

Valerio Olgiati or how simple complexity can turn.

(Architectura No.43, April 2006, page 47)

Maybe all there is to say about Valerio Olgiati is:

He knows to get to the essence of what he's doing.

A presentation of his projects could easily lack the regular data about square meters, construction year and so on. All this is simply irrelevant. His projects are nothing but what they are: a school. A house.

A school. A house.

Free of any useless detail – until the very essence of their function.

Free of any shape searched only for the sake of shape.

Brought to the extreme of their simplicity just to become anything but simple.

Simplicity born out of words. Olgiati designs by discussing with his collaborators. Buildings are born straight out of ideas. Sketches? No. A conversation. Then someone goes to a computer, draws a plan, a section, a printer's buzz somewhere. Yes, this is it.

Time to design. You don't necessarily need a lot of time to get a high-quality project. You just have to be a good Architect. This took –has been taking – already enough time. This, yes it takes time.

Olgiati refuses to be labeled as a regionalist. He doesn't find his buildings born out of the rocks nearby, or from his own connection to his native land. He doesn't think to be less qualified to build in Bangladesh than in canton Graubunden. Disorienting for who thinks to find in his building the abstracting of a strong genius loci? Absolutely.

Olgiati insists; he doesn't "abstract" anything. To abstract the features of an existing reality is for him a low-level exercise. The search is deeper than that. The result comes from further down the way.

Rational and irrational. Rational is simple. Predictable. Analyzable. Left alone, it is as boring and cold as it is fundamental. And then, what is more rational than introducing irrational into it? An angle is unexpectedly deformed and the cold concrete box gets a vibration. A light. Is talking.

Concrete, simply concrete. Real, alive.

Important, the quality of construction work? Vital, the careful detailing? No. It's just the way Swiss build. A good project may well be badly built; you just have to know in advance. To expect it. To transform a problem in advantage.

Inimitable. Olgiati doesn't mind imitators. The one thing that may be imitated is the process leading to a certain result. Result unique by its own nature. So, why mind imitators?

Just a wish, for Valerio Olgiati: to build more. To keep simple projects great and complex. To bring his lesson to an even higher level. We would all benefit. Not least himself.