

CROSS [BREED] ING , PASSAGES & SEQUENCES.

For me, above & beyond any notions of structure or construction, architecture has always been about crossing structures and weaving volumes. Always on the brink of utopia, this art form allows us to invent a world of sensations and emotions by acting in the manner of a movie director who must put together sequences of differing atmosphere : scenes of violence or love, of action or contemplation... Architecture gives us the possibility of infinitely playing with constricted spaces (where one feels protected or perhaps oppressed) & wide open ones (where one feels all of a sudden free to do anything & strangely isolated) as if one were to link the density of the forest with the openness of the clearing , or the tight crack of a canyon with the horizon of the great plain. It is a fabulous game where all relationships are possible , where a vertical mass in levitation must be reconciled with the horizontal, anchored in the ground, where red comes to visit blue, where electric light relays the natural.

As requested, I will show you a built work and a project: a building , built in 1993 on the street called 'rue Oberkampf' in Paris & the master-plan for the 'Ottakring' quarter in Vienna, a competition won this year. (left-hand screen). These experiments belong to an approach within which crossbreeding & connecting are recurrent themes ; an approach where it is difficult to isolate a particular stage, building or project . Also, in parallel to these two experiments, I shall show others centered around the same themes. (right-hand screen).

At 'rue Oberkampf' I neither put up a façade nor divided a block into apartments, but simply attempted to connect a narrow sloping street , rising to the hills north of Paris, with a space allowing passers-by to pause, to stop for while. This project continues, in a very different context, the thinking sketched out at ' boulevard de Belleville'. The design focused on the notion of connection between the two Parisien spaces which are traditionally closed from one another: the realist universe of the street, such as painted by Balthus & that, surrealist, of the courtyard , some of whose characteristics (notably factory chimneys) may evoke the hallucination of a De Chirico. To the caesure, which suddenly relates these antinomic spaces to one another, replies the intervention of 'joker' elements which create the link, the spatial connection. Here, the two towers extend from the back of the plot to reply to the wide opening on the street, there a metallic turret reduces the fault in the city block.

This commission for an apartment building for young civil-servants also included a Post Office at street level. Rather than compose a base with this institutional program, I used it as an active partition from a loggia situated under the building & open to a courtyard treated as a real mise-en-scène or dramatisation of forms & volumes. In order to maintain the specific character of the courtyard, I suggested to the client a gallery of workshops which were not planned for in the initial program. Thus, on top of the crossing of spaces is superimposed a crossing of activities which strengthens & reinforces it.

The housing itself is composed as a series of spatial sequences. Thus, the apartment whose window frames the two towers appears linked to the exterior space.

The slope of the site allowed me to offer a sunken garden: as if, below the street, the building was founded in the real ground, the real earth. As if it passed through & linked several sedimentary strata. As one plays with traditional urban typologies or forms & colours, one can compose with more generic categories such as 'nature' or 'the built', on condition that they be articulated within a coherent discourse, on condition that each building, even the most humble, assert itself as a genealogy of architecture.

In my projects, I attempt to conceive of specific atmospheres for night & day. Most buildings disappear at night or are lit so inappropriately as to sometimes do them injustice. At 'rue d'Oberkampf', the building appears differently at night. The garden, in shadow by day, is suddenly dramatised ; the darkened forms of the cut-outs loom overhead. With its aircraft landing lights, it forms an unlikely runway in total contradiction with its daytime appearance.

The question of artificial light is approached right from design stage, as these models for the

concert hall in Blois show. Architecture is no longer summed up by the 'magnificent play of volumes in natural light'. As Fernand Léger had already understood in painting after visiting New York, more & more, in our non agricultural societies where activity is no longer confined to daytime, artificial light is becoming the reference...

For the Ottakring in Austria, I was able to apply, at the scale of a quarter, the ideas which I had until then only developed in one-off buildings, built or simply projects (Oberkampf, Belleville or the Courts of Justice in Narbonne...). In this site, both residential & tertiary, making up a real small city of leisure (with restaurants, movie theatres, shops) I looked to cross extreme spaces. Thus, very calm, silent zones cut across busy & very lively strips, bucolic spaces are crossed by high dense blocks. Without ever falling in the trap of figurative representation or pastiche, I designed units which retain the spatial characteristics of the most remarkable spaces in Vienna (the Courtyard of the Karl Marx Hof, the baroque nature of the Schönbrunn park, the street widened into a square of the Graben, or the monumental markers which punctuate the Ring). The calm courtyards, the noisy esplanades, the covered galleries, the gardens are crossbred, mixed...

This is what we can see on the plan & the axonometric. Furthermore, each crossing is punctuated by an architectural event. This strategy of weaving spaces, forms & different activities, (germinating in this project from 1985, whose objective was the reconstitution of dislocated suburban fabric) I picked up again & refined in another context : the master plan for a 4 kilometre by 150 metre strip, linking Athens to the Pireas, which was presented at the exhibition called 'la ville en éclats' (the shattered city).

Crossbreeding of nature & building, passing from day into night , implanting an hallucinogenic space into a traditional space: within the sensorial experimentation of this mixing (hustle-bustle) of forms & colours; within the experimentation of this crossbreeding & these offshoots ; from these oppositions & their reconciliation, the sensitive body of contemporary man is to be found. In the era of the portable 'phone, the TV, the Web & the home computer, architecture has inherited the theoretical function of testing, of defining this archaic feeling body which is more & more indescribable, more & more ineffable. This body, which new technology appears to want to occult, hide, erase. Because it is for it & by it that architecture exists, architecture can not be founded outside it & remains condemned eternally to make form & fiction around the possibility of its presence .