

Color and Colorimetry Multidisciplinary Contributions

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Under the Skies of Gianluca Peluffo's Architecture. Color as Design and Landscape Strategy

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Abstract

Between 2015 and 2016 Gianluca Peluffo (Peluffo & Partners Architecture) realizes three architectural works where color is the key through which architecture fits into the landscape. These are three very different buildings in terms of size, program, form and materials. Peluffo's approach departs from those authorial color interpretations recognizable in terms of a coherent and systematic "language," such as the interventions of Sauerbruch - Hutton or Jorrit Tornquist. The elementary school in Zugliano in the province of Vicenza, - the first project analyzed - reconstructs through the inclined planes of its roof, the profile of the mountains on the horizon. A solution only apparently mimetic, which instead, places the work halfway between heaven and earth. Thus, the building declares its belonging to the context, but also reinforces its formal characteristics. The IULM extension in Milan, - the second project analyzed - in a suburb that is now almost a center, seems to want to dialogue with its surroundings through the use of materials typical of the built city. Then, suddenly, a red tower and an explosion of emerald green ceramics. Like a traffic light in the fog. In contrast, the headquarters of the BNL - BNP Paribas Real Estate group, - the latest project in this series - is located near the Tiburtina station. In an open, large, iridescent, luminous place, this building with mirrored surfaces is deformed, like a horizontal Brancusi, or a Boccioni painting, to gift and dynamically multiply of the sky of Rome. Gianluca Peluffo in these three projects has, on the one hand, the ability to construct three architectural figures based on color, on the other hand, he demonstrates a marked aptitude for descending into the context by developing on each occasion a different chromatic design strategy. Three inventions then, three ways of making the architectural work dialogue with the context, three exercises in specificity, in which the environmental, atmospheric dimension, identifies a type of "specific color." Three projects that dialogue with three different landscapes, the natural landscape of the Venetian foothills, the post-industrial urban landscape of Milan, and the infrastructured suburbs of Rome. Three landscapes, under three different skies, three atmospheres through which to decline the color of architecture.

Keywords: architecture, landscape, sky, Peluffo & Partners Architecture, architectural language

Introduction

Between 2015 and 2016 Gianluca Peluffo (Peluffo & Partners architecture) created three works where color is the key through which architecture fits into the landscape. These are three very different buildings in terms of size, program, form and materials. Three divergent projects, alternative to each other. It is in this aspect that this paper on the use of color in architecture is interested in exploring. Gianluca Peluffo's approach in fact departs from those authorial color interpretations recognizable in terms of a coherent and systematic "language", such as the interventions of Sauerbruch-Hutton or Jorrit Tornquist.

The elementary school in Zugliano (Femia and Peluffo, 2015) in the province of Vicenza, - the first project analyzed – reconstructs through the sloping planes of its roof the profile of the mountains on the horizon. The chromatic covering of the roof, in metal slats that vary in tones from gray to blue, is visible from the surrounding plain and the slopes of the Asiago plateau. A solution only

apparently mimetic, which instead places the work halfway between heaven and earth. Thus the building declares its belonging to the place, but also reinforces its formal characteristics.

The IULM extension in Milan (Femia and Peluffo, 2015), - the second project studied – in a suburb that has almost become a center, seems to want to dialogue with its surroundings through the use of materials typical of the built city. Bricks, exposed concrete, glass, plaster, suddenly transfigured into a red tower and an explosion of emerald green ceramics. Like a traffic light in the fog, this project explores the signaling value of color.

In contrast, the headquarters for the BNL – BNP Paribas Real Estate group (Peluffo, 2016), - the last project in this series – is located near the Tiburtina station in Rome. An open place, with a sudden loss of density related to the railway infrastructure, where there are no presences of archeological or historic weight. In an open, large, iridescent, luminous place, this building with mirrored surfaces is deformed, like a horizontal Brancusi, or like a Boccioni painting, to give and enhance the dynamic multiplication of the sky of Rome through a color, or rather colors, that take on a metamorphic significance.

The heterogeneity of these three projects is intended to support the hypothesis that color can be used as a very versatile “material” that fuels creativity and through which it is possible to develop ever-changing design strategies that promote the specificity of the architectural work.

These strategies, understood as mediating solutions between architectural form and landscape, also allow the sky to be recognized as a structural chromatic element of the perceived landscape, and to give color a dimension at the “environmental” scale.

Finally, the reflection on these different strategies and the interpretation of the spirit of places through color allows for a reflection aimed at distinguishing between different and disjointed elements of architectural work, such as personal poetics, technique as transmissible knowledge, and authorial language.

School complex in Zugliano

“Building a school is a public event”, designing a building that is to welcome the future of the community is an important and symbolic occurrence.

In designing this new school complex in Zugliano, Peluffo imagines a school able to communicate with the territory and the landscape with an action that is both protective and protected.

The architectural Project (Prinsi, 2013) starts with the horizontal line of the building lot and the irregular profile of the surrounding mountains and hills. The building does not wish to disappear into the landscape but declares itself in its belonging to the context, highlighting and enhancing its natural features (Fig.1).

The school is fairly simple in its plan design, due to the specificities of the territory of the province of Vicenza, but also thanks to the morphology of the territory present in the lot and the absence of surrounding buildings. These premises have allowed for a geometric compositional simplicity of the plant made up of a square with a central courtyard, with the 15 classrooms, the offices, the canteen and a gym that open up around it. The simplicity of this geometry does not translate in section where the continuous roof is made up of roof pitches or sails, with all different inclinations to resemble the surrounding mountain peaks in order to create a formal connection with them, with the hills and with the Alps (Peluffo, 2015b).

The courtyard is characterized by the expressive nature of the light orange wood, used for the tree like pillars, also evocative of the context with their expressive formal image of branches that hold up large leaves, the pitches that project shadows onto the patio and enhance the feeling of intimacy of the closed space.



Fig. 1 – The Zugliano school complex. On the left: the building inserted in its context. Center: detail of the roof's cladding. Right: the inside view of the school's courtyard.

The sails facing the sky are made up of semi reflecting colored metal with different shades of blue to match and reflect the different colors of the sky during the day but also during the changing seasons. The initial idea for the roof was terracotta tiles, given the importance Peluffo associates with the ceramic workshop with which he makes most of the maquettes for his projects (Peluffo, 2023). The idea was discarded, however, due to budget problems, and the terracotta was replaced with metal (Fig. 1).

The role of the central courtyard is the heart of the school, understood as both the common and connective point. It represents the importance of experiencing freedom during the pause from the didactic activity. Along with the blue casing of the roof, the walls of the courtyard are painted in vibrant colors varying between red, orange, pink, and blue to achieve a fun and recognizable ambient for the children and the staff utilizing the space (Fig. 1).

In a short amount of time the school has given identity to the territory but also has become a reference point for the students and their families.

Iulm in Milano

The next project is the new IULM (*IULM_Milan / 5+1AAA*AlfonsoFemiaGianlucaPeluffo, 2014) location, to be the main site of the Polytechnic school of Design and the IULM University Club. The headquarters are located in Milano Famagosta, a periphery that is slowly turning into a new center for the Italian city.

The new complex is made up of a building that within its 20.000 square meter lot constructs solids and voids with the same hierarchy. The building is organized through a 9 stories tower and a 600 seats auditorium connected through the north and south wings along with a large multi-functional exhibition space (Peluffo, 2015a).

In a similar way to the Zugliano school, in plan the compositional layout seems elementary and simple, but in elevation it is possible to capture all the variations that create the rich and complex relationships with the intermediate spaces.

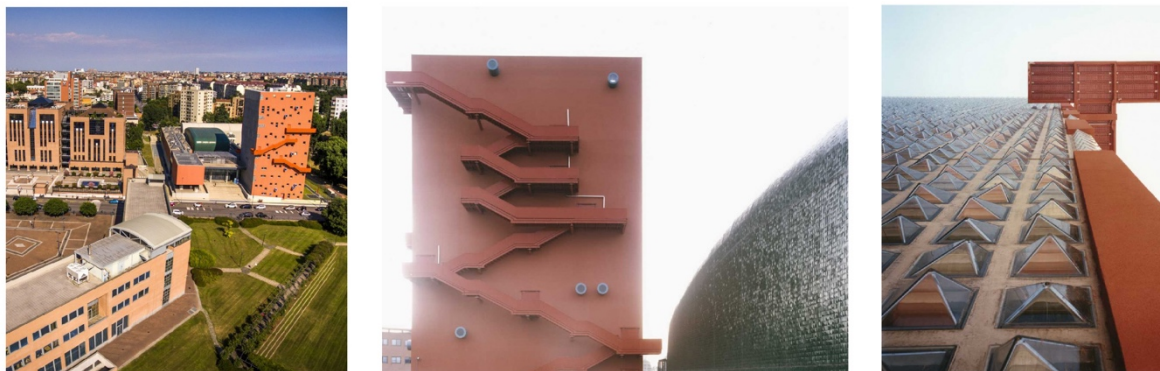


Fig. 2 – On the left: the IULM campus and the surrounding city. Center: the tower and the auditorium. Right: Detail of the diamond shaped glass inserts in the north façade of the tower.

The tower with the laboratories is the heart of the project, three of the facades facing the city are clad in red-orange plaster and are lined with a continuous ramp of stairs that twists on its facades as an angular but unique promenade (Fig. 2). The metal of the promenade has been painted red to match the color of the plaster. This choice of material serves a double purpose, it is first of all an homage to the industrial past of this part of the city of Milano and the presence of the with its red-orange color of bricks, but most importantly its color wishes to become a sort of traffic light (Peluffo, 2023), always standing out against the often grey and foggy sky of the city. The third façade is lined with irregular pyramid shaped glass cement bricks (Fig. 2), reminiscent of the diamond-pointed bugnato in use in Italy in the second half of the 14th century. Because of the “pointed” glass the surface of the façade appears fairly opaque, but it lights up at night, or once again, in case of the typical gloomy climate of Milano. The tower in fact has been specifically clad to suit the Milano weather, allowing the tower to both stand out and fit into the context.

At the center of the complex’s solids and voids, almost embedded, is the 600-seat auditorium, clad in green ceramic tiles (Fig.2), conveying disorientation and surprise. The building with its vibrant color represents an important junction of the complex that provides spaces not only for the university but also for the surrounding companies and the general neighborhood.

The complex as a whole is characterized by a clear emphasis on its volumes but especially on its chromatic aspects: the strong horizontality of the auditorium coexists with the verticality of the tower, just as the bright green of the auditorium juxtaposes well with the warm brick tones of the plaster.

Bnl/Bnp Paribas Headquarters in Rome

The Bnl/Bnp Paribas building represents and signifies the spirit of the city of Rome and especially its sky. The sky of Rome and its light is one of its myths, and as such it belongs to everyone. The building is located near the Tiburtina station and the area is characterized by an unusual low density for Rome, mainly due to the presence of the railway infrastructure, whose presence is underscored

by the railroad cistern by Angiolo Mazzoni, that has constrained (but also allowed) the building to break and deform around it.

The railroad then is representative of another myth, that of progress. In this sense one could say that the building finds itself in dialog with two myths: the Roman sky and the futurist and dynamic force of progress (Peluffo, 2023).

The building is inserted in a peculiar context, defined by the traces of the rails that were once separating two major urban areas, but has now achieved a central role in reuniting them. The lot is narrow and follows the longitudinal direction of the railway and for this reason, the two long facades face two very different urban situations, for this reason the building plays a defining role in its two-sided urban image (Peluffo, 2016).

The east façade of the building faces the Pietralata neighborhood, where the urban context is slow and still, and the continuous façade is flat and clad with alternating glass panels, reflective and transparent, and opaque diamond shaped ceramic tiles. This façade is characterized by the large black external staircase and the Mazzoni cistern, framed by a large breach of the building that also allows it to be seen from the west side.

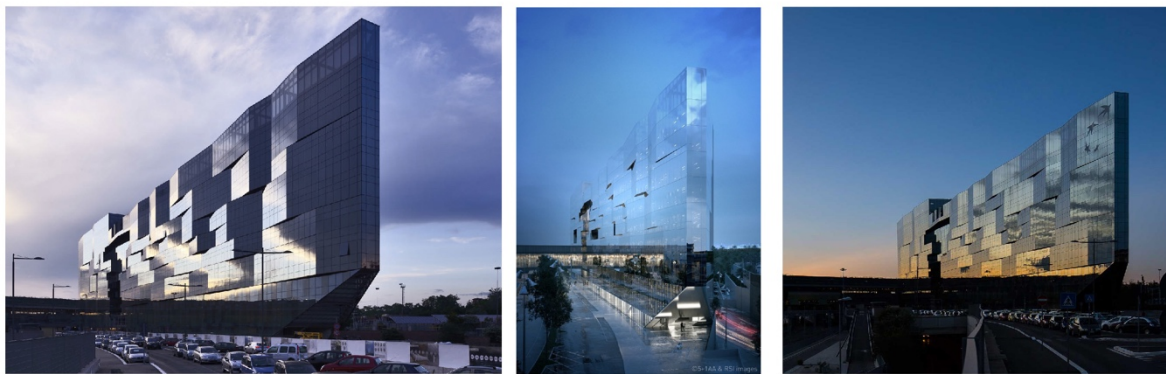


Fig. 3 – West façade of the Bnl/Bnp Paribas building at different times of the day.

The west façade (Fig.3), directly facing the railway and the train station, where the iridescent effect of the curtain wall materials is amplified by a regular sequence of indentations and protrusions, designed to be viewed from the coming and going fluxes of trains departing and arriving. Depending on the incident radius of the sunlight beams, the building absorbs, reflects, beams, and, after dark, it almost dissolves and blends in with the context.

Finally, in its southern part, the building become thin, it tapers into a bold cantilevered prow (Benetti, 2014).

It is possible to say then, that the Bnl/Bnp Paribas building dialogs with the context in a way that is not necessarily direct or explicit, but it is made up of perspective references with the urban landscape of Rome.

Conclusions

Gianluca Peluffo in these three projects has, on the one hand, the ability to construct three architectural figures based on color, and on the other hand, he demonstrates a marked aptitude for immersing himself into the place by developing on each occasion a different chromatic design strategy.

The school in Zugliano uses the gray and blue tones of the sails of its roof, not so much to blend into the green plain at the foot of Asolo, but to build a dialogue, not only with the landscape at the local scale, but also at the territorial scale. Architecture through color dialogues with an enlarged landscape, with sweeping, panoramic views, where mountains stand out against a blurred sky, crossed by statuesque, solid, three-dimensional clouds like those of Mantegna (Peluffo, 2023).

IULM in Milan, on the other hand, through the timbral color of the red plaster of its tower and the green ceramic surface of the auditorium, dialogues with a diaphanous urban atmosphere. Milan's sky is made of fog, mist and hazy condensation, which do not hide the sunlight, but filter it by refraction. The result is a sky that has a volumetric, dusty texture, with a strong charge of abstraction and estrangement that recalls all paintings of Mario Sironi (Peluffo, 2023).

The Bnl Group headquarters, on the other hand, through its mirrored and oblique facades, recognizes an almost monumental value in the dimension of the Roman sky. The result is an architectural solution that is simultaneously immaterial and plastic. An architecture that feeds on the chromatic generosity and luminous richness of the skies of Rome like a futurist work by Tullio Crali (Peluffo, 2023).

Three interventions then, three ways of making the architectural work dialogue with the context, three exercises of specificity, in which the environmental, atmospheric dimension identifies a type of "specific color".

Three projects that dialogue with three different landscapes, the natural landscape of the Venetian foothills, the post-industrial urban landscape of Milan, and the infrastructure suburbs of Rome. Three landscapes but especially three different skies, three atmospheres through which to decline the color of architecture. Although the subject of different solutions, however, an interesting consideration emerges, the sky is always understood as an element of chromatic connotation of the landscape. In other words, the landscape no longer corresponds only to earthly elements, it is expanded. Through Gianluca Peluffo's projects, we understand that the landscape in order to be read and interpreted, must be observed along with its complementary element, the sky above it.

Moreover, in conclusion, once analyzed the projects and identified the strategies of landscape insertion, it is also possible to distinguish some aspects that concern design in general and that can be useful in reading and interpreting works of architecture, such as poetics, technique and language.

The first aspect starts from the assumption that design development involves an authorial issue. That is, there is a poetic dimension, of personal sensibility, which in the cases examined corresponds to the identification and choice of tone or agreement between architectural work and environment. In the cases presented, the "perceived surrounding", this "feeling of place", both in terms of suggestions and impressions, takes the form of an interpretation of the sky as a significant character of a place.

However, it is also possible to recognize a second methodological component related to the design technique. The relationship with the sky is established through the construction of precise and conscious chromatic relationships, from time to time established by analogy or contrast, by affinity

or difference, nourished also through the dialogue with works of a pictorial character extracted from the repertoires of memory (the sculptural classicism of Andrea Mantegna, the metaphysical surrealism of Mario Sironi, the futurist aero-painting of Tullio Crali).



Fig. 3 – Left: Andrea Mantegna, ceiling of the *Camera degli sposi* (The room of the spouses). Center: Mario Sironi, *Paesaggio Urbano* 1922-1923 (Urban Landscape). Right: Tullio Crali, detail of *Passione tra le nuvole* (Passion in the clouds).

Poetics and technique also have a bearing on architectural language, that is, on the communicative capacity of the forms brought into play by the author. In particular, the architectural intention in the projects presented is not formalized and exhausted only in the plastic terms of the composition of three-dimensional figures. The figures that emerge from the projects studied, these ordered systems of signs, acquire meaning, become appropriate and specific with respect to a place and a moment, thanks to the use of color.

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