mixed colours: it was a mysterious experience; surprise in the mysterious kitchen of an alchemist".

Kandinsky [1] In Italian idiomatic phrases (and may be also in other language there are similar association of colours and feelings) we use to say: green with rage, white with fear, black resentment, a *fifablu* (something difficult to literarily translate, more or less blue cold feet or better blue fear). Then, there are the Black Man (terror of naughty children) and the Blue Fairy (hope of little Cinderellas). We express moods and temperaments by associating them with chromatic manifestations. We acknowledge a close relationship between colours and feelings. Studying the contribution of colours in compositional processes I have known that in some parts of the world, there is no mention of yellow, blue or red, like warm or cold colours, like in Western culture. Colours could be dry or wet, soft or hard, smooth or rough, opaque or shiny, deaf or loud, cheerful or sad [2]. The colours or related nuances are not important in themselves; it is significant the sensations that they provoke.

So, what colours is "The Scream" by Edward Munch? It is red streaked with yellow, like the tragic sunset sky behind the wax mask that represents it. The yellow, for its part, emits a sound comparable to that of an acute trumpet; it is the stain of bright colours contrasting with the central black fire of Kandinsky's painting "Impression 3 (Konzert)", inspired by a Schönberg concert to which he attended on January 2, 1911, in Munich. Sound is yellow Kandinsky [1], "The yellow sound", 1912, preceded by the stage composition "The yellow sound", 1908-09).

Architecture

The Mediterranean Architecture is white, with intense blue doors and shutters of the windows painted, like the summer sky. Blue is also a widely used colours in the Mediterranean area to dye the clothes, because-I heard that the blue tones move away the flies. We architects take for granted the beneficial effect of colours in interior finishing: we discover that the green or light blue improves cell regeneration by accelerating the healing process; that white in certain prisons often leads to terrible anxiety attacks, while blue in the eastern houses gives a pleasant feeling of coolness. In the workplace, accountants are better concentrated in dark green; moreover, many model-stables have blue walls because this colour increases the milk production [3]. In colours therapy, the blue colours treat stress.

In a society like ours, in which to see often corresponds with to know (while on the contrary the development of the child proceeds through a tactile and olfactory phase, which precedes the visual one), architecture, while addressing a prevailing attention to the vision, is nowadays experiencing its dematerialization substantially giving up colours [4]. The evanescent visions of icy glass architectures allow the combination with metallic surfaces and intensify their effect with the white colour, that makes the internal edges disappear and above all the walls-ceiling joint. White epiphanies to enhance the overthrow of the inside to the outside.

Like a Moebius strip, architecture conquers the fourth dimension by losing matter (intended as a physical element able to shape the limit or "the skin" of the architectural object), melting the spaces among them, sacrificing the sense of touch and that of sight, making them paradoxically coincide in their sublimation with the vision of

the absence of the limit itself. The gaze crosses transparent walls or multiplies images, bumping into its reflection that is produced by shiny and two-dimensional surfaces [3]. The architecture of the computer age experiments the Synesthetic potentialities of a kaleidoscopic and multisensory perception that goes beyond the synthesis of the arts [5]. This last was one of the main topics for the Modern Movement masters, who argued about the geometric boundaries of the architecture and drew walls, designed as opaque scenes, cropped, solid and at the same time abstract and allusive.

In the Iidabashi station of the Tokyo underground, Makoto Sei Watanabe sows trans-sensory clues that intertwine in a sort of interstitial oscillation between memory and physical sensation: part of the wall along the pedestrian walkway is treated with a texture borrowed from the Braille alphabet, to enhance the sense of connection of touch and sight. With the fingertips you can “read” on a metal surface, the phrase “wooden surface treatment” [6]. In this way two sensations overlap, or rather three: the sense of touch, that of sight and that of sight through touch. The knowledge that one has of the different characteristics of the materials and their sensory effects is translated into words, triggering in the mind a process of transferring information from consciousness to sensation and vice versa as in a “perceptual oxymoron”. The surface is not made of wood and you can feel on your fingers the cold and smooth metallic material that makes fun of us denouncing what is not [7].

Synesthetic is an allusive architecture, like the Monsoon restaurant, built in Sapporo in 1990 by Zaha Hadid, with the ice colour bar at the entrance, icy just like the cocktails prepared inside, a perfect image of architecture as petrified music; with the restaurant in the innermost part, enveloped in darkness, torn from above by a fiery red metal spiral band, an allegory of taste that transfers the familiar image of the domestic place of cooking food to the limit of the infernal metaphor of the sin of throat. Synesthetic is the architecture of the new Department of Philosophy at New York University, completed by Steven Holl in late 2007. For this project, from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theories set out in the “Observations on colours”, the architect takes the opportunity to experience the capabilities of light to modulate changeable colour send tactile effects crossing the white perforated metal sheet that unrolls in the large central void of an emptied building revived by the new white

“porous” staircase connecting the six floors changing direction to each level [8]. Synesthetic was the Dutch experience of “Material Experience”, the multidisciplinary and multisensory exhibition, curated by the interactive platform set by Material, which attracted more than 3,000 creative designers in the Netherlands to exhibit concentric objects and materials in the concentric rings which had to be touched, smelled, photographed, organized in information and disseminated on the web [9].

Conclusion

To conclude, we report the etymological meaning of the word, which sums up a perceptual phenomenon leading to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway [10]. Sometimes it is used as a rhetorical procedure that consists in associating in a single image two words or two discursive segments referring to different sensory spheres: Synaesthesia from the Greek *syn* = συν (with, together) *estesia* = αισθησις (perception), a contamination of the five senses in the perception of the perceptible. Synesthetic are those situations in which a visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile or taste stimulation is perceived as a distinct and simultaneous sensorial event. In other words, the metaphoric image of the compositional process in Architecture.

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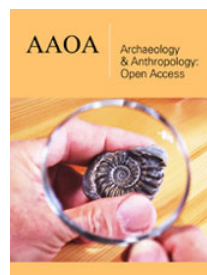
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