

TOWARDS A MUSEUM OF THE FUTURE

opus

15 F INTERNATIONAL

24
25



Cover of *Opus International*, nos. 24–25, 1971

Towards a Museum of the Future.
Interview with Pontus Hultén

Yann Pavie

Opus International was a French journal for contemporary art (1967–1995) that covered and commented on new tendencies in art in three issues per year. The collective of art critics that wrote for the journal included Alain Jouffroy, Jean-Clarence Lambert and Anne Tronche. Yann Pavie, an art critic since the late 1960s, was a curator at ARC (Animation – Recherche – Confrontation) at the Musée d’art moderne de la ville de Paris between 1973 and 1976. The interview with Pontus Hultén is part of a theme in the journal “Vers le musée du futur” (Towards the Museum of the Future). In his introduction, Pavie refers to the fundamental issue of the role of museums in society and the social purpose of art. He mentions a few European initiatives he finds interesting, one of which is Peter F. Althaus’s project “Le musée ouvert” (The Open Museum) at the Kunsthalle in Basel, and another is Pontus Hultén’s activities at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. The model with four circles that Hultén used to describe the museum of the future is the most acknowledged in recent times of these initiatives. Hultén’s ideas were formulated in discussions with Pär Stolpe and others, in connection with the plans to relocate Moderna Museet to Kulturhuset in central Stockholm.

OPUS: How would you define the role and function of a modern art museum?

PONTUS HULTÉN: Your question actually raises the problem of the future of such a museum, or that of the “museum of the future”. It is with this in mind that we have set out to analyse the roles, functions, and structures of our museum.

Until 1960 museums were based on the same conceptions informing the 19th-century museum. Nothing had fundamentally changed, other than the fact that the focus was on modern objects.

This was a “museum for visits”, dedicated to the worship of objects. In around 1960, we discovered that in a museum of this kind, things could be shown and done that society did not accept elsewhere: “works of art” that were inadmissible anywhere but in such

a space ... We have attempted to expand this conception. We have played music that couldn't be played in concert halls, screened films that couldn't be projected in movie theatres ... The space became a *Cour des Miracles*, a place where society tolerated acts that were out of the ordinary. This situation was recognised by artists, musicians, filmmakers, museum professionals and so on, as much abroad as in Sweden.

But, in my opinion, this situation lasted only from 1960 to 1968. In 1968, as a result of the events in May, it could not continue because it would have lent itself to the idea that the modern art museum was simply a *Cour des Miracles*, a closed, isolated place where everything was permissible because there were no repercussions on social reality.

We came to realise that events in the street had a more powerful creative force. Thus, we have to prove that the actions and objects in our intuitions can serve as examples for all the activities that renew people's mentalities. We have to demonstrate that our events and activities, at their own level and with their own means of existence, have value as a reality and can thereby inspire a new conception of life.

OPUS: On what elements, from this perspective, does your analysis focus? No doubt, four could probably be identified: contemporary art, the museum as such, the public and the notion of a society's culture.

P.H.: We started from the last point and tried to see the role the museum could have in the public arena. During the days of May 1968, the prevailing mentality, the state of mind was informed by spontaneity. Our objective is to ensure that ideas that expand the conception of life find a place where they can be expressed and developed in a permanent way.

We asked ourselves if it would be possible to hold onto the essence of the May 1968 situation, the "situation in the streets" where everyone was out there, regardless of class and without necessarily having a particularly "cultivated attitude", without feeling rejected.

We started with this question to build up a theoretical model for a modern museum. We imagined an abstract three-dimensional model, spherical in appearance. The sphere comprises four concentric layers.

The outer layer, the spherical envelope, that corresponds to the universe of daily life, is characterised by an accelerated concentration of information. This information must be filtered as little as possible. The materials for us in this layer are raw and direct. There will be, for example, tickers from all the news agencies.

This will represent a sort of “degree zero” of information, a place where the individual is assaulted by information of all sorts. Obviously it is impossible to obtain non-manipulated information, but the very fact that the information will often be contradictory will create a conflictual situation, one that lends itself to critique. The situation in the streets is thereby recreated and intensified, and the conditions for discussion are enhanced.

The second layer will be devoted to workshops. It will provide spaces where tools and other means of production will be made available: from hammers and nails to brushes and computers. The tools are provided but nothing is decided as to their use, the fields to be exploited, or the aims of experimentation. The museum staff could serve as instructors for these machines. These workshops could be used by a single artist, a group of artists, by us, by anyone. Specialists in the field of art or communication will work there on all types of problems.

The third layer of the sphere will present the productions from the workshops and will be dedicated to events: visual arts, films, photographs, dance, concerts, but also exhibition of ready-made products. While the area is dedicated to recognised cultural activities, the contacts with the workshops will endow them with a more revolutionary dimension.

The last layer, the core, will contain the memory of the information processed. This is the museum’s role of preservation and collection.

OPUS: This latter function, it would seem, is open to debate.

P.H.: True. There are differences of opinion among curators on this issue. As far as I’m concerned, I have a positive response to this. Collecting must remain, even if this poses practical problems regarding the works that we have a historical responsibility to conserve. These would be works we decided to keep as testimony to the events we organise, but they could also be elements, such as artworks, films, and tapes, acquired elsewhere ...

In my opinion, the collection represents a necessary continuity. Collective memory is important and the image seems to me to be one of the most concentrated forms of human experience that can be consulted.

One last point: an institution like ours is quite vulnerable to the reactionary forces of society. The collection can be a safeguard, the guarantor of the trace left by the passage of people at a given point in time. Let's not forget the thirties in Germany ...

OPUS: That said, you are announcing innovations?

P.H.: What's new is the addition of the two first layers that connect the museum institution to the social phenomena of everyday life, in which it thereby participate directly – a critical participation with all that we can bring to it that is upbeat, joyful and a little bit more insane.

Our theoretical model is based on a complete communication in both directions, not only between the concentric layers but also between the outside world, the public arena, and the inside, the museum.

We also need to devise a permanent system of transmissions between the different layers, not only within the institution, but also with all institutions of the same type and with a variety of dissemination and communication organisations: newspapers and audiovisual media ...

The purpose of all this is not to monopolise a certain category of information but rather to increase in number the sources of information.

OPUS: Practically speaking, do you imagine having distinctive spaces designed based on the different functions that you have attributed to the “museum of the future”?

P.H.: As a basic principle, in the building that we are having constructed, there will not be permanent partitions between the areas that could be used as workshops for artists, the public or ourselves. This allows for free communication on all levels and facilitates exchanges of ideas at all times. But if ever someone is working on a long project, it would certainly be possible to isolate that person. This design solution is incidentally more practical insofar as museum surveillance is concerned.



Telle est la problématique contemporaine, c'est pour la question du lieu et de la fonction du musée dans notre société. C'est d'ailleurs, poser le problème de la fonction sociale de l'art et celui du musée qui turent de cette société.

Le fait est comme qu'il existe un décalage entre nous, cinquante ans après la création des idées — innovation intellectuelle — et son application dans le monde public. Il ne s'agit sans doute pas d'un retard mais d'un écart qui, le musée excepté ni la rue n'ont jamais vu de ce genre d'actes. On comprend pourquoi. C'est une idée qui se perd dans le monde réel, on ne peut la faire vivre que dans le musée. On comprend pourquoi. C'est une idée qui se perd dans le monde réel, on ne peut la faire vivre que dans le musée.

Le fait est que le musée est devenu un lieu de rencontre entre le monde réel et le monde public. Il ne s'agit sans doute pas d'un retard mais d'un écart qui, le musée excepté ni la rue n'ont jamais vu de ce genre d'actes. On comprend pourquoi. C'est une idée qui se perd dans le monde réel, on ne peut la faire vivre que dans le musée.

Le fait est que le musée est devenu un lieu de rencontre entre le monde réel et le monde public. Il ne s'agit sans doute pas d'un retard mais d'un écart qui, le musée excepté ni la rue n'ont jamais vu de ce genre d'actes. On comprend pourquoi. C'est une idée qui se perd dans le monde réel, on ne peut la faire vivre que dans le musée.



LE MODERNA MUSSET. NOMBRE DE VISITES

La conférence a rassemblé par le monde entier... (Text describing the conference and museum statistics)

LES VISITES COMMENTÉES ET CONFÉRENCES POUR ENFANTS

Année	Visites
1965	12000
1966	15000
1967	18000
1968	22000
1969	25000
1970	28000
1971	32000
1972	35000
1973	38000
1974	42000
1975	45000

LES VISITES COMMENTÉES ET CONFÉRENCES POUR ADULTES

Année	Visites
1965	5000
1966	6000
1967	7000
1968	8000
1969	9000
1970	10000
1971	11000
1972	12000
1973	13000
1974	14000
1975	15000

OPUS: Museum surveillance is a thorny problem. Have you found an original way to resolve it?

P.H.: We prefer thinking of the surveillance staff as monitors rather than guards, because they are there not only to guard the tools, but also to inform the public. Obviously, a repressive, policing attitude on the part of the staff must be avoided. At the Moderna Museet, this personnel is strictly female: they are what could be called “hostesses”, though I don’t love the word. By their role which is essentially to inform and instruct the public, these new “guards” have responsibilities towards the public and in this way they participate in the life of the museum.

OPUS: The “education” of the public seems to be one of the major obstacles that could ruin the usefulness of contemporary art museums. Should such a museum take into consideration the population regardless of class or should it continue to address an elite, choice public? How can you manage to interest as many people as possible?

P.H.: This, to my mind, is not the real issue, since the museum alone cannot be expected to resolve this most important problem. I can offer a reply based on two observations. When a worker comes to repair the roof or the piping, in other words when he comes to the museum for a professional reason, he is usually interested (when he’s being paid, of course). But the idea of walking into the museum on his own initiative for leisure purposes would surely not occur to him. Each class has its own “cultural attitudes” and “practices” that are strongly bound up with its conventions and ethos. This cultural structure will not change until classes in society break down. As things stand right now, we can only hope at best to contribute to this change. We must trust in artistic activity as the subtlest and at the same time the most incisive means of expression.

OPUS: In that case, is the solution purely political?

P.H.: I don’t believe that it is purely political insofar as the worker will hold on to the same cultural attitude dictated by the morality of the class to which he belongs, even if he steps into a managerial position in his business.

OPUS: Yes, but everything is connected. I mean that political and economic thinking, social attitudes and artistic production form a coherent whole in the history of society. For example, the art market maintains a warped relationship to the artwork and to the function of the museum by providing them with a specific brand image: an object of speculation and a temple of universal knowledge dedicated to the cult of the “valuable” object ...

P.H.: In that sense, it is political. But I'd like to add that since around 1960, the modern art museum has no longer been considered a temple of culture with a capital C. This idea seems outdated to me. The difficulty resides in the fact that we have to promote the modern art museum as a haven of freedom, perhaps the only one that can exist among institutions.

This can only be achieved by way of a profound change in the global structures of our society, a shift toward a so-called civilisation of leisure.

OPUS: And what about galleries? What about the art market? How does Moderna Museet fit into this market?

P.H.: With our mode of society being what it is, we cannot ask artists to be beggars.

Galleries are useful, but it seems to me that the commercialisation of art has been driven to extremes since 1960. Galleries have gone too far and this is dangerous.

Sellers and artists have been corrupted by the enormous ease of a “consumer society” that regards the art object as a product of speculation and nothing more.

It is, of course, impossible for us to put a stop to such a system. Actually we have tried to do what we could to encourage purchases directly from the artists instead of through the galleries, with artists coming to propose their works, to leave them or images of them, in the museum. In that way, our museum becomes like an open square where artists and the public meet each other in a healthier way. This extra role, which is necessary to my mind, creates a new, parallel and complementary situation that makes it possible to escape a warped pricing system, one that does not correspond in the least to the reality of the visual arts.

entretien avec pontus hulten



HULTEN,
Karl Gunnar Pontus Vougt
né le 21-6-1924
1945-50
*Etudes d'histoire de l'art
et d'ethnographie*
à l'université de Stockholm
1950-55
*Etudes à Stockholm
et à Paris ;
journalisme et cinéma*
1957
Conservateur assistant
au musée d'art moderne
de Stockholm
1960
Premier conservateur
du nouveau Moderna Museet
1961
Exposition :
« Art en mouvement »
1964
Collabore à l'exposition
« Le musée de nos désirs »
1966
Exposition :
« Monde intérieur
et monde extérieur »
1968
Exposition :
« La machine »
1969
Refuse en tant que
commissaire pour la Suède
de participer à la Biennale
de Sao-Paulo
1970
« Alternative Suédoise »

Opus : Comment définissez-vous le rôle et la fonction d'un musée d'art moderne ?

Pontus Hulten : Cette question pose en fait le problème de l'avenir d'un tel musée, ou celle du « musée de l'avenir ». A ce propos, nous avons essayé d'analyser les rôles, fonctions et structures de notre musée.

Avant 1960, celui-ci était fondé sur les mêmes conceptions que l'était un musée au XIX^e siècle. Rien n'était au fond changé, si ce n'est qu'on s'occupait d'objets modernes. C'est le « musée-visite » consacré au culte des objets. Autour de 1960, on a découvert que, dans ce genre de musée, on pouvait montrer des choses et réaliser des actes que la société n'acceptait pas ailleurs : des « œuvres d'art » inadmissibles, sauf en cet endroit précis... Nous avons essayé d'élargir cette conception. On jouait de la musique qui ne pouvait pas être jouée dans les salles de concert, on présentait des films qui ne pouvaient pas être projetés dans les salles de spectacles... Ce lieu devint une cour des miracles, une sorte d'endroit où la société tolérât des actes qui sortaient du cadre. Cette situation fut reconnue par les artistes, les musiciens, les cinéastes, les hommes de musée..., à l'étranger aussi bien qu'en Suède.

Mais, à mon avis, cette situation ne dura que de 1960 à 1968. En 1968, à la faveur des événements de mai, elle ne put plus durer, car elle aurait prouvé que le musée d'art moderne n'était simplement qu'une cour des miracles, un lieu clos, isolé, où tout était finalement permis puisque sans répercussion sur la réalité sociale.

On venait de réaliser que les événements de la rue avaient une force créatrice et destructive plus percutante. Ainsi, il nous faut prouver que les actions et les objets dans nos intuitions peuvent donner des exemples pour l'ensemble des activités renouvelant la mentalité des hommes. Il faut faire comprendre que nos manifestations, à leur échelle et avec leurs propres moyens d'existence, ont valeur de réalité et ainsi peuvent inspirer une nouvelle conception de la vie.

Opus : Dans cette perspective, sur quels éléments porte votre analyse ?

On pourrait sans doute en distinguer quatre : l'art contemporain, le musée proprement dit, le public et la notion de culture d'une société.

P. H. : Nous sommes partis du dernier point et avons essayé de voir quel rôle le musée peut avoir au sein même de la cité. La mentalité qui régna pendant les journées de mai 1968 fut un état d'esprit fondé sur la spontanéité. Notre objectif est de faire en sorte que les idées qui élargissent la conception de la vie trouvent un endroit où elles peuvent s'exprimer et se développer de façon permanente.

Nous nous sommes demandés s'il était possible de garder l'essentiel de la situation fondamentale de mai 1968, la « situation de la rue », où

tout le monde, sans distinction de classe, sans « attitude cultivée » particulière, était là, sans se sentir rejeté.

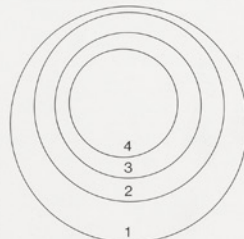
A partir de cette question, nous avons construit un modèle théorique du musée moderne. Nous avons imaginé un modèle abstrait à trois dimensions, d'allure sphérique. Cette sphère comprend quatre couches concentriques :

La couche ultérieure, l'enveloppe sphérique, qui discerne l'univers de la vie quotidienne, se caractérise par une concentration accélérée d'informations. Ces informations doivent être aussi peu rédigées que possible. Ce sont pour nous des matériaux bruts et directs. Là se trouveront par exemple des téléscripteurs de toutes les agences. Cela représentera une sorte de « degré zéro » de l'information, un lieu où l'individu est agressé par toutes espèces d'informations. Il sera évidemment impossible d'obtenir des informations non manipulées, mais le fait même que ces informations seront souvent contradictoires créera une situation de conflit, une situation critique. La situation de la rue est recrée et intensifiée, les conditions de discussion améliorées.

La deuxième couche sera réservée aux ateliers, c'est-à-dire comprendra des espaces et des outils : des locaux où l'on met à disposition des moyens de production, allant du marteau aux simples clous, des pinces à l'ordinateur. Les outils sont fournis, mais rien n'est décidé quant à leur usage, ni sur les champs à exploiter, ni sur les buts des expériences. Le personnel du musée pourra agir comme instruc-

Modèle des activités futures du Moderna Museet, en trois dimensions.

1. Information primaire (communication téléprintée).
2. De l'espace et des outils pour le traitement des informations (des ateliers pour le public, les artistes et le personnel du musée).
3. Information traitée (expositions d'art, films, musique, danse, théâtre...).
4. Collection d'art, archives de films... Information traitée et gardée : mémoire.



teur de ces machines. Ces ateliers de travail pourront être employés soit par un artiste, soit par un groupe d'artistes, soit par nous, soit par tout le monde. Les spécialistes dans les domaines de l'art ou de



OPUS: We have so far spoken little of the artist and of contemporary art. Do they contribute to the changes in the conception of the museum?

P.H.: Yes, without a doubt. The evolution from 1960 to 1968 which I have briefly outlined is related to the conversation that has been established between artists and the museum. Driven by the demands of producing their art, artists were always pushing back against the confined limits of the enclosed space, against the institutional sclerosis of traditional museums. The Pop Art phenomenon involved reviving the connection with everyday life and, by its impact on day-to-day life, it tested in its own way the reality of the everyday. So the museum too had to rediscover these links.

The history of the modern art museum may very well be the history of “reconnections” that have not yet come to fruition.

OPUS: In this regard, it seems to me that artistic production since the beginning of the century, followed by contemporary productions, have been characterized by a reflexive approach to the history of art and the history of societies. Thus, there is an attempt these days to equate activities that are cultural in nature – art history, for example – with research activities of a scientific nature. Is this of interest to you?

P.H.: Very much so. We have to be continually available to receive and tap the constantly shifting information of our environment. The theoretical framework proposed earlier, which situates the role of the museum in society, in relation to the artists and the public, not only permits ongoing research activity concerning the systems of critical analysis capable of continuously processing information, but in fact it cannot function without it.

Conversations and discussions are the mainstay of our preoccupations in trying to channel and unpack information and its modes of presentation.

We would like to do what the Surrealists called a “critique of life”. Of course, such a mechanism is of interest only if it both operates continuously and is grounded in a methodology. A genuine information science is being developed in conjunction with the new direction taken in the fields of science and humanities – computer science, cybernetics, linguistics, semiology, art history and

so on – challenging concepts of theory, history, space, time, the sign ...

These are, in my opinion, some indications that will define the fundamental options of the contemporary art museum.

OPUS: What then is the role of the curator?

P.H.: The “museum of the future” will be regarded as a base for direct contacts between artists, the public and society. It will be the locus par excellence of communication, meeting and dissemination. It will be an instrument of reflection, a center of para-scientific research into present-day and future socio-cultural practices.

The curator will be a coordinator in this center of research.

Interview from the magazine *Opus International*, nos. 24–25, 1971.