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A SUBTLE MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Claudio Gobbi's photographs portray interiors, public spaces, devoid of life. They belong to a tradition of analytical examination that has brought photography closer to the world of art, as in the work of artists such as Candida Höfer and Hiroshi Sugimoto, or which sees architecture as a silent landscape, as in Gabriele Basilico, to mention only the most obvious references.

The point here is not to trace a genealogy of the practise, but to draw attention to the interest shown by recent generations of artists and photographers alike in a modern archaeology of forms and ideologies, a desire to treat recent history as a depository of collective beliefs and recurring themes to be unearthed and examined in the light of day. It is an approach that runs right through the work of both European and American artists, uniting the post-modernist sense of appropriation with a fresh attention to the forms of the past as fossils of a specific and unique memory. A sensitivity of perspective (focussed in particular on the recesses of Modernism) connecting artists as diverse as Simon Sterling, Carol Bove, Tom Bur and Artur Zmijewski, who share the same need to reconcile nostalgia and analysis, performance of the past and romanticism, mourning and erudition.

Some of these elements can be discerned in the photography of Claudio Gobbi, in his discreet approach to representation as *mise-en-scène*, to social research especially in his more prosaic and secondary work, in his recovery of recent yet perhaps clouded visual memories.

His photographs often portray—and I think it's important to stress the individuality and intimacy that the idea of a portrait contains—places for public gathering, and especially for the presentation of fiction and drama. Theatres, dance halls, social clubs which Gobbi has found on route from Turin to Berlin, Warsaw to Paris, and which tell a story of patterns of aggregation that are outmoded, near extinction, at best material fit for nostalgic revival. But in the way he 'poses' these deserted spaces, in the subtle choreography of the visual elements, so discreet as to be almost imperceptible, Gobbi combines a typically German aspect of photographic investigation (the Bechers' typologies spring to mind) with an Italian love of the cinema of everyday life. A tradition which begins with Neorealism, continues through the bourgeois vision of the *commedia italiana*, to arrive at the intimism characteristic of much contemporary cinema.

In his most recent series dedicated to Carlo Mollino and his Teatro Regio and Lutrario ballroom in Turin, this archaeology of the *mise-en-scène* focuses on an architect whose work reveals the happiest and most sensual aspects of design, with no disdain for style or decoration. Above all, Carlo Mollino was the designer who brought fiction and stage craft into the domestic arena, whose discreet taste for

the sensual and the sexual conquered middle-class interiors and pioneered the idea of furniture as temporary scene settings, turning privacy into role play.

Pointing his lens at the Teatro Regio, at the furnishing details and the stalls, Claudio Gobbi pays quiet tribute to Carlo Mollino's work and to that epoch of taste which is so excruciatingly fashionable today precisely because it is so decadent, sexy and bon ton.