



Naked poetry

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Any valuable work of art stands in contrast to its own times. This is the distinction between artworks that can be called poetic and works that can't. The latter try their best to ride the tiger of the current moment, and in so doing they even try to run ahead of it, getting inevitably devoured. Architecture, the really modern one, as such devoid of modernist propaganda, not only struggles against its own times but, like T.S. Eliot's poetry, maintains it intends to pacify it. This is what I feel looking at the magisterial villa Valerio Olgiati has built for himself in the Portuguese countryside. A fence, a garden, a construction of rooms ringed in by an eccentric corridor: primary gestures trying to belong to a timeless architecture, one that is evocative yet already well known to that mysterious precognitive being inhabiting each and all of us. In taking the distance from its own times, this work points to a possible future. The contemporary system of architecture is already and definitively bipolar: on the one hand the thoughtless and elbowing supporters of a decomposed, coreless form, constantly after the new for its own sake, invasive and performance-driven. On the other those who know that what has been will always be, because such is the human condition. A weak state, in which we feel as if we were thrown into the world (Heidegger) and looking for a shelter, a sanctuary. Olgiati's bare structure conveys the idea of such sanctuary, which is valid today, in an ancestral time and in the future. It is an exposed *buen retiro*, conceived to preserve the intimacy of its inhabitants and at the same time what one could define, quoting Simone Weil, their social solitude. The new in what is already known, an alchemic operation that transmutes substances yet lets them remain themselves. Let



us take for example the villa's plan. It is clear that the key connotative element is the corridor that unfolds among the rooms like a corridor of lost steps: without it, without its "waste", the effect would be quite different. The same holds true for the splay towards the sky Olgiati imposes to the walls of the enclosure. A choice that might as well look like a whim, while instead it allows us to realize, in the unveiled section of the roof, that we are before a modern construction, where reinforced concrete is brought to the limit of its plastic capacity. As Novalis wrote about two hundred years ago: «in giving to the ordinary a higher meaning, to the finite the appearance of the infinite, I make them romantic». If we replace the adjective romantic with modern, as after all Baudelaire suggested, one then sees appear the meaning and the newness of Olgiati's work.