

Log

Winter 2012
Observations on
architecture and the
contemporary city

30°45'N, 1°17'E

Dar El Assad, Algiers, Algeria

Discovered by conflict, Dar El Assad, the facade of the mid-20th-century building in the Dar El Assad neighborhood of Algiers, not far from the medina, is a strong proof of the impact of modern life on both traditional structure and modern architecture itself. The efficiency of the building by laundry, sheets of plaster, and uncountable dates (only so many, when you would rather) reminds us that facades are malleable and that as a response to modern life, architecture is as often a mask as a statement of principle. Yet, reflecting the measured nature of urban dwellings, the new facade, or mask, of satellite dates is the strongly authentic as it shows a right, Dar El Assad, which translates as "Land of Happiness," was first built by Europeans for European. Now it is in many Algerians, but it is also, like so many other populations, controlled by the world by the same technologies of modern communication that challenge ideas of representation in architecture today.

18

\$11.00



When a work is at its peak in intensity, proportions, quality of execution, in perfection, there occurs a phenomenon of unspeakable space.

— Le Corbusier

On the 50th anniversary of the "occupation" of La Tourette (it was started in 1952 and work continued while the Dominican brothers set up shop in early 1959) the austerities of the priory seem etched in the mind, no less because the site is also much visited and it is possible today to rent one of the friars' cells. A sensation upon completion, Le Corbusier and Iannis Xenakis's masterpiece

near Lyon resides in an agricultural landscape that oddly formalizes by antithesis its brutalist sensibility, while the origins of that rigor lie in both the Dominican aesthetic and Le Corbusier's own somewhat manufactured "hermeticism" (heroic isolation).

La Tourette/Le cinquantenaire 1959–2009 (Paris: Bernard Chauveau Editeur, 2009) is an equally concise presentation of this virtuous economy of architectural form and lived experience. The book features the work of three photographers (Philippe Chancel, Stéphane Couturier, and Pascal Hausherr). Each

LE CORBUSIER, LA TOURETTE.
PHOTO: © PASCAL HAUSHERR

documents a different aspect of this "economy" — the restoration work (Chancel), the chromatic and geometric gestures (modular) of the walls and screens (Couturier), and the "unspeakable spaces" of the entire ensemble, from exterior pastures and forest to the extreme modularity and singularity of the cells arrayed atop the priory (Hausherr). The convent was formally inaugurated in October 1960 and sits today astride the "fault" that marks the collapse of modernism and all that came afterward. — Gavin Keeney