Foundation Mimmo Jodice
Naples, Italy

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A new foundation to house the work of the Italian artist and photographer Mimmo Jodice was located within the historic core of the city of Naples. The project was undertaken by the ‘City as Archive’ thesis group in UCD in the academic year 2010/11 as part of a collaborative programme between Technological University of Ilmenau and the Technische Universität Berlin. On 16 December 2011 a selected exhibition of the work opened at the Gran Salone della Meridiana at the Museum of Archaeology in Naples. Two keynote speakers, Alberto Campo Baeza, architecture and Tony Fretton, addressed the opening. On 24 March 2012 the exhibition opened in Weimar with a keynote lecture given by Joseph Rykwert. This was followed on the 30 May by an opening in Berlin, in the historic room of the Oberhochsod, where the famous Bauhaus exhibition of 1923 put together by Walter Gropius took place. This year the programme will move to Berlin and consider a new archive to house the extensive modern art collection of the collector Egidio Marzona.
Lunchtime Lecture 6: András Pálffy

John Parker

It is somewhat unorthodox to suggest that the reviewer enjoyed an architectural lecture by way of its 'omissions', but in the case of the brief and elegant lunchtime presentation by András Pálffy, I might just about get away with it. It might even be taken as a compliment (as it is intended) particularly since the work of Jaborneg & Pálffy Architects could be described as being an architecture of omission.

In a rather sonorous, Germanic monotone, the lecturer invited the audience to interpolate the full output of his studio from 2003 to 2012 from the presentation of two projects that neatly book-ended this period. The first project, and the first completed project to emerge from his office, involved the creation of an exhibition space in the centre of Vienna for The Generali Foundation. The second, and one of the office's current projects, involved extensive works to Altenburg Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Lower Austria. 'Somewhere in between these two projects, something happened!' Pálffy hints, that 'something' being the entire oeuvre of Jaborneg & Pálffy and the 'in between' being the entire existence of their studio.

And 'in between' might seem an appropriate sub-title to this lecture which addressed the matter of working with existing historic structures. Pálffy outlined for us an architecture which is as much an act of 'clearing out' so as to discover the space that might lie within as it is an architecture of construction or addition.

The project for The Generali Foundation was at first presented as a process of careful excavation where space was carved from the centre of a city block deep within the historic fabric of Vienna to create a series of exhibition rooms for contemporary art. Pálffy described a methodology where, through forensic study of existing built fabric, decisions were made as to what was of value and what was not. It is not a matter of what you like and what you don't', he stated. Such decisions are presented as being 'a matter of fact'.

Pálffy went on to describe the act of designing as the masterful technical resolution of the myriad constraints of any project, be they fire regulations, daylighting, conservation, or structure. The willfulness of the architect is never to be seen. The final work is the inevitable result of 'techno', he suggested, being comparable to a modern car engine – precise, beautiful and giving us no clue as to the effort of its production or its function. (This analogy I do understand, but not my car engine!) If this resonates with early modernist propaganda, so do the images of the final work, precise, white interiors revealed through the wonderful play of natural light. Quite beautiful.

Again, in Altenburg Abbey, a project involving the stabilisation and reconstruction of a terrace overlooking a forested valley as part of works to a Baroque monastery, the architect is presented as a somewhat neutral participant. Early excavation of the site revealed layers of inhabitation from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, from which the architect was required to 'excavate' a new museum.

Here, the architect's actions are comparable to those of a surgeon, involving the cutting out of layers, stabilising and, with hints of prophylaxis, the introduction of precise beams that 'followed need and weight'. The final result is pure negative space. Natural light, stone and white concrete come together to create a masterful route that threads through archaeological fragments, revealing to visitors traces of the past. Of the exterior expression of the project there seems to be nothing. Well, nothing but an exquisite balustrade (assembled from timber laths sourced from a local penal institution) and a stone terrace with extraordinary views of the abbey above the valley beyond.

It wasn't only the clinical hand of the architect that was presented that afternoon. Suggestions of another aspect of the visitor's take on life slipped through: in a passing reference to a hot factory that once occupied the site of the Generali Exhibition space, (before the demise of such an essential item from a gentleman's wardrobe), a delightful image, seemingly snatched from some fragment of early cinematography, was conjured up of exuberant fans throwing their hats in the air at a football match. And ten years of painstaking graft on Altenburg Abbey was balanced by Pálffy's simple exclamation that on occasions the architect had been afforded access to the monastery's cellar and had shared moments of conviviality with the monks over a glass of the very best wine that Austria has to offer.