Therme Vals

EDUARDO OLIVEIRA
Vals is a small village, with just over one thousand people, located in the canton of Graubünden in Switzerland. It is laid on the valley carved between two ravines, one on the north and the other on the south.

Stone is the common material in Vals, from the mountains to the roof tiles and walls of houses. Broken, rough, smooth or polished, the materiality and the different scales of grey attracted Zumthor early.

The formal language of the thermal baths had in mind the avalanche protection galleries and the concrete dam at the Zervreilasee. The baths reflect the essence of the dam: stone holding water inside. Inside of dams we can find spaces which are hard and strong, fighting the forces of the water and the mountain.

The underground aspect of the baths has its reference upon the stone quarries found throughout Vals.

The materials can be summed into three: Valser quarzite slabs, metal (brass and iron) and obviously water. The fusion of metal and water can be found on the rusty remains dripping down the walls in the corridor leading to the changing rooms.

The organization was thought out like a stone quarry, huge massive blocks of stone divide and organize the surrounding spaces, but it’s all illusions: the space is a continuum and the massive blocks actually hold different spaces inside of them.

The thermal baths act like a platform, partially underground and breaking the slope of the mountain.
There are two kinds of light sources: vertical and horizontal. The vertical ones illuminate mainly the pools while the horizontal ones offer additional light and a view to the landscape.

The entrance corridor offers us the sound of dripping water while we head to the changing rooms. The light slits on the ceiling always follow us, making its presence while keeping the space very dim.

Another presence is yet invisible. The sound of water and people, is reflected, reverbed, echoed again and spread across the baths.

Horizontality is the main force, just occasionally broken by the brass railings.

The outside pool adds two more elements: vapour and landscape. The strength of the mountains fading behind the mist.

References and drawings from the book “Peter Zumthor Therme Vals” of Scheidegger & Spiess

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THE STONE ROOF TILES OF THE TRADITIONAL HOUSES OF VALS

DAM AT THE ZERVREILASEE
TRANSVERSAL CUT THROUGH THE MAIN BATH

PLAN OF THE MAIN FLOOR:
CYAN - MAIN BATHS 32º
RED - CALDARIUM 42º
BLUE - FRIGIDARIUM 16º
PURPLE - SOUND STONE AND SOUND BATH 33º
YELLOW - FLOWER BATH
LIGHT BLUE - FOUNTAIN
GREEN - RELAXING ROOMS
LIGHT RED - UTILITY SPACES AND STEAM BATHS
EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE MAIN FAÇADE

INTERSTITIAL SPACE
VIEW OF THE ACCESS STAIRS AND LIGHT SLITS
OUTSIDE BATH IN WINTER

THE MAIN INDOOR BATH WITH THE BLUE VERTICAL LIGHTING