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**Galletti & Matter** c o l l e c t i o n o f p l a c e s  
buildings & projects

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**Collection Archigraphy Lémaniques.**

This collection, which simultaneously covers historical and theoretical fields, pursues the objective of publishing the completed works of contemporary architects, and thus incorporating documentation for the founding of a critical reflection relating to the evolution of architectural practice in Switzerland.

**Collection Archigraphy Lémaniques** is directed by Bruno Marchand.

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A visit to an architectural practice often holds many surprises. Particularly for those who seek to understand, in all its complexity, the work of an architect or a duo of architects from the initial concept through to the principles by which their creative working space is organised.

An office visit allows the privileged observer to dwell on a number of clues such as the arrangement of the room, its general layout, the images on the walls, the presence (or not) of models on the tables, etc.

This brings to mind the striking sight of Le Corbusier's office in the old convent in the Rue des Sèvres, where his employees worked at drafting tables arranged in a regimented, monastic row, a manifestation of the master's austerity and his need for control. Also, even more impressively, the offices of Eero Saarinen, cluttered with gigantic models that allowed him to achieve a better understanding of form, space and light in his projects.

When I first visited the offices of Olivier Galletti and Claude Matter, I was immediately struck by the great many samples of building materials adorning the conference room. They use these when they are discussing the various material and constructional aspects of their current, past and future projects.

One might feel that there is nothing extraordinary about this: the preoccupation with construction materials is currently a theme central to architectural thinking, since *"the identity of buildings, and hence that of their architects, is often linked with the architects' ability to discover materials and to suggest inventive ways of constructing with them that speak of texture and perception"*<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of Galletti and Matter, however, this preoccupation does not seem to dominate their projects to the exclusion of all else, as their main focus is on the relationship between architecture, landscape and the surrounding region, in a constant quest to forge links between the complementary levels of a project.



School and gymnasium, Fully



Espace Gruyère, Bulle

The two had already confronted these questions during their studies at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, under the guidance of Professor Martin Steinmann and Professor Luigi Snozzi respectively. There they learnt to consider region and city as compulsory points of reference for a project, and to strip architecture to its bare essentials by taking a very rigorous approach to space and construction.



Gymnasium and multi-use hall, Renens



Middle school, Collombey

Galletti & Matter have understood this regional and architectural debate and have demonstrated great talent in their response to it, winning many competitions for their work. This has allowed them to realise some extremely ambitious buildings at a very early stage in their careers, such as the school complex in Fully (1991–1995), the Espace Gruyère conference centre in Bulle (1993–1998), the middle school in Collombey-Muraz (1997–1999) and, more recently, the multi-use sports hall in Renens (2000–2002).

In view of what has been said above, it might seem inappropriate to take the theme of "attention to materials" as the main focus of this article. And yet, is the choice of materials (their texture and their colour) not a determining factor in the dialogue between a piece of architecture and its context?

Does the meaning of a building not derive, in part at least, from the fact that the materials create a relationship with the context? And from this perspective, cannot the same material assume different meanings when considered in different contexts?

These questions, pondered in relation to the architecture of Galletti & Matter, cause us to reorient our point of view and to reflect that the two architects' profound knowledge of materials and will to innovate go hand in hand with a marked interest in region and landscape, and that their choice in the matter of materiality does indeed assume several meanings, the principal one of which remains the relationship with context. In an attempt to better define this relationship between materials and context, I shall restrict myself to analysing two of their creations – the dwelling for two families in Lausanne, and the middle school in Collombey-Muraz – which make radical use of two particular materials, reinforced concrete and industrial glass. Two ordinary materials that have featured widely in the construction of modern architecture, although in the context of contemporary architecture their constructional and expressive possibilities have certainly not been exhausted.



Middle school, Collombey



Two family houses, Lausanne

#### ***Walls of reinforced concrete for a contextual analogy***

A retaining wall of reinforced concrete, slightly curved, leading us up towards the doorways of two houses; a conspicuous wall of reinforced concrete that retains the earth of the garden further up the slope and is adjoined by other walls, also made of reinforced concrete but serving a different purpose: that of containing the domestic spaces of the two abutting houses, set into the slope at right angles to one another. These are one's first impressions of this *opera prima*, born, as is often the case, from a family's commission: the building of a home for two families on a plot of land in Lausanne, a sloping plot punctuated at its apex by a mansion house dating from the 1930s.

The project required much thought as to the positioning of the building within the site, and the enormous potential for view and contemplation. The two houses were therefore positioned together as a single building realised in two separate, adjoining parts and incorporating two major themes: that of the base platform – serving the purpose of retaining the earth and delimiting the original garden to the property – and that of the view towards the lake and the Alps. The architects' choice of material, reinforced concrete, contrives to confirm and materialise these purposes. As the architects maintain, its use is *“not an aim in itself, but rather a means to organise the desired spaces and views. In this case, it was the obvious choice to hold back the earth, but also because of its archaic quality, which marries well with our vision for this type of dwelling as a place where one puts down roots, a place to which one returns continually”*.

Reinforced concrete used to characterise a place and to anchor a specific, domestic way of life there: this affirmation, with its Heideggerian echoes, is at some remove from the heroic connotations of a material presented by the historian Sigfried Giedion in his 1928 work *Bauen in Frankreich Eisen Eisenbeton*<sup>2</sup> as one of the principal foundations of the new architecture. A material which, according to the Modernists, has the capacity to take on inventive new forms and to meet the requirements of the emerging ways of life induced by social changes between the wars<sup>3</sup>.



Two family houses, Lausanne



Mies van der Rohe, *The Concrete Country House*, 1923

However, in his enthusiasm for this material with its “artificial chemical composition”, Giedion failed to draw attention to a paradox: the fact that, during this period in history, reinforced concrete plays only a very small part in the elaboration of a specific aesthetic (brutalism was to come later, in the 1950s), architects seeking rather to achieve an abstract expressive ideal that was clean-cut and consisted of smooth, purified surfaces with no apparent weight. Among the few notable exceptions to this predominant tendency one can cite *The Concrete Country house* designed by Mies van der Rohe in 1923.

Although this project was not realised, some magnificent drawings by Mies have survived, showing stretched facades made of raw concrete, broken up by various openings. Their texture and their resonance in the light are brought out with touches of charcoal. Non-supporting facades surround internal spaces made fluid by the sporadic nature of the enclosing structures, also in reinforced concrete, allowing use to be made of cantilevered slabs, corner windows, and long thin openings at base level.

Mies does not restrict himself to exploiting the spatial, aesthetic and technical potential created by the use of open plan and reinforced concrete. Taking account of the monolithic nature of the material, he works its volume like a sculptor, carving from a compact, homogeneous block, with “the skin forming both the roof and the walls”. Thus he echoes Giedion’s affirmation that reinforced concrete is a “composite material” capable of shaping “buildings that crystallise into a single rock”<sup>4</sup>, and he establishes a way of working derived from the plastic qualities of reinforced concrete, which he describes in these terms: “I cut openings in the walls where I needed them, to frame views or to illuminate spaces”<sup>5</sup>. The materiality of the Lausanne houses is part of this heritage, the concrete serving to unify the separate parts and giving the whole a

monolithic appearance broken up only by openings of various shapes (square, long and thin, on the angles) which frame one’s gaze in a different way each time. But the elementary and essential use of concrete, although it may have similarities with Miesian architecture, is still very much indebted to the teachings of Snozzi<sup>6</sup>, and to the recognition of historical references within the project. From this perspective, the reduction of architectural language – a process which paradoxically attaches great importance to surface and to the way the material is used – has something of the nature of an attempt at creating unity between the new and the old. “By analogy, the buildings make explicit reference to the construction methods already present on the site”<sup>7</sup>, through a contemporary, abstract expression which thus weaves links with a context in which are intermixed, on the one hand, memory and history (the garden walls and the brickwork of the master house) and on the other hand, the real and the everyday (the view and the landscape framed by the concrete).

As these houses were being built, work was just coming to an end on a school complex in Fully, the pair’s first major project and the outcome of a competition won by them in 1991. Here again, the reference is at once both contextual and historical, as witnessed by the dialogue that the building opens up simultaneously with the rock, the vineyards and the existing school. As for the positioning of the building, it was set very precisely on the remains of an old dyke, and the rocks extracted from the dyke were



Luigi Snozzi, Kalman house in Brione s/Minusio, 1976



Two family houses, Lausanne

used in the construction of some of the walls. However, the architects rather left this approach behind them when, some years later, they won the prize for the Collombey-Muraz middle school, a simple, compact construction that gave them the opportunity to experiment with a different material: industrial glass.

### **Walls of glass for an imaginary context**

At first sight, one's main impression of this middle school is of walls of translucent Profilit glass, oriented along the line of the Rhône Valley; two walls of glass rising three storeys high, which constitute the two main facades of the school and which "filter the light of the Valais across their entire surface"<sup>8</sup>; whole glazed surfaces, "dotted" with windows that seem at first to be arranged in a random fashion; glazed facades that underline the presence of the wooded hills in the surrounding landscape by their brightness and their lustre.

At Collombey-Muraz, the glass takes on an imposing power and almost solid physical presence quite at variance with the qualities of lightness and transparency that make it, along with reinforced concrete, one of the construction materials most representative of modernity. One example of this modernity which remains an icon is the Glass Pavilion realised by German architect Bruno Taut for the Cologne Werkbund Exhibition in 1914, an edifice celebrated in the prose poem *Glasarchitektur* by Paul Scheerbarth, published the same year. But it would be wrong to maintain that the essential good fortune of this material is limited strictly to its qualities of transparency. In his poem, Scheerbarth (who also considers reinforced concrete to be an ideal material, although unfortunately not very aesthetic) advocates "the adoption of a glass architecture which lets the light of the sun and the brightness of the moon and the stars into dwelling places, not just through a few windows but also through the greatest possible number of walls – walls made entirely of glass (...)"<sup>9</sup>. Thus he makes a clear distinction between openings fitted with panes of transparent glass, intended essentially to allow one to look through them, and double walls of translucent glass which he would like to see used to form the outer shell of buildings, with the main purpose of filtering the light.

Scheerbarth desires to control the intensity of the light; he aspires to muffled, introverted ambiances, bathed in changing light filtered through glass screens. In fact his intention is "not to obtain a perfect outlook, but rather to educate people as to how to receive light, how to diffuse it and distribute it generously". He seeks to bring out "a new kind of photosensitivity, an ability to take in and make best use of the phenomenon of light that would become an ability and a skill possessed by all, a source of acute and subtle physical and moral pleasure for everyone (...)"<sup>10</sup>. Pleasure also engendered by the effects of artificial lighting, generated by electric lamps arranged between the walls or inside the rooms. Twinkling light that "will make the whole glass house into one great lantern, blazing in the night through summer and winter like fireflies and glow-worms"<sup>11</sup>.

This last quotation, taken from *Glasarchitektur*, could be illustrated to striking effect by images of the Collombey school at night: the glass walls of the two main facades lit up like a great lantern, a vast light source in the darkness of the plain. In this building, Galletti & Matter play with the two different properties of glass: its transparency and its translucency. Thus they make a clear distinction between the vertical openings, through which one gazes out, and the expanses of the glass walls composed of vertical panes of Profilit attached to aluminium cross-beams, which on the contrary contain one's gaze.



Bruno Taut, *Alpine Architecture*, 1919



Gymnasium and multi-use hall, Renens



Middle school, Collombey







Glasshouses

The relationship with the site is present right from conception. The form of the building, its orientation, corresponds to the rough outlines of the landscape, consisting of the horizontals of the Rhône plain and the mountains. This relationship is reinforced by the arrangement of viewing points, strictly controlled and differentiated by the shape of the openings: vertical windows, at different heights, in the classrooms, like paintings reflecting the contrasting shades of the vegetation on the hills; horizontal slits on the landings to give a better idea of the breadth of the valley; and lastly, random openings positioned to frame the view of the solid mountains in a picturesque and striking way.

But through the medium of the glass and through its use, the architects set this direct relationship aside to introduce another level of discourse: now it is the glasshouses dotted about the plain and illuminating it at night that serve as a model, the qualities of the ephemeral being transposed into buildings that are institutional and, by definition, durable. Thus the use of glass harks back to a context which is at once real – the glasshouses are indeed present in the Rhône Valley – and also imaginary, since they correspond to this general “mythical background” against “which the architects delineate their work”<sup>12</sup>; as it happens, the plain in its original state, serving its agricultural and horticultural vocation, to which the architects make reference by their use of glass.



Gymnasium and multi-use hall,  
Renens



#### **Textures: working to the limits**

Concrete, used to root a domestic way of life in a place laden with history; glass to create analogies with utilitarian buildings: in both cases, the material is used to exalt the viewpoints, to manage the supply of light and, at the same time, to give the building a meaning that is in keeping with the context into which it is placed.

After Collombey-Muraz, others of the pair’s more recent projects have reintroduced the same dissociations of the outlook and the light, the window and the expanse of glass. In the gymnastics hall at Renens (2000–2002), the openings in the concrete plinth are cut out apparently at random, while the main light, lateral and zenithal, is diffused by an enclosing structure of Profilit covered in polycarbonate. The principle here is that of dissociation of the outlook and the light, governed by complementary materials. In other projects – the multi-use hall and library in Collombey (2001–2004), the Collège de la Carrière in Crissier (2003, still under construction) – the concrete is prefabricated, adding a touch of pragmatism to a discourse on materials that becomes increasingly complex in its quest for other meanings.

Among this diversity, however, one again finds the same interest in materials – not in a constructional sense, concerned with their structural potential, but in the sense of the constitution of a surface, a texture. This is working on the limits, on those enclosing structures, the expressive force and the ability of which to arouse emotions depend upon the spirit of the materials, which in turn seems to reflect another spirit: that of the places that Galletti & Matter hold in such affection.



Middle school, Collombey



Prefabricated elements,  
Collège de la Carrière, Crissier



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- 1 M. C. Loriers, "Matériaophilie", *Techniques & architecture*, no 472, 2004, p. 77.
  - 2 S. Giedion, *Building in France, Building in iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (1928), Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.
  - 3 See also on this subject C. Simonnet, *L'architecture ou la fiction constructive*, Les Editions de la Passion, Paris, 2001, pp. 22-35.
  - 4 S. Giedion, *Building in France, Building in iron, Building in Ferroconcrete* (1928), Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p. 66.
  - 5 Mies van der Rohe, "Bauen", *G*, no 2, 1923, p. 1.
  - 6 E. Lapierre, with C. Chevrier, E. Pinard, P. Salerno, "Entretien avec Aurelio Galfetti, Luigi Snozzi et Livio Vacchini sur le béton en tant que matériau de construction et mode d'expression", *archithese*, no 2, 1986, pp. 11-14 and 32.
  - 7 I. Lamunière, P. Devanthéry, "Tout bois, tout béton, oui mais... Deux réalisations de Brauen & Waechli et Galletti & Matter". *Faces*, no 25, 1991, p. 37.
  - 8 G. D., "Olivier Galletti et Claude Matter. Ecole secondaire Collombey, Suisse", *amc*, no 105, 2000, p. 42.
  - 9 P. Scheerbart, *L'Architecture de verre* (1914), Circé, Strasbourg, 1995, p. 29.
  - 10 D. Payot, "La société barbare de Paul Scheerbart" in P. Scheerbart, *L'Architecture de verre*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
  - 11 P. Scheerbart, *L'Architecture de verre*, p. 64.
  - 12 E. Lapierre, with C. Chevrier, E. Pinard, P. Salerno, *Architecture du réel, architecture contemporaine en France*, Editions du Moniteur, Paris, 2003, p. 33.

## Galletti & Matter: a serene architecture

Pierre-Alain Croset

I first met Olivier Galletti and Claude Matter in 1987, in Luigi Snozzi's design studio at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne. They were bright students,



Town hall, Monthey

belonging to a very talented generation; yet there was nothing about them to suggest that soon they would have won several major competitions and begun to create a body of work that would achieve great significance within only 15 years: 21 buildings realized out of a total of nearly 100 projects. Compared to others of Snozzi's most outstanding pupils, they seemed to be almost "withdrawn": in fact their reserve, their discretion and even their politeness hid qualities of rigour and simplicity that were very soon to become the principal qualities of their architecture. It was thanks to these qualities that an international jury – which included Álvaro Siza and Aurelio Galfetti – awarded them first prize in the competition to design a town hall for Monthey (1989). This major success, coming shortly before they graduated, provided them with the necessary basis upon which to open their own practice, without actually guaranteeing that the project would be realised. Following this dazzling start, I had the

opportunity to meet them again as a member of the competition juries at Martigny (1989) and at Monthey (1990, 1991). Later I discovered through various publications that, despite their youth, their work possessed a solidity and maturity that quickly won much admiration in international architectural circles. Firstly, their dwelling for

two families in Lausanne, designed in 1987 and built in 1992, was selected in 1993 for its obvious topographical and tectonic qualities as one of the 20 finalists for the prestigious Andrea Palladio architectural prize, an award specially for architects under 40 years of age and boasting a particularly eminent jury (Francesco Dal Co, Rafael Moneo, Manfredo Tafuri). Secondly, a monograph about the Collombey-Muraz middle school was published in a special issue of *AV Monografias*, devoted to Swiss architecture (no. 89, May/June 2001, "Materia Suiza"). The editors of the journal took the opportunity to use a close-up photo of the building's glass facade to create a curious photomontage representing a kind of visual summary of the issue's contents: against the apparently neutral background of the Profilit panes, the windows are shown as framing not panes of glass, but samples of materials characterising the facades of some of the buildings most representative of the latest trends in Swiss architecture. Thus one recognises for example the Vaduz museum (Kerez,

Morger & Degelo), the Swiss Embassy in Berlin (Diener & Diener), the St. Jakob stadium in Basel (Herzog & de Meuron) and the Vrin abattoir (Caminada).

However, this fragment of "typically Swiss" facade is not in any way representative of the work of Galletti and Matter.



Andrea Palladio Prize



AV Monografias

Their architecture in fact expresses its major qualities in its relationship with the urban and geographical context, and consequently cannot be confined to an image of the object taken in isolation. Thus it resists the excesses of a certain manneristic tendency in most recent Swiss architecture to express itself in a fetishistic love of materials and in a kind of falling back on questions of pure constructional aesthetics. This tendency seems to favour the rhetorical figure of synecdoche – the part to represent the whole, the material to represent the object – to the detriment of the quality of relationship between form and function that has traditionally characterised the ethics of modernist architectural design. The fact that the issue of *Arquitectura Viva* is

structured according to a categorisation of objects by material – concrete, wood, glass, metal – seems to tie in with this reductionist tendency. To Galletti and Matter, however, the choice of a material is not an end in itself. Concrete, wood, glass and metal have all been used in turn to suit different briefs and to dialogue with diverse contexts; this demonstrates an open, anti-ideological and even pragmatic attitude towards the question of the materialisation of a project. Concrete – a homage to their master Luigi Snozzi – thus characterises the dwelling for two families in Lausanne, giving substance to the idea of building the base platform for the master house. Wood is an integral part of the context of the Espace Gruyère fair and conference centre in Bulle – a physical presence in the neighbouring sawmill, a natural presence in the landscape that forms a backdrop to the town – and thus it plays a part in connoting the rural character of this “cathedral for cows”. The glass used in the Collombey school, and the metallic outer shell enveloping the spaces of the gymnastics hall, imply a more abstract relationship with the geographical context: placed in the open countryside of the Rhône Valley, the expanse of glass and the perforated sheet metal lose any local connotation and become a statement of universalist modernity.



Two family houses, Lausanne



Espace Gruyère, Bulle

### ***The happiness of children***

Like all good architecture, the buildings of Galletti and Matter resist the immediate seduction of photographs and reveal their most secret qualities only when one actually visits them. The materials mentioned above involve different registers of perception: some years on, it is possible to remember concrete for its roughness, wood for its smell, glass for its luminosity. What memories will be retained by the children who fill Galletti and Matter’s schools? Of the middle school in Collombey, memories will no doubt remain of the particularly brightly lit classrooms, the framed views out over the plain and the mountains, the generous expanses of the corridors. The children at the Fully primary school, on the other hand, will remember the happiness of break times spent playing on the steps of the covered playground, in the shade of the soaring rock; and of running between the sculptural lanterns that occupy the schoolyard. At the Saillon primary school, their finest memories will be of the central space of the schoolyard, and in particular of the great wooden canopy from which one can admire the view of the old village.

The schools of Galletti and Matter have not forgotten the great functionalist lessons of Duiker, Beaudouin and Lods, Terragni or Neutra: “air and sun” penetrate from all sides, while great attention is however paid to what is today a major concern, the energy costs, in response to the very strict demands of the Swiss standards. The Collombey facade is the most successful in this respect, and since its construction Galletti and Matter have continued to experiment with innovative constructional solutions dictated by the ethics of sustainable development.

When one visits these schools, however, what strikes one the most is the particular way that they not only enhance these quite exceptional geographical sites, but also integrate fragments of existing architecture and improve them by creating a new context around them. In Saxé, the new building contrives by its extremely precise positioning to enhance the old school at the border of the village; but most importantly, the excavation work and backfilling skilfully change the topography in such a way as to create a new relationship between the rock, the school and the rich sequence of the external spaces. In Saillon, the brief of creating



Middle school, Collombey



School and Gymnasium, Fully



Primary school extension, Saillon



Primary school extension,  
Saillon



Library patio, Collombey



View from the swimming  
pool to the patio,  
Collombey

a modest extension (comprising only four classrooms) is brilliantly interpreted as an opportunity to redefine the pre-existing school complex: on the one hand, by giving it a new facade of a more urban character, defined by a stone “brise-soleil” that carries on a dialogue with the stone houses of the old bourg in the distance. On the other hand, despite the limitations of a meagre budget, the architects succeed in enhancing the internal schoolyard by making it a place that brings together the different elements of the old part and the extension, where previously all dialogue between the architecture and the context was lacking. In Collombey, the new middle school building redefines the relationships between the different parts of the pre-existing school complex: the covered porch, looking like a great table placed between the new wing and the old buildings, forms a new entranceway along the length of the football pitch that gives structure to the urban composition of the various minimalist “boxes”. Two years after the completion of the new wing, Galletti and Matter won the competition to create new infrastructures for the school in 2001. This gave them the opportunity to integrate the new library and a second gymnasium in a very skilful way that ultimately reinforces the urban function of the covered porch. Thus the quality of the intervention can be gauged by the architects’ ability to create meaningful relationships between new and existing parts. On a visit to the school complex one comes across several places that take one completely by surprise, such as the small patio area created between the existing swimming pool and the new library: a real secret garden, containing two fine trees, onto which the fullheight sliding glass doors of the library can be opened wide. The patio catches a very attractive light, filtered through the vegetation, which enhances the internal spaces of the swimming pool and the library.

#### ***Creating intermediate spaces between town and country***

On several occasions, Galletti and Matter have demonstrated great skill in the way they have enhanced some magnificent sites: the precise framing of the views of the landscape, the discretion and simplicity of the new spaces, the precision of the positioning. These are all characteristics of the Saxe and Collombey schools, and also the dwelling for two families in Lausanne, so that the new architecture establishes a relationship of appropriateness with the landscape. The Collège de la Carrière in Crissier, currently nearing completion, confirms the topographical sensitivity of the architects, who exploit the possibilities of a sloping plot to best effect. On the one hand, the positioning of the gymnasium and the wing of classrooms at the base of the slope reduces the visual impact of the school on the landscape; on the other hand, the great lime tree that already existed on the site is not only preserved, but made the founding newel of the design, with a square built around it to give access to the library pavilion. This square, delimited by a portico that opens onto a large beveled terrace above the wing of classrooms, has a character all of its own, neither truly urban nor truly rural: it is a public space of a new kind, a perfect solution to the need to create places for socialisation in the residential areas that are gradually taking over the fallow farmland around urban conglomerations. Galletti and Matter make intelligent use of the fact that it is possible to build schools in Switzerland without perimeter fences: they exploit this to create a great freedom to wander round the building, and in the case of the school in Crissier they



Collège de la Carrière, Crissier

make best use of a public footpath that crosses the site. This same principle of freedom to wander round a public building characterises their interesting design for a village hall in Ballaigues, set in an orchard on a slope. The orchard becomes the urban space connecting the car park at the top of the slope, the terrace outside the foyer of the multi-use hall halfway down and the new square at the bottom. The architectural, or even sculptural treatment of the volumes is also significant: the large sheet metal roof that envelops the whole building dialogues with the traditional village roofs, yet at the same time asserts a discreet monumentality that connotes the public dimension of the architecture.

Galletti and Matter are interested in reinterpreting certain typical elements of traditional rural architecture in a resolutely contemporary architectural language. However, they do not apply this interest only in a rural context. In Renens, in a peripheral urban site marked by the presence of a park with large trees, the two volumes of the gymnasium hall and the multi-use hall of Les Pepinières are designed as two elementary “boxes”, shrouded in a skin of glass and metal, which take their inspiration from the architecture of rural barns to create a vast intermediate space beneath the roof, significantly reducing the building’s energy costs. As in the projects analysed above, the positioning of the two “boxes” in the site takes skilled advantage of the slope to make best use of the pre-existing park as a space connecting the different entrances of the gymnasium hall in the lower part of the park and the multi-use hall in the upper part.

Thus rural architecture is used not as a formal reference in the work of Galletti and Matter, but rather as an ethical model for a “way of building” inspired by the principles of economy, simplicity and respect for the site. The architects’ ability to use the technical innovations in contemporary architecture to best effect is thus made to serve their conviction that the architect’s profession involves a precise social responsibility: that of constructing reference places for the public life – schools, town halls, village halls, covered markets – while striving to enhance the natural and the built-up landscape, and at the same time to respect the new conditions of sustainable development.



Gymnasium and multi-use hall, Ballaigues



Gymnasium and multi-use hall, Renens

## Strategy and planning/ pragmatism and imagination

Olivier Galletti – Claude Matter

This inventory gives us an opportunity to pause, to look back over the works we have accomplished. At first sight, the various projects described may seem fundamentally different to one another. The theme that they clearly all share is the continual quest to create buildings that bring out the intrinsic qualities of each location. In each of the projects, this fundamental quality is the fruit of our first thoughts, our initial conceptual choices.

After our studies, when our first project was built, we found out how difficult it is to give life to these initial ideas. Although we thought that we could rely on these premises as the basis for a series of decisions that would give substance to the future building. We understand that these concepts remain abstract without wishing to discover all they hold. At the centre of the study therefore it is an approach which starts by listening and understanding a process of abstraction capable of revealing the properties of a place, a function and a building.

At this stage the project takes on a life of its own as one steps back to let the hidden energies of the initial sketches come forth.

Developing a project is to us the equivalent of diving into the instant of “doing”, of allowing oneself to be guided by the will, the breath of the project, by its inevitable contradictions, without wishing to surmount them in a perfectly unitary whole.

In a section of “La Promesse” speaking of detective stories, Dürrenmatt offered us a clearer understanding of this attitude patiently applied:

*“You don’t try to grapple with a reality that keeps eluding us, you just set up a manageable world. That world may be perfect, but it’s a lie. Forget about perfection if you want to make headway and get at the way things actually are, at reality, like a man; otherwise you’ll be left fiddling around with useless stylistic exercises. (...) I know very well what a dubious bunch we all are, how little we can accomplish, how easily we make mistakes; but I also know that we have to act anyway, even at the risk of acting wrongly.”<sup>1</sup>*

So our way of tackling the project remains open-minded. The initial abstraction of the concept does not seek to resolve all the problems; it gradually allows itself to be contaminated, enriched by the many unknown quantities inherent to any construction. At each stage of the project, some of the problems are knowingly left unsolved; their resolution is kept for a later stage, a different approach.



Middle school Collombey, construction and model

For example, in the school project in Collombey, the initial idea of a vertical framing of the views in the east and west facades became richer to take account of the architectural and technical problems. The search for solutions which aim to solve technical problems such as integrations of solar protection, natural ventilation via windows which open or the integration of translucent insulation up to a maximum height of 2m in profile glass modules, opened up a direction which offered a solution to the architectural problem of plastic

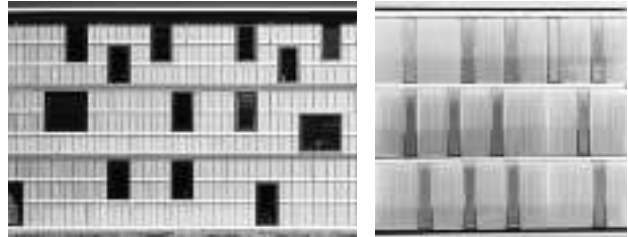
discontinuity of translucent elements which was posed by the initial idea of a floor to ceiling window. The new solution integrating shorter windows reinforces the plastic unity of the envelope and creates the language of the building. Thus the work is not confined to the single vision of the initial concept. It has fed on the history of the project, the possibilities connected with the different ways of realising it. In an age where craftsmanship is no longer the reality of the building site, the project takes shape on the basis of the installation of numerous prefabricated elements. Borrowing,



moving, assembling and diverting fragments of technologies that are often heterogeneous, the architect's constructive invention then no longer follows the same process as the engineer.

It flourishes along a path that approaches that of the "Bricoleur" by Lévi-Strauss in the quest for a dialogue with the project:

*"...The poetry of the 'bricolage' also derives above all from the fact that it does not limit itself to accomplishing or executing; it 'speaks', not only to objects, as we have already shown, but also through objects: telling us, through the choices that it makes between limited possibilities, about the character and the life of its author."*<sup>2</sup>

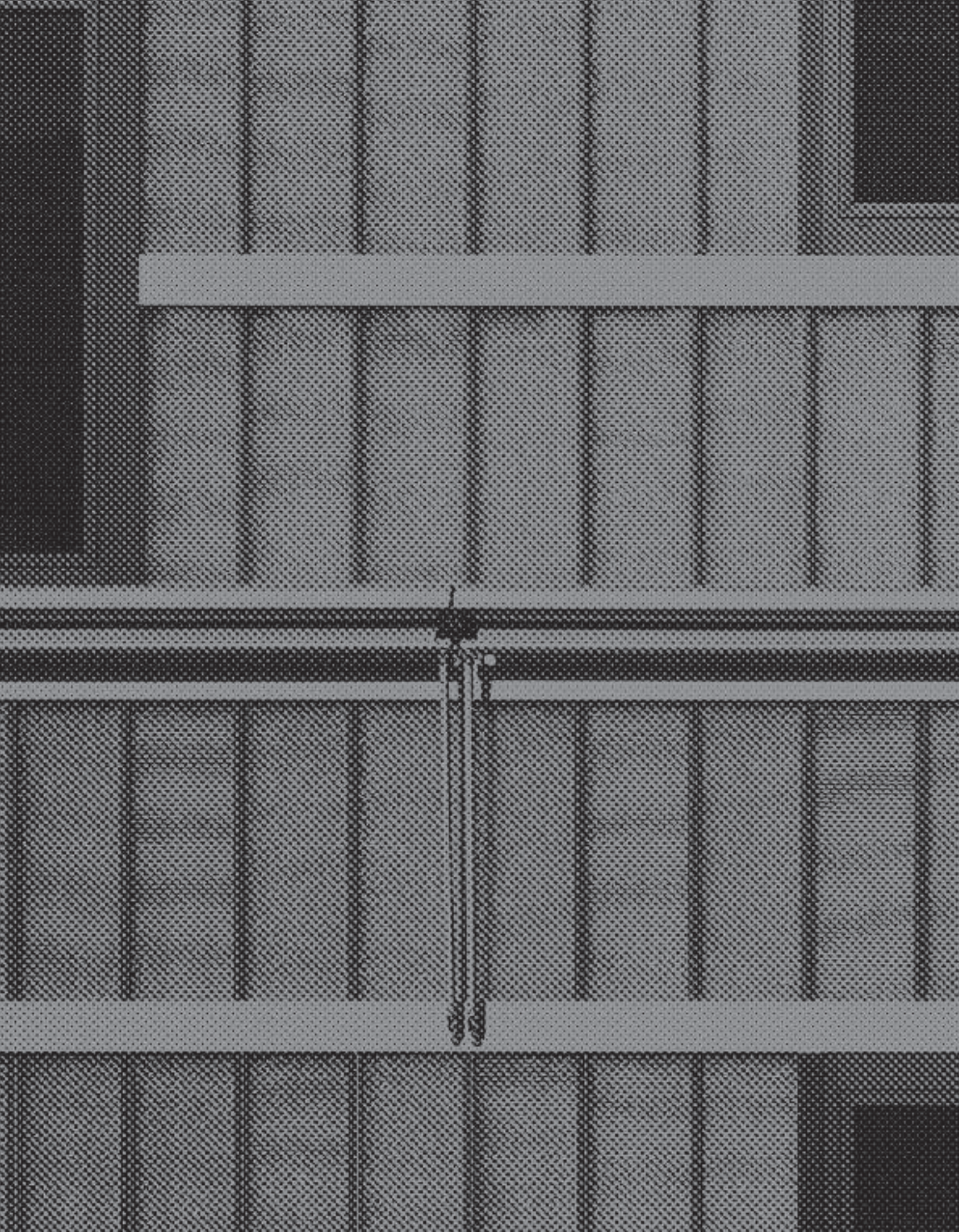


Middle school, Collombey, construction and model

1 Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Pledge*, Penguin, 2000, p. 9.

2 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974, p. 35.







**Place watching**

*Project*

*Realisation*

Middle school, Collombey

1997

1999

Primary school extension,  
Saillon

2000

2003

Family dwelling,  
Fully

2004

Housing, Delémont

1998



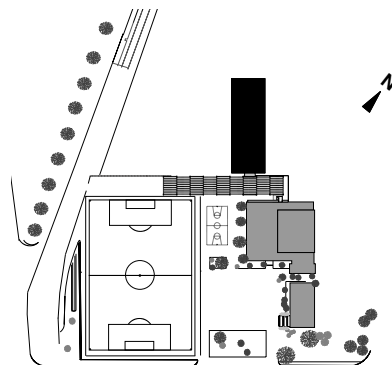


The site was already built up with a primary school, a gymnastics hall, a swimming pool and a day nursery.

The project reorganises the whole school complex on either side of a covered schoolyard. This constitutes a central backbone to which all the elements of the complex are grafted. The middle school building is positioned at right angles to the covered yard, along the line of the valley, enhancing the fundamental characteristics of the site:

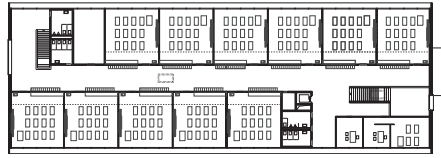
- The vertical windows facing the slopes accentuate the features of the Valais landscape in succession: the plain, the mountain, the sky.
- The long windows facing the valley accentuate the specific nature of a glacial valley: its width, the horizontality of the ground, the power of the mountains bordering it.
- The vertical windows of the east and west facades are integrated into a system of Profilit glazing with integral translucent insulation. This type of glazing filters direct sunlight and gives

a gentle, even light at all times. The sun protections are provided only to prevent the building from overheating in the summer period; the rest of the year the sunshine provides thermic gains. This solution offers optimal lighting of the buildings with a central corridor typology and ensures excellent energy efficiency.

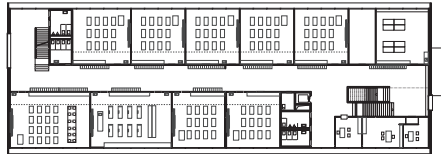


Site plan

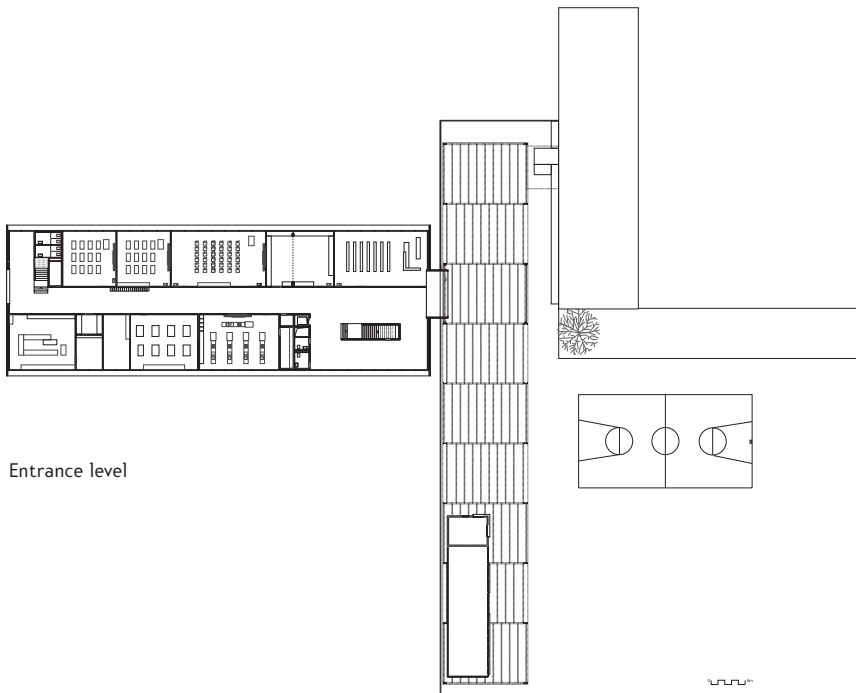




Second floor level



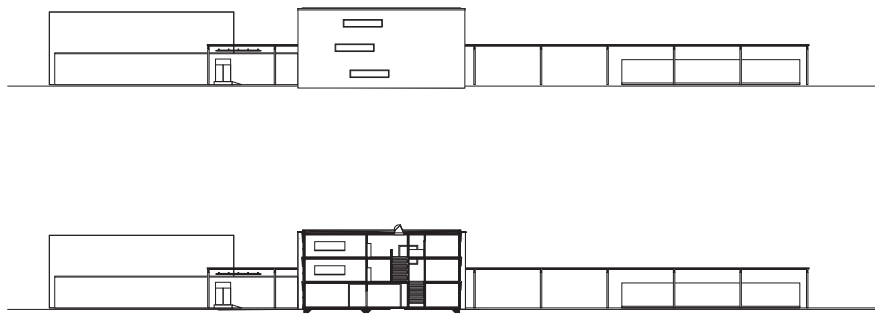
First floor level



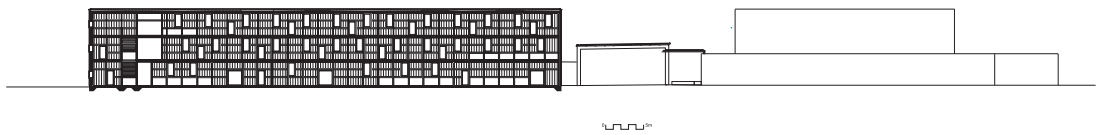
Entrance level







North facade and cross section



Long section through corridor







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