People’s Palaces

Architecture, culture and democracy in two European post-war cultural centres
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Architecture, culture and democracy in two European post-war cultural centres

Volkspaleizen

Architectuur, cultuur en democratie in twee na-oorlogse cultuurcentra in Europa

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Technische Universiteit Delft
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. ir. K.C.A.M. Luyben
voorzitter van het College voor Promoties
in het openbaar te verdedigen op 2 maart 2010 om 10.00 uur
door Christoph Grafe
bouwkundig ingenieur
geboren in de Freie Hansestadt Bremen, Bondsrepubliek Duitsland
Dit proefschrift is goedgekeurd door de promotoren
Prof. Dr. A. D. Graafland
Prof. Dr. A. Forty
To my parents
and
Christopher, Jacob and Paula,
three Young Turks and Europeans

Samenstelling promotiecommissie

Rector magnificus, voorzitter
Prof. Dr. Arie Graafland, Technische Universiteit Delft, promotor
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Prof. Ir. Dick van Gameren, Technische Universiteit Delft
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... diese Geschichte ist sehr lange her; sie ist sozusagen schon ganz mit historischem Edelrost überzogen und unbedingt in der Zeitform der tiefsten Vergangenheit vorzutragen. Das wäre kein Nachteil für eine Geschichte, sondern eher ein Vorteil; denn Geschichten müssen vergangen sein, und je vergangener, könnte man sagen, desto besser für sie in ihrer Eigenschaft als Geschichten und für den Erzähler, den raunenden Beschwörer des Imperfekts.

... this story, we say, belongs to the long ago; it is already, so to speak, covered with historic mould, and unquestionably to be presented in the best tense suited to a narrative out of the depth of the past. That should be no drawback to a story, but rather the reverse. Since histories must be in the past, then the more past the better, it would seem, for them in their character as histories, and for him, the teller of them, rounding wizard of times gone by.

Thomas Mann, Vorsatz (foreword) to Der Zauberberg (The Magic Mountain)
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<td>1944</td>
<td>World War II ends</td>
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<td>Labour Party election victory; Clement Attlee Prime Minister</td>
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<td>1946</td>
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<td>Karl Popper, <em>The Open Society and its Enemies</em></td>
<td>Royal Festival Hall construction starts</td>
<td>The Arts Council of Great Britain is established. First chairman: John Maynard Keynes</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>Indian independence</td>
<td>Albert Camus, <em>La Peste</em></td>
<td>Design of the Royal Festival Hall</td>
<td>The National Health Service (NHS) is established</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>Berlin Blockade</td>
<td>Simone de Beauvoir, <em>Le Deuxième Sexe</em></td>
<td>Royal Festival Hall construction starts</td>
<td>The National Health Service (NHS) is established</td>
<td>Education reform introducing a nine-year compulsory 'rehetsskola'</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>United States: Trial and subsequent execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg for alleged espionage activities</td>
<td>Vilhelm Moberg, <em>Invandrarna</em></td>
<td>CIAM conference ('The heart of the city'), Hoddesdon, England</td>
<td>Arts Council launched the initiative for an art gallery on the South Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Josef Stalin dies</td>
<td>First Tetra Pak is presented in Lund, Sweden</td>
<td>Unite d'Habitation completed in Marseilles, <em>Le Corbusier</em> Town hall, Säynätsalo, Finland, Alvar Aalto*</td>
<td>Leslie Martin appointed head of the LCC architect’s department (1953-1956)</td>
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<td>1952</td>
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<td>First IKEA store opens in Almhult, Sweden</td>
<td>School at Hunstanton, England, opened, Alison and Peter Smithson* Yale University Art Gallery, Louis Kahn*</td>
<td>Preliminary scheme for the completion of the South Bank</td>
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<td>1953</td>
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<td>Leslie Martin appointed head of the LCC architect’s department (1953-1956)</td>
<td>World Wide TV broadcast of the coronation of Elizabeth II</td>
<td>Inner city re-planning of Stockholm starts with the demolition of the Hötorget area</td>
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<td>1954</td>
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<td>Worldwide TV broadcast of the coronation of Elizabeth II</td>
<td>Food rationing ends</td>
<td>First Swedish motorway opened</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>Suez Crisis</td>
<td>Hungarian Revolt</td>
<td>European Economic Community founded</td>
<td>Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) founded</td>
<td>Second Indochina (Vietnam) war (1959-1975)</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>First McDonald’s restaurant, Des Plaines, USA</td>
<td>First private television in Britain</td>
<td>Exhibition This is Tomorrow, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London</td>
<td>John Osborne, Look Back in Anger</td>
<td>Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>Church at Ronchamp, France* and governor’s palace, Chandiagar, India, Le Corbusier</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Anthony Eden (Conservatives), Prime Minister</td>
<td>Harold Macmillan (Conservatives), Prime Minister</td>
<td>Seagram Building, New York, completed, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe*</td>
<td>Last CIAM conference, Otterlo, The Netherlands Engineering Building, Leicester, England, Stirling and Gowan*</td>
<td>Reymert Banham, Theory and Design in the First Machine Age</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Hubert Bennet appointed head of the LCC architect’s department (1956-1970)</td>
<td>Housing the Arts committee installed</td>
<td>Housing the Arts report launches the idea of a ‘Metropolitan Arts Centre’</td>
<td>Design of Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall (1960-1961)</td>
<td>Presentation of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall design</td>
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<td>1960</td>
<td>Ragnar Edenman (Social Democrats), Minister for cultural and church affairs, demands a new cultural policy</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy inaugurated as US president</td>
<td>Berlin Wall is constructed</td>
<td>End of Marshall Plan</td>
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<td>1962</td>
<td>Cuban crisis</td>
<td>End of war in Algeria</td>
<td>Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)</td>
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<td>1963</td>
<td>John F. Kennedy assassinated</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Student protest at Berkeley University, USA</td>
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<td>1965</td>
<td>Bob Dylan, Like a Rolling Stone</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>May 1968 student revolt</td>
<td>Stanley Kubrick, <em>2001 Odyssey</em></td>
<td>The Beatles, <em>A Space Odyssey</em></td>
<td>The Open University is established</td>
<td>Western part of Kulturhus opened as Swedish parliament</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>Charles de Gaulle resigns as French president</td>
<td>Monty Python’s Flying Circus</td>
<td>Dario Fo, <em>Morte accidentale di un anarchico</em></td>
<td>Edward Heath (Conservative Party), Prime Minister</td>
<td>Kulturhus construction starts</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>German chancellor Willy Brandt visits the Warsaw Ghetto</td>
<td>Pippi Långstrump TV series</td>
<td>Shulamith Firestone, <em>The Dialectic of Sex</em></td>
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<td>Western part of Kulturhus opened as Swedish parliament</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>Publication The limits of growth (Club of Rome)</td>
<td>Sesame Street</td>
<td>Michel Foucault, <em>L’ordre du discours</em></td>
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<td>Läsesalongen (the reading room) opened</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>Richard Nixon resigns</td>
<td>Manfredo Tafuri, <em>Progetto e utopia</em></td>
<td>J.G. Ballard, <em>Concrete Island</em></td>
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<td>Peter Celsing dies</td>
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<td>1976</td>
<td>End of Franco dictatorship in Spain</td>
<td>Willis, Faber and Dumas building, Ipswich, England</td>
<td>Pier Paolo Pasolini, <em>Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma</em></td>
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<td>Wim Wenders, <em>Im Lauf der Zeit</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Apple computers founded</td>
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<td>Writer Wolf Biermann evicted from the German Democratic Republic</td>
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<td>1977</td>
<td>German Autumn: Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin and Jan-Carl Raspe found dead in their cells in Stuttgart</td>
<td>Heiner Müller, <em>Hamletmaschine</em></td>
<td>Centre Pompidou* Pontus Hultén, director</td>
<td>Margaret Thatcher (Conservatives), Prime minister</td>
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<td>1978</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>The Greens elected into Bremen Bürgerschaft, winning the first seats in a German state parliament</td>
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* Date of completion
Chapter 1

Introduction
London, South Bank, November 2005. It is half past three on a dull Sunday afternoon. People, locals and tourists, amble along the river promenade, passing bookstalls and forming temporary circles around the performers bracing the weather. The few customers on the terrace of the café under the bridge sit on long robust wooden benches designed as bits of urban hardware to resist the constant wind sweeping through the wide arch. Sheltered against intermittent showers but relying on the defiant attitude of its patrons and their resilience against the wind, the terrace is a fairly implausible arrangement, both demonstratively permanent and permeable; while drinking their pints of lager or sipping cappuccinos, customers are not merely offered the spectacle of the moving pageant along the promenade, but also exposed to regular requests for money or cigarettes.¹

The promenade is also one of the approaches to the concert hall on the western side of the bridge, although the innocent passer-by might be forgiven for not recognising this. Were it not for the occasional single person or group of people climbing up the concrete staircase to reach the upper deck above the promenade, or the people overlooking the scene from this higher vantage point, there would be no sign that there is a building offering concert performances, exhibitions and a range of other events that could conveniently be described as cultural.

Having managed the stairs (which someone, at some stage, has mystifyingly decided to whitewash in cheap oil paint in a vain attempt to signal an entrance) the visitor stumbles onto a pair of doors in cast aluminium.² Beyond these there is a space identifying itself as a foyer, although the dimensions and material expression evoke other associations. Extensive and low-ceilinged, surrounded on all sides by bands of windows, the space would not appear out of place in an airport, as a peculiarly austere waiting lounge. Attempts at introducing visual tokens of festivity have been made: a purple organically shaped screen marks a central seating area and a bar, its aesthetics and planning emitting signs of hopeful provisionality.

Neither the disparate character of these objects nor the ambiguity of the architectural treatment of the foyer – its exposed concrete mushroom columns, the triangular elements suspended from the ceiling or the smooth but grubby white pentelic marble on the floor – seem to affect the assembly of people gathering for a musical performance. People enter the room, quite leisurely, with confidence and hardly a hint of the type of self-conscious adjustment that a concert hall may induce. Each segment of the audience seems to react to the space in its particular fashion. The white-haired elderly visitors, dressed up or in smart rural fashion and armed with programme booklets and a cup of tea, are accommodating themselves on vaguely Scandinavian mid-century modern chairs arranged around spindly tables, leaving the sofas to younger couples and groups well acquainted with the studiously relaxed etiquette of Starbucks’ coffee lounges. Around the edges single visitors, mostly male, retain a slightly nervous perpendicular position, avoiding glances and possible interference. The main concourse is taken up by a loosely connected group of teenagers, their

¹ Times change. In 2009, as part a comprehensive make-over of the café, the benches were replaced by more polite (and comfortable) chairs. The terrace is now accessible only from the interior as a barrier fends off passing intruders.

² The stairs were painted in signal yellow in 2009.
visibly mixed ethnic background suggesting that they have arrived from an inner city district, possibly as part of an extra-curricular school activity. Dressed in branded urban street fashion they form smaller groups engaged in bubbly gossip, cheerful bonding and posturing.

Both as a space and on this occasion the foyer offers the image of the co-existence of different types of behaviour in public, of a variety of ages, sex and ethnicity. One does not need to be a sociologist or anthropologist to note that these differences also pertain to social background or occupation. The foyer effectively operates as a panorama of social diversity and temporary territorialisation, as each particular group occupies its own section of the space. Within the confined space of the foyer these differences are enhanced by the panoptical visual experience framed by views of the city.

Ten minutes later, as the doors are finally opened, everyone shuffles into the auditorium. Gradually the ambient noise dies down, as the visitors adjust their behaviour to the surroundings and sink into the soft leather seats. The formal seating arrangement and dimmed lighting, softly reflected by the wooden lining along the walls seems to have a transforming effect even on the more vivacious members of the party of youngsters. The group of people, who appeared as a motley crowd apparently thrown together by accident only a few moments before, has rearranged itself into an audience, knitted together by the occasion and a vague sense of anticipation.

The change of behaviour may have been as predictable as it was marked. Concert performances, after all, are social situations characterised by well-defined conventions designed to allow contemplation and concentration. Adjustment in body movement or voice control is generally expected and becomes part of a ritual in which each member of an audience is expected to participate. All this also helps to forge a sense of a collective, creating a sense of common purpose among the people sharing the auditorium. Yet here, the concert (Wagner’s Siegfried Idyll and music by twentieth century Swiss composer Frank Martin) also offered a remarkable, slightly improbable experience. Despite considerable initiatives to reach out to new audiences, the presence of a congregation made up of people with visibly divergent backgrounds and including teenagers alone is a rare experience in venues devoted to classical music. Here, however, the apparent routine with which the audience mingled and settled – leisurely in the foyer, with more formality during the concert – seemed to convey a sense of ease both with the surroundings and the occasion. The assiduous absence of signs of exclusivity in the presentation as well as in the physical environment seemed to generate an atmosphere which appeared to allow all, both those accustomed to attending performances of classical and contemporary music and those less acquainted with the experience, to develop a sense of confidence, even appropriation. This, we the audience seemed to understand, was a building that in its robustness (paired with a certain and slightly unlikely elegance) was designed to host everyone, without difference, without privilege – an egalitarian building.
1.1 Cultural Centres: representations or enactments of equality in post 1945 Europe

The Purcell Room on London’s South Bank, the venue of the concert, is part of a cultural centre designed and constructed over a long period between 1953 and the mid 1960s. As the term ‘cultural centre’ – occasionally also ‘arts centre’ – suggests, the building or compound of buildings is devoted to culture as a general category of practices or activities. In this case the cultural centre contains three concert halls of varying sizes (the Purcell Room being the smallest), a public art gallery, extensive foyer spaces used for lectures, debates or performances, a poetry library and a variety of bars, café and restaurants.

The extensive range of these facilities, all organised within one institution, the South Bank Centre, reflects the location of the cultural centre in the middle of a large European capital. Yet, the institutional concept of an institution that proposes to offer a variety of different cultural experiences in one architecturally defined complex, if not under one roof, absorbing concert halls or galleries, often also theatres, libraries or cinemas, is by no means unique. Rather, the South Bank is one particularly exposed example of a widespread phenomenon that can be found in a variety of European countries after 1945, and also in the Americas or Australia. The ‘cultural centre’ is a type of cultural institution that emerged, had its heyday and almost completely disappeared again within a period of no more than two decades in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Indeed, from the late 1950s until the mid 1970s cultural centres were the preferred solution for the state administered provision of culture in Western Europe. By the end of this period, which coincides with the moment supreme of the post-war welfare systems and extensive educational reforms of the late 1950s and the 1960s, most smaller or medium sized towns in Sweden, France, Holland or England had obtained a new building housing a variety of cultural institutions, from performance spaces to galleries and libraries, albeit on a much smaller scale than on the South Bank in London. The movement which produced these buildings had its grand, but late, finale with the building of the Centre Beaubourg, the later Centre Pompidou, which was launched as the ‘cultural centre for the twenty-first century’, opening its doors in 1977.

When I embarked on this study, this was from a general feeling, perhaps conjecture, that the post-war cultural centres in their various forms seemed to offer a valuable experience, not just of a historical phenomenon, but also in the context of contemporary Europe (and possibly elsewhere, too). Buildings like the South Bank, the Centre Pompidou or the Stockholm Kulturhus, as well as those in smaller towns appeared to constitute rare attempts at establishing places in which the claim to provide access to culture came together with an opportunity to transgress social and cultural boundaries and forge a temporary, if fragile sense of common purpose. The openness of the programmatic definition of the cultural centres and their specific architectural qualities apparently allowed them to be experienced as environments where the visitor was...
not only able, but actively invited to engage with a variety of social and cultural practices. In doing this, the more successful examples of these centres appeared to be surprisingly good at absorbing different audiences and constructing collective experiences of the sort not generally found in other public institutions. The proposal of the cultural centre, in its intentions, entailed a comprehensive re-configuration of art and its institutions.

This capacity of cultural centres to address people from various social backgrounds, not as consumers, but as intelligent citizens, continues to hold appeal against the background of contemporary social realities. Their assumptions about a modernisation of society through access to culture and education, and the egalitarian ideals informing the process of their invention and realisation, may have been uncritically optimistic, riddled by internal contradictions and vain hopes; yet, as a model for creating enclaves in which commercial logics, social privilege or distinction are temporarily suspended, the cultural centres have retained some of the initial promise of a good society. The proposal that culture, the various forms of creative expression, but also of debate and dialogue, might constitute some sort of common ground for contemporary societies has not lost its validity. Rather, I suspect, it might have acquired a greater urgency against the background of the increasing social and cultural divisions, which have emerged over the past twenty or so years between different social and ethnic constituencies across Europe.

There was, in other words, an interest in reassessing, and perhaps rehabilitating, the cultural centre as an important part of the social experiment of the post-war period and its legacy. This desire was by no means unfounded. Many of the cultural centres (including the South Bank and to a lesser degree the Stockholm Kulturhus) went through extended periods of neglect and decay. Particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s many of them crumbled away, often just kept afloat by their administrators trying to make ends meet with less and less money. Sometimes these institutions, established to offer cultural activities for a wide audience, were replaced by new semi-commercial agencies whose main concern it became to develop the commercial potential of a site rather than exploring how these institutions might take a role in redefining culture and access to it. Sometimes, cultural centres just renamed themselves and operated under names designed to carry historical prestige, reverting to the older classifications of ‘theatre’ or ‘museum’, as if to hide their origins in the social experiment of the post war welfare state. Often the very existence of many of the cultural centres was called into question.

This study is specifically limited to the relationship between the emergence of welfare states in Western Europe and buildings for culture. It does not include a discussion of the various concepts for Houses of Culture or cultural palaces in the Socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe or cultural centres in, for example Brazil, Canada or the United States. In Western Europe the building of the cultural centres occurred as part of what might be seen as the phase of fulfilment of the social agenda which proposed or professed to propose the realisation of an egalitarian society, aiming at material redistribution, but also allowing more evenly spread access to education and culture. This agenda gained a new momentum in the reform policies of the 1960s (just before being radically questioned in 1968) and was directly responsible for the provision of a large number of buildings. The conception and construction of buildings dedicated to culture, and eventually to a significantly enlarged concept of culture, stands out as an attempt at re-creating West-European societies by altering the conditions for access to cultural production. The primary objective of my study is an analysis of the ideas which informed the institutional concepts and architectural designs of cultural centres in the first three decades after the end of World War II. The connection between the ideas about the functioning of the buildings as institutions, their form and appearance seems obvious and, I would argue, is inevitable, if one wants to assess the significance of the cultural centres. This architecture, conceived as part of a larger social and political project, even experiment, could not be properly understood without contextualising it.
The ambition of discussing these buildings as both architectural objects and as outcomes of ideas introduced a significant complexity. If one starts from an understanding that the architectural concepts for the centres were explicitly devised in terms of allowing access, of creating experiences of equality or collective purpose, and that all these terms were probably related to assumptions concerning the role of culture in a democratic society, this implied that a full picture could only emerge from an analysis of both the design as such and of the ideas behind the programmatic concepts. How, then, were arguments for the institution constructed at the time, and how could the initiative be situated within larger cultural debates? To find out, it would be important not only to consider the immediate context of initiatives for new institutions, but also in how far these initiatives were positioned within the framework of state-sponsored cultural provision. Furthermore, the broadening of the brief of the cultural centres itself, the inclusion not only of new types of flexible exhibition spaces, but also of restaurants or bars, lounges or youth libraries, suggested that the meaning of ‘culture’, the very term by which these buildings had been defined, was not fixed. Rather, it seemed to have undergone a series of quite significant re-definitions, and quite drastic extensions, all of which should have affected the programme of the new buildings.

If even the one central notion describing the function of cultural centres has a flexible definition, this would suggest the existence of a wide and varied field of discourses about their programmatic and institutional concepts. There would be the experts in the artistic disciplines absorbed into the institution, the art curators, librarians, theatre or musical directors and administrators, all of whom could be expected to have views concerning their particular fields. Given the substantial cost not only of constructing buildings, but also of running new institutions one could also expect there to be documents justifying the expenditure, reports setting out their function within the broader objectives of cultural and education policy and situating them within the social or political agendas of the public agencies acting as clients. As new institutions, constituting a distinct departure from the existing models of cultural institutions, the cultural centres could also be expected to have invited the views of critics, philosophers, writers or cultural theorists.

An English report published in 1970 on behalf of the North West Arts Association in Manchester illustrates the broad spectrum of the requirements and expectations with which cultural centres were invested. In the introduction to this publication the association’s chairman hints at the considerable difficulty of defining the brief for ‘a place for the arts’, observing that possible clients, mostly local authorities, ‘were not clear in their own mind, what they wanted from an arts centre’. To assist local authorities and organisations, the editors of the report had gathered information about 52 arts or cultural centre not only in Western, but also in East and Central Europe, as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, and commissioned a proposal for an ‘Envirotheatre’, a multifunctional hall mainly designed for performances, from the Scottish architect John L. Patterson. The third part of the report contains a collection of contributions from ‘artists and many others who have been involved with the North West Arts Association and whose ideas and opinions are sympathetic or relevant to its work’. The list of contributors, though idiosyncratically composed, reads almost as a map of the points of departure from which the concept of a cultural centre could be approached. There are texts by the writers Iris Murdoch and Nicolas Raiwsky, theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, composers David Wilde and Trevor Hold, and sculptors Charles Fraughan and Fritz Wotruba, whose contributions had the form of personal statements on creative activity as a form of individual expression. Other texts by theatre and museum directors and broadcasters set out the considerations of institutions and their administrators. The authors also include a specialist in neurophysiology, educators and academics. Finally there are statements by two politicians who had played a central role in the development of 1960s cultural politics, Jennie Lee, Britain’s first minister for culture, and the writer André Malraux, who had served as minister in the French cabinet from 1959 to 1968 and who has been described as the ‘inventor’ of the French post-war Action Culturelle – and the Maisons de la Culture. Even if the report did not cover theoretical speculations on culture and society, but addressed the subject mainly from the vantage point of artists and that of local audiences, the range of discourses thought relevant for setting up a cultural centre was tellingly extensive. This range also provides an indication of the mixture of high hopes and vagueness that surrounded such an initiative. We may reasonably assume that this probably applied to many other projects of the same type elsewhere. Even at first glance the programme for the cultural centre appears both over- and under-determined, its functional core much less defined than that of traditional theatres or galleries, while at the same time invested with a variety of expectations, educational and social, cultural and political.

Perhaps surprisingly, the report of the North West Arts Association gives little attention to the question as to which architectural types or expressive languages might be appropriate for a ‘place for the arts’. The proposal commissioned from Patterson is detailed in its indications of how the ‘Envirotheatre’ could be used and changed. It remained, however, sketchy about the architectural design. The gazetteer of art or cultural centres – both terminologies are used as interchangeable – occasionally includes plans or photographs of the buildings, but not for all of them. Any speculation as to how the architectural concepts of these precedents might be viewed is, however, absent. This is remarkable since the contrast between the Socialist Realist formality of some of the East European buildings or the monumentality of the New York Lincoln Center (not illustrated), on the one hand, and the decidedly anti-formalist experiments in, for example, Holland, on the other, could hardly have been greater. None of the disparities were discussed, nor was the effect of the architectural decisions on the way in which a cultural centre was to function or should represent its purpose.
Cultural politics and architectural discourses

How, then, were the arguments for specifically architectural decisions about the buildings and their design formulated and by whom? If one accepts that the capacity of, for example, the South Bank Centre to attract a wide audience does at least to some degree depend on the appearance and planning of the building, architectural considerations surely must have been part of the calculations, certainly of the designers, but probably also of clients and public commentators. Designed within the planning tradition of post-war reconstruction, the majority of cultural centres of the 1960s were informed by functionalist preoccupations developed in the design of housing and new towns while at the same time anticipating the demands of an affluent consumer society with an emphasis on choice and self-fulfilment. This dilemma within the architectural culture reflects the tension between the tradition of enlightened provision of fine arts for the masses and the renegotiations of what might constitute culture in a pluralistic society which played at the level of the cultural institutions.

In the first three decades after World War II discourses on architecture and planning, particularly in Western Europe, were dominated by the role of the discipline within the larger programmes of reconstruction and social modernisation. It would not go too far to state that many architects regarded their profession as profoundly embedded in the system of the welfare state and its large-scale initiatives for providing not only housing, schools and hospitals, but also cultural facilities. Did ideas about culture and its role in society, about extending access or facilitating self-expression, and about the definition of the term itself, enter professional or critical debates among architects? And if they did, how were they framed within the discourse on modern architecture and its revisions as they developed from the 1950s onwards?

It is within this field of questions and of forces, political and disciplinary, that the present study of post-war cultural centres was the impetus. It may also be evident from the superficial mapping of different debates surrounding the initiatives for these buildings that a comprehensive survey of their development over a period of almost three decades and in various national or local contexts would run the risk of remaining superficial. There would be little space for an extensive discussion of the particular sets of values and cultural assumptions informing the cultural politics, which varied significantly from country to country, even if the general direction of the policies was similar. Conclusions about the interplay between politicians, art administrators or artists and architects would almost inevitably tend to be abstract and concealed the complexities generated by national situations. The problematic relationship between the variety of claims and hopes with which the cultural centres were invested and the architectural considerations – whether or not related to debates outside the profession – would be almost impossible to describe with the necessary precision and subtlety.

Two sites, three buildings

The decision to organise this study around a detailed analysis of the development of projects in two particular European cities largely stems from these considerations. It appeared to me that a precise examination and analysis of a limited number of exemplary projects might offer an appropriate framework for the description of the calculations which had led to taking the initiative for a cultural centre, the evolutionary lines of its conceptualisation and realisation. Buildings, however universal the ideas that inform their existence, are ultimately very local affairs, and this applies also to the cultural centres – most of which were municipal initiatives anyway. In order properly to understand the origins of the projects and the way in which they had materialised in a particular building it seemed necessary to delve rather deeply into local planning traditions and politics, contemporary public debates and architectural responses to them.

The selection of these building projects, the South Bank Centre in London and the Kulturhus in Stockholm was, at least initially, an intuitive one. In the case of the South Bank I had come to know the building rather intimately as a user and had long been intrigued by it. The Kulturhus made an instant impression when I first visited Stockholm in 2002. The building, at first glance, struck me as an extraordinary example of how a particular interpretation of the idea of an egalitarian society with decidedly utopian overtones had materialised in a building to whose architectural design I could immediately relate. Beyond these intuitive considerations, it appeared that there were rather compelling reasons for concentrating on these two buildings. First of all both were conceived in two countries that at the time of their realisation were widely regarded as ideal-typical of the post-war European welfare state. Both were, and to some degree still are, seen as historically important products of their respective architectural cultures. Neither of them was the result of a purely pragmatic decision to opt for a cultural centre in order to save resources, as it might have been in smaller cities. Rather, the metropolitan context of the proposal meant that the buildings could be expected to be objects of a critical debate both in the public media and professional circles and had to be positioned clearly against existing theatres, galleries and concert halls. As it turned out both were also implicated in a triangular relationship with what is probably the most prominent example of a cultural centre, the Centre Pompidou, and thus indirectly connected.

Most importantly, however, the conception and realisation of the South Bank and the Kulturhus rather neatly coincide with a period during which the ideas about the responsibility of the welfare state for the provision of culture emerged and underwent significant changes. The South Bank is the result of a long history of planning and design starting in the late 1940s and brought to a conclusion in 1968. The Stockholm Kulturhus was designed in 1967, in the middle of heated debates on the role of the cultural institution in the city, and was completed in 1974. Taken together both buildings appeared to represent at least three (and
perhaps more) key moments and particular responses to the question of how cultural provision might contribute to a democratic society, by helping its citizens to engage with creative practices and their products.

The case studies demonstrate that this architecture and these buildings are not the result of single agendas, but of interesting messy confluences of ideas and preoccupations. To start, objectives of cultural policy were in neither case the sole reason for the buildings. Like many other public buildings they were part of projects of urban reconstruction in the central areas of larger cities. Both were, therefore, seen as instruments in planning strategies and became objects onto which divergent and often conflicting visions of how these cities were to develop could be projected. Situated on prominent central sites they not only constituted a major public investment in terms of construction costs, but also occupied valuable and contested land. Set up as important projects of the largest municipal authorities in their countries, they were repeatedly embroiled in power struggles between ambitious local politicians and national governments. Both epitomised the agenda of the welfare state, acquiring emblematic status and attracting the opposition of those political forces that maintained a critical stance towards social, cultural and educational reform. Yet they also reflected, or could be expected to reflect, the internal contradictions of the ideologies underpinning the welfare model itself. After all, neither British nor Swedish politicians, also those within Socialist or Social Democratic parties, proposed radical changes to the political or economic system, but in fact advocated a limited redistribution of wealth and cultural capital. Equality, therefore, was to a large degree a matter of perception, and one would have to ask whether cultural politics – and its buildings – were primarily a strategy of representing it, rather than an anticipation of its enactment. Whether this question provides a summary of the controversial debates surrounding cultural politics, particularly in the course of the 1960s, requires close examination of the public discourses about the nature of the new buildings.
1.3 Definition of the object – what is a cultural centre?

The observation of the North West Art Association that local authorities were often unclear about what they wanted from a cultural centre points to a problem of definition. In contrast to buildings for a particular form of the visual or performing arts – a theatre, opera house, gallery, museum, concert hall or library – the function of the cultural centre involved a fundamental ambiguity. Taking the gazetteer included in the English report as evidence this absence of a clear definition is immediately visible. The list of documented projects (see fig. 9) includes buildings which in fact could be described as public galleries with attached educational and recreational facilities. In the French Maisons de la Culture, the performing spaces, with an emphasis on drama, absorbed the lion’s share of the entire building. This applied also to the ‘arts centres’ or ‘places des arts’ in Canada. Occasionally the term was used for buildings that might better be described as academies or learned institutions, or semi-professional institutes like the Centre Le Corbusier in Zürich. In a number of the American cases the cultural centre was affiliated with religious institutions, whereas East European buildings could be part of factories and devoted to leisure activities for the workers. The most striking institution on the list is a Bulgarian Centre for Fishermen, which, according to the documentation included a theatre and a gallery.

Even if one accepts that this list was primarily an accidental outcome – including only those institutions that had made the effort to fill in the questionnaire sent out from Manchester – it is clear that the term cultural centre could not easily be reduced to an unambiguous programmatic definition. In the two cases of the South Bank and the Kulturhus the programme was relatively broad. Their size and location in larger cities presumably allowed for a wide scope of activities even if the South Bank itself does not actually include a theatre; it is situated next to one. If a cultural centre could be made up of different components, it should not be surprising that its architectural form showed large variations. After all, these components determine the typological layout of a building. A composition arranged around a large hall, either for concerts or theatre performances, is quite different from one in which a library or a public gallery occupies this position. Moreover the very nature of the performing arts, the fact that the act of contemplation takes the form of a public ritual, suggests that a building arranged around a theatre merely needed to reinforce or modify an already existing sense of collective. In a gallery or a library, by contrast, this had to be consciously created and realised, often by architectural means.

How these variables and different requirements manifested themselves as architecture will have to be examined by looking at the buildings themselves. For now it may be sufficient to note that the programmatic openness of the cultural centre suggests that their architectural form was equally unstable and open to interpretation. In its very nature it seemed to attract wildly different typological and spatial conceptions, inviting all sorts of images, social ideas and professional
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* polyvalent spaces, in the case of the Fishermen’s hall also used as ball room
** The Meerpaal was one large polyvalent spaces which was used also as market hall, television studio and sports hall
*** the main use of the space was a sports activity (ice rink, arena etc.)
WORD GAME
take two words

ARTS CENTRE

civic hall
plays films ballets exhibitions lectures concerts recitals operas

PEOPLE
public hall

PLACE
community centre

COMMUNION
PASTIMES
ROOM

RECREATION

MAISON DE LA CULTURE

culture
POP music dance folk song beat rhythm

talking DIALOGUE relaxation
watching looking listening doing

SILENCE

SOUND
laughing clapping shouting cheering

leisure
les voix du silence

MAGIC

AUDIENCE appreciation education

PARTICIPATION

PLACE
gala

palace of culture civilization art

ARTS lab workshop forum school

environment focus centre

ENVIROTHEATRE

ENVIROTHEATRE

END ENVIRONMENT

TAKING A WALK

take the word

ENVirotheatre
SPECTATOR PERFORMER

RELATIONSHIP

confrontation optimum

association view

face to face sight

group touch

500 raked

150 flat

SITE

1970-2000

NEW DEVELOPMENT

CONVERSION

00.00-24.00


add the figure

$120,000

and you still have

adaptability flexibility space room

AUDIENCE/ACTOR AREA

ACOUSTICS

end stage total

TECHNICS video electronic stereo

lighting orchestra pit rostra

TRASH OPEN SPACE

AUDIENCE

ACCTOR MUSCIAN ARTIST SCREEN

CHILDREN expansion enclosure

700-300 studio laboratory workshop

‘le conformisme commence à la définition’ Braque

entrance adaptable dressing room

toilet showers

lounge bar workshop

lavatories wardrobe

lobby rehearsal

cloaks green room

ANIMATEUR

programme choice

NOW MULTIPLY

NUлевые действия

instruct talks

nurture class

AUDIENCE ACTOR AREA

ENVIROTHEATRE

end of word game
preoccupations to be projected onto them. In a period of intense experimentation with urbanistic concepts, from structure to mega-structure, monumentality to anti-architecture, the cultural centre with its symbolically charged, yet functionally open programme seemed to provide the perfect object where these ideas could be applied and tested.
1.4 Revisions of modern architecture and culture in post-war Europe: existing research

Over the past two or three decades the architecture of the post-war period – or ‘post-modernism’ as it is often called – has been the object of substantial historiographic activity. To some degree, the attention of architectural historians, writing architects and others may be explained by general patterns of history writing. Once a particular period has become part of the past, the texts, images and objects produced by it seem almost inevitably to arouse a mixture of nostalgia and curiosity.7 In architecture this pattern of revaluing the work of one generation after it has been forgotten – or dismissed – by the subsequent one appears particularly marked. The activities of organisations dedicated to the protection of buildings from the pre World War II years show a gradual extension to include the architectural production of the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Perhaps most notably in the United Kingdom an increased appreciation is also reflected in listing practice, which has also been applied to buildings from the first three decades after World War II.8 This seems to be particularly true for buildings conceived and realised during the 1960s ad 70s, the new universities, housing estates or first shopping centres, all of them products of two decades of economic growth and almost without exception constructed using industrialised building technologies. In the late 1970s and the subsequent decade these buildings, their size, the emphasis on serial rational production and their predominant building material – concrete – acquired the status of symbols of a, now discredited, belief in technology. Consequently the discourse intent on the reassessment and revaluation of buildings from this period is marked by a series of complications. On the one hand it has to take account of the hostile attitude among large sections of the general public towards many of these buildings. On the other hand the fact that their significance derives, at least in part, from their position within debates about the revision of modern architecture, means that an argument for their value as historical monuments may not always be accepted or even recognised by this general public.

Meanwhile, studies of the architecture of the 1960s and 70s amount to a significant body of literature about single architects, architectural movements, particular buildings and building types. There are now, for example, extensive and perhaps definitive publications on school and university buildings or collective housing in England and other countries.9 The architectural experiments of architects associated with Team X, as the most international and prominent ‘movement’ within the architectural culture of the 1960s and early 70s, has been the subject of exhibitions and publications.10 This attention also extends to architects operating largely in national contexts. The work of Peter Celsing, the designer of the Stockholm Kulturhus, has been discussed in three monographs.11 The architect’s department of the London County Council, which was responsible for the buildings on the South Bank, by contrast, has not been covered in a comprehensive publication, apart from monographs on two of its heads Robert Matthew and Leslie Martin.12 Against the background of substantial research and publishing activity on school or university architecture, the absence of an equally comprehensive study of buildings dedicated to cultural activities is notable. There are critical historical overviews of the Maisons du Peuple, with a focus on France and Belgium, and studies on the post-war ‘Salons of the Socialists’, the cultural centres in the German Democratic Republic.13 Frank van Klinger, whose cultural centres in various small Dutch towns belong to the most experimental examples of the institutional type, is the subject of a monograph focusing on the genesis of these buildings.14 The architectural output of the French Action Culturelle has also been covered in an anthology of critical articles and reminiscences, which, however only touches on the designs.15 Starting with the public discourse on the competition in 1971, the Centre Pompidou has attracted an almost constant stream of publication, assessing and re-examining its architectural and institutional proposal, which continues to arouse controversy and a variety of theoretical speculations.16 Neither the South Bank nor the Kulturhus have had similar attention. In the London case most historiographic effort has been directed at the Royal Festival Hall, the first phase of the centre built in 1951, and the problems of properly attributing authorship of the design.17 The 2007 re-launch of the South Bank was accompanied by the publication of a monograph, which, however, pays only limited attention to the historic complexities that informed the designs both of the Festival Hall and the extension constructed in the 1960s.18 Commissioned by the institution, the book reads mostly as an invitation to contemporary audiences to develop a liking for the buildings and their role in London’s cultural scene. A critical historical assessment, in other words, is not intended. Existing literature on the second phase of the South Bank is predominantly concerned with the attribution of the innings, Modern Architect: the Life and Times of Robert Matthew, (London: RIBA) 2008. Leslie Martin as it were supplied his own monograph. Leslie Martin, Buildings and ideas 1933–1983, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 1983.


design and the question whether or not the building should be seen as an early realisation of the paper architecture experiments of Archigram, three of the later members of the group having also been team members working on the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. The only recent book on the Kulturhus is an in-house publication highlighting the role that the institution has played for Stockholm’s culture since. The literature on Peter Celsing, by contrast, mostly discusses the building as an architectural object and pays only limited attention to the extensive debate on cultural politics of which it was the result.

In discussing the interplay between architectural design ideas and the debates on the role of culture in society this study is complementary to the existing research on the South Bank and the Kulturhus. In order to establish possible connections between discourses on cultural politics and those on architecture, or identify the absence of such connections, I sought to trace the documents, articles, statements, exhibitions and policy papers, in which ideas on the provision of culture were formulated. In doing this, I had to rely on the by now extensive secondary literature on post-war cultural history, in both Sweden and Britain.

1.5 Methodology and sources

The cultural centres, including the South Bank and the Kulturhus, are remnants of a not-too-distant past, but they are history. How much this was the case became increasingly clear to me when trying to establish contact with those involved in the initiative or in the process of their design and realisation. Four decades later (and even more in the case of the South Bank) it proved difficult if not impossible to attempt a reconstruction of events by relying on first-hand accounts. For the Kulturhus I was given valuable hints by Per Ahrbom, who worked in the Celsing office while the project was developed and by Johan Celsing who provided memories of the period in his father’s life. Neither, however, had been directly involved in the first design phase. The development of the South Bank is discussed in some detail in an interview with Norman Engleback, the group leader of the design team, which was produced for the National Sound Archive held at the British Library. Yet, this account, too, leaves many questions unanswered about why and how the design developed in the way that it did.

My analysis of the evolution of the institutional and architectural concepts, therefore, relies largely on archive material and secondary sources. For the Stockholm building this was relatively unproblematic. The Celsing archive, set up after the dissolution of the architectural office and still located in a part of the former studio, holds a vast number of sketches, drawings, written documents and anecdotal evidence, allowing a reasonably precise reconstruction of the process which led to the Kulturhus.

In London this proved more difficult. For the first phase of the South Bank, the Royal Festival Hall, I could largely use material that has already been published. Attempts at settling the attribution of the design have generated detailed accounts of its development, which benefited from the availability of the material of the LCC’s architect’s department that was transferred to the London Metropolitan Archive (LMA) after the dissolution of London’s local body authority in the 1980s. A reconstruction of the initiative and the process of designing the buildings of the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Hayward Gallery, the second phase of the South Bank, was much more complicated. Even after extensive searching I was only able to trace sets of drawings – in vast number – produced during the execution phase, when the general outline of the design was largely settled. The interpretation of events or ideas preceding and informing the preliminary design, which forms the basis of the executed buildings, largely depends on the accounts of Norman Engleback in the National Sound Archive and those of others in various publications. The fact that some of the detailed memories of those involved in the scheme seem to be contradictory and contradicting each other suggests that they have to be read with the necessary caution and that the reconstruction of the design process retains a necessary degree of uncertainty.

The description of the various processes leading to these initiatives and to formulating the briefs of the buildings was easier. In both
London and Stockholm, reports and documents produced by administrators and politicians have largely been kept in archives. For the Kulturhus I could also rely on the full documentation of all major reports and statements in Kulturhuskommitténs Slutrapport, the very precise and exhaustive report published by the committee responsible for formulating the programme of the new building. The reception of ideas on culture, as well as the realised buildings, could start from a thorough analysis of the articles and reviews in professional journals and the broadsheet press, held in various archives in both countries.

The main methodological difficult of this study of two buildings in the context of post-war cultural politics stemmed from the immense variety of material. Attempting to make sense of these discourses, and organising the information obtained from them, often felt like playing not one, but several, very grand pianos. My approach relied on the hypothesis that different disciplinary discourses developed simultaneously or had interacted with each other. In order to test this hypothesis I not only had to make myself acquainted with the discourses as such, but also had to establish – or at least credibly construct – relationships between the positions of people operating within fairly distinct disciplines or social practices. In some cases these relationships had been stated, or cross-references been made explicit; in others they had to remain conjectures or could only be proved by an analysis of the terminology or the structure of arguments.

Finally, this study relies to some degree on an analysis of drawings, as far as available, and of buildings. The experience of the South Bank and the Kulturhus ‘in the flesh’ and in everyday or exceptional situations had been the reason for my embarking on this project and it provides also the material for their analysis. There may well be a certain amount of bias, perhaps occasionally partisanship, in these interpretations and my ‘readings’ of buildings and how they appear to be used. But then, I guess, such bias is probably unavoidable. After all, this whole undertaking relies on an understanding that these buildings still speak to us about the ideas from which they emerged.

1.6 Structure of the study

This study focuses on two particular buildings, the individual histories of their conception and realisation, and an analysis of their designs. In order to locate the two cases it seemed, however, also necessary to examine the general conditions which explain their existence and which might offer a framework for understanding them. For this reason the present study is organised in four parts in which I will discuss the historic and ideological context along with the analysis of the buildings.

Chapter 2 considers the emergence of cultural policies in the twentieth century and the creation of an extensive institutional infrastructure for state-sponsored cultural provision after 1945. Since the two projects to be closely examined are situated in Britain and Sweden, it seemed appropriate generally to limit the discussion of the invention of cultural politics and their policies to these countries. However, debates about culture and society in modern Europe are not defined by national boundaries. Much of what has been thought and written about the subject has its roots in eighteenth century enlightenment thinking and Idealist philosophy, various modifications and re-definitions of culture vis-à-vis society show at least a certain degree of influence across these boundaries. Having set out the ideas behind the identification of culture as one of the core responsibilities of the post-war welfare state in Britain and Sweden, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the fundamental shift in the objectives of cultural policies and the interpenetration of politics and culture in the late 1960s.

Chapter 3 focuses on the way in which ‘culture’ might be understood in relation to ideas about democracy, a connection that was invariably established in post-war discourses on the objectives of cultural policies. Particularly in the 1960s these objectives of a democratisation and modernisation of society, and the role of culture within this process, became increasingly linked and interpreted as essential in the development of a critical public debate. This chapter examines the conditions informing this process using Jürgen Habermas’s seminal study of the public sphere, published in 1962, and a series of critical reactions to it, as a theoretical framework for understanding both how this sphere of debate constituted itself historically and which role was played by various concepts of culture in this development.

The following three chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) contain a close examination of the South Bank and the Kulturhus, each discussing their origin in large-scale urban reconstruction projects, the process of formulating their programmes, the debates surrounding them and the factors that determined their programmatic arrangement. Discussions of the main actors, local politicians or art administrators and the architects operating from within their particular architectural cultures are included to provide an understanding of the ideas informing the design. Each case study concludes with examinations of the realities of day-to-day use after the building had been completed and the critical reception of the projects.

Finally: were the cultural centres successful in realising increased access to culture and did the hope that a greater, deeper and more
critical engagement with creative practices could help a good society materialise? Could the fundamental critique of the realities of developed capitalist societies become credibly absorbed into a system of state-sponsored cultural provision? If the cultural centres were really successful in realising a new, and more inclusive culture, how could this culture be described? Or were they ultimately preparing the way for an understanding of culture that has given up not only its association with social privilege, but also the demand of a minimal commitment to seriousness and intensity, which formed the basis of the nineteenth century ideal of beauty, truth and virtue? Is it possible to find traces of the idealistic (and Idealistic) agenda which informed the initiatives for the cultural centres in their current function, despite the pressures to make them more ‘commercially viable’? How do they operate within a cultural industry, for which Adorno and Horkheimer’s characterisation as an ‘Amüsierbetrieb’ that keeps reproducing itself has become an almost mild compliment when set against the brutal boring banalities confronting contemporary audiences? These are some of the questions I endeavour to discuss in the last chapter (Chapter 7) of this study, by way of a tentative conclusion about two European buildings and the ideas behind them.

Acknowledgements

My research would not have been possible without the patient and dedicated support from the archives which provided me with material, particularly Johan Celsing and Britta Abrahamsson Stokke at Celsing Arkivet/ Birgitta & Peter Celsing Stiftelse and the staff at the London Metropolitan Archive, as well as staff at the Amsterdam University Library, The National Sound Archive and the British Library, the library of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the library of the Architectural Association, Delft University Library, Stockholm’s Stadsarkiv. Henrik Löfgren at Stockholms Kulturrhus provided me with very valuable material from the archive of his institution, and the conversations with Uwe Badewardt, Margareta Zetterström and others at the Kulturrhus supplied me with background information both on the history of the building and its current functioning. Per Ahrbom and Johan Celsing were extremely generous with their first-hand knowledge of the design process in Stockholm. Norman Engleback kindly sent me a copy of his reminiscences of his time in the architect’s department of the London County Council.

I have been able to benefit from the kind support and constructive criticism of Catherine Croft, Ellis Woodman, Irenée Scalbert, Irina Davidovici and many others in London. The initial idea to focus on public buildings from the 1960s and early 1970s emerged in long conversations I had with Mark Cousins when I was studying in the Histories and Theories Programme at the Architectural Association School. In Sweden I would like to thank Catharian Dyrssen, Elizabeth Hatz and Helena Mattson who either invited me to lecture and thus provided the opportunity to test my first findings on a Swedish audience or provided additional information. Tineke Jorissen-Wedzinga was patient enough to help me acquiring at least a rudimentary knowledge of the Swedish language, essential for reading through the relevant documents and secondary literature on Swedish history, culture and architecture. I owe particular thanks to Claes Caldenby, Stefan Mehr, Björn Elmbrandt and Johan Celsing, as well as Elain Harwood, Patrick Healy and Dirk van den Heuvel for reading parts of my manuscript and for their constructive criticism.

Much of what I have been writing, including this study, is marked by my long involvement in a most extraordinary journal for architecture, Oase. The editors of this journal, a group of dedicated writers and practitioners from the Netherlands and Flanders, have, both directly and indirectly, had influenced my writing. Some of them, particularly Tom Avermaete and Lara Schrijver, have actively commented on my work, others including Johan Lagae, Véronique Patteeuw, Dlaine Camp, Hans Teerts, Joachim Declerck and Klaske Havik (who continue as editors), and Mechthild Stuhlmacher, François Claessens, Madeleine Maaskant (who have editors been in the past), have provided an atmosphere, in which a particular type of architectural research, which is both precise and critical, can flourish and from which I have certainly benefited in my own work.
A research like this always relies on the surprising turns and the endless generosity of others. The Stockholm research, and indeed being able to immerse myself in a culture that had been more or less unknown to me, would have been impossible without the hospitality, support and friendship of Klas Ruin and Elin Strand. At Delft my colleagues in the chair of Architectural Design have been following me on my long journey, and on many occasions helped me proceeding in what to them must have seemed an indeterminate project. I am thus deeply grateful for the support by Irene Cieraad, Mark Pimlott, Jurjen Zeinstra, Eireen Schreurs, Mechthild Stuhlmacher, Udo Garritzmann, Leontine de Wit and Susanne Pietsch for bearing with me, for their time reading my manuscript and for often very precise comments. My special gratitude goes to Tony Fretton, Professor of the chair, who not only read my texts with dedication, but also was crucial in making some of the larger strategic decisions and to Franziska Bollerey, Professor of the history of architecture and urbanism at Delft, for her many helpful suggestions and her active moral support, but also for reminding me in the kindest possible way of my priorities. I owe special thanks to Klaartje van Eijk for finding a visual form for organising the material and my colleagues in the department of architecture, and particularly Dick van Gameren, for supporting the book production. Thanks also to robstolk printers for their financial support and tremendous expertise.

I should also like to express my gratitude to the members of the PhD committee for engaging with this project and the colloquium held on the occasion of the defence. This event was jointly organised by the Department of Architecture and the Delft School of Design (DSD).

When Arie Graafland, Professor of Architectural Theory and director of the Delft School of Design, and Adrian Forty, Professor of Architectural History at the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, kindly agreed to advise me and supervise me, they probably did not expect to be part of the long-term project this study has become. I am deeply grateful for their unfailing support and patience, for their crucial critical comments and for their generosity.

As I embarked on this study, I had to learn Swedish and immerse myself in the culture. The fact that I did not have to do the same for London, and that I could rely on at least a rudimentary knowledge of the city, its history and culture, I owe to Christopher Woodward, whose role in this project – as necessary irritant, critical reader, provider of knowledge and in mending my English, to name just a few aspects – has been so vast, I could not start to describe it.
Chapter 2
Civilising force or Experiments with Equality? Cultural politics and cultural policies
2.1 Introduction

When the Swedish writer Göran Palm published his poem 'Two Cultures' (if this is indeed how the text should be categorised) in an anthology of his works in 1969 he voiced the sentiment of a large section of the public opinion not only in his own country, but across much of Western Europe. His juxtaposition of keywords referring to institutions, types of cultural practices and values was rhetorically unsophisticated and relied on a simplified opposition. Yet in its journalistic crudeness the 'poem' provided a popularised version of other, more complicated critical discourses on the mechanisms of the commercial cultural industry and on the open or hidden elitism of the cultural patronage of the post-war welfare state.

Palm's text offers a convenient summary of the issues that figured in the debates on culture at the end of the 1960s. It opens with an attack on the exclusive nature of the institutions: outside the ‘official culture’ of the ‘grand houses’, the opera or dramatic theatre, there is the ‘other culture’ in ‘houses for all’ in urban neighbourhoods, as part of protest movements against large-scale modern city planning. Then there is an attack on the commercial nature of the cultural industries and the concentration of ownership of newspapers and publishing houses, which the author wishes to be replaced by collective systems of control by the cultural producers. Distinctions between professional and amateur artists, between cultural producers and audiences are to be eliminated and Palm suggests replacing staged ‘panel discussions’ with ‘mass meetings’, not just in the large cities, but in every community in the country. It is in the final passage that the author sets out the objectives for the ‘other culture’, which positions itself within a movement for a general cultural revolution and the ‘social and political liberation of the many’. In Palms vision culture becomes a politicised practice, a vehicle for class struggle providing ‘arms for the powerless’ rather than a consolation for the inequalities of a capitalist society.

The author invests the ‘other culture’ with considerable power. His proposal entails a radical reorganisation of state patronage for the arts, pioneering a change of the economic and political arrangements of Swedish society. This implies a position of moral leadership for cultural producers in areas outside the creation of art works. In fact, the term ‘art’ as such is used merely in a pejorative sense, in order to denote the exclusive nature of established culture.

The poem could be dismissed as naïve, pretentious and self-congratulatory. However, as I will try to show in this chapter, its basic premise, that culture was an essential component of a socially progressive egalitarian agenda, was very widely shared and the criticism of the elitist nature of established cultural institutions so widespread that it became absorbed into the policies for state-subsidised cultural provision in Sweden a few years after Palm published his poem. Somewhat hidden by its questionnable literary quality the text represented the collective expectations of a generation of left-wing intellectuals, artists, cultural administrators and politicians, not only in Sweden, at the end of the 1960s.  

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1 Göran Palm, Vad kan man göra, (Stockholm: Pan/ Norstedts bokförlag) 1969, p. 113-115; translation by the author. Palm’s book was a considerable publishing success; the cover of the 1969 edition claimed that in this year alone 10000 copies had been sold – an astonishing number in a market of less than ten million potential readers.
The objective of this chapter is first of to sketch out the development leading to the establishment of new systems of cultural provision in the years after 1945 and the shift in the objectives of state-sponsored culture in the subsequent two-and-a-half decades, but particularly in the 1960s. The post-war ‘invention of cultural policies’, which materialised in an entirely new set of agencies established for funding cultural production (and the buildings to support this practice), were included in broader agendas of social reform. In the first part of this chapter I will try to show that these policies have a long lineage from ideas rooted in the Enlightenment and nineteenth century Romanticism, and how philo-
thropic or cooperative reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to instrumentalise culture for their visions of a different, better society. One aspect of this process is the unease, particularly among the middle classes, about the emergence of a ‘mass’ of urban industrial workers, and the problematic relationship between a concept of culture that has been described as ‘dominant’, ‘hegemonic’ or ‘exclusive’ versus a degenerate culture of the mass and an idealised original (rural or in any case pre-industrial) ‘folk culture’. The role of the state as patron and the tradition of absorbing culture into the raison d’état the state as patron and the tradition of absorbing culture into the raison d’état.

2 This is the title of a study of the French politique culturelle after 1959. Philippe Urfahlino, L’invention de la politique culturelle, (Paris: Hachette) 2004

3 The notion of cultural hegemony originates in the thinking of Antonio Gramsci, who used it to examine the adherence to pre-capitalist forces by the Italian working class to inherited cultural and political assumptions which did not suit their own economic situation in an industrialised society. Cf. Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Note-
books, (London: Lawrence and Wishart) 1971, p.333

4 Irene Cieradzka describes this as a ‘triangular relationship’, in which representatives of the dominant culture (cultural thinkers, ethnographers or later anthropologists) set an allegedly commercialised and inauthentic culture of the masses against the authentic folk traditions. As she points out there is a difficulty in the terminology: the term ‘culture populaire’, ‘cultura popolare’ or ‘popular culture’ invite misunderstandings, whereas the use of ‘Volkskultur’ and its equivalents in Dutch or the Scandinavian languages implies a concept of a pre-industrial, pure culture, linked to Friedrich Thönnies’ notion of Gemeinschaft. Irene Cieradzka, De elitaire verbeelding van volk en massa, (Tilburg: Tilburg UP) 1996, p.9-13

5 Sometimes the terms used in different languages are revealing and this is surely the case when it comes to culture and its relationship with political arrangements. All major Continental Euro-
pean languages use the noun ‘politik’ in its singular form – rather than the English ‘policies’ – as a container term for measures taken by the state in the field of culture. It seems evident that the refer-
tance to a Kulturpolitik (the Swedish or German term) or politiques culturelles implies that the measures taken for state patronage are viewed as an integral part of the core responsibilities of the Kulturpolitik has overtones of centralised planning of

culture. My approach is necessarily fragmentary, and guided primarily by the question in how far arguments on the definition of culture had a bearing on official policy after World War II.

Secondly, it should be clear that a comprehensive discussion of all particular national developments across Europe is beyond the scope of this study. I shall therefore concentrate on a comparative examination of two countries in which a variant of the welfare state model, involving a limited measure of material redistribution, a comprehensive state control of the sectors of health and education and a certain degree of centralised economic planning was introduced immediately after the war. In this context Britain and Sweden, where for historical reasons this model of an attempted reconciliation of a capitalist economy with ideas about social equality was adopted earlier than elsewhere, play a central role.

The French Action Culturelle instigated by André Malraux is briefly discussed, as a mirror of the two Northern European welfare states and because of its apparent influence on cultural debates and policies elsewhere in the 1960s.

In Britain the system of state planning as part of the war effort could be (partly) redirected to rebuid the domestic economy, while the extraordinary contribution of ordinary people to victory in the world war provided a moral impulse for allowing the majority of the population a share in the fruits of an envisaged economic recovery. In the field of cultural provision measures that had been taken during the war to boost morale at home and among the soldiers formed a pretext for the institu-
tionalisation of state patronage for culture (or ‘the arts’ as the field was invariably referred to in the 1950s and early 1960s).

Sweden provided another influential example for the development of a society following the welfare state model. It was in the unique position of a country that had not participated in the war and where a politi-
cally dominant Social Democratic party had initiated measures of social reform in the 1930s. These reforms were taken up with increased force in 1945, allowing the country to make a head start while most of Europe was only gradually returning to some rudimentary form of normality. The implementation in the late 1940s of large-scale programmes for housing, education and health care invested Sweden with a model status for planners and politicians from those countries where such measures were, for the time being, merely a future projection. At the same time, the legacy of a strong tradition of state intervention in the moral affairs of individual citizens through the established Lutheran state church had a continued influence on a cultural policy justified by social as well as artistic considerations.

Both the British and the Swedish welfare systems were installed by Social-Democratic governments. It seems reasonable to assume that the idea of a change of society via education and culture was a particu-
larly powerful component of the policies of a political movement that advocated a reform of the political and economic system rather than a revolutionary transformation or a restoration of a liberal capitalist system. The development of post-war cultural policies may be seen as directly linked to the electoral success of Social Democratic parties.
The involvement of politicians from other political formations must, however, not be underestimated. It was in Gaullist France, under the aegis of André Malraux as the republic’s first minister for culture, that the agenda for a *politique culturelle* was formulated with explicit rhetorical power during the 1960s. It is for this reason that the French approach provides important material for a discussion of the development of a centralised policy, which also materialised in the construction of a large number of new cultural centres across the national territory. It will also be interesting to examine if and how far the policies and activities of Malraux provided a pretext for the initiative for building the most well-known of all European cultural centres, the Centre Pompidou.

In 1961 Raymond Williams noted that Western society, and Britain in particular, was living through a decisive phase of a cultural revolution ‘which our best descriptions only in part interpret’, a change ‘transforming men and institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual forms and ideas’. Williams was voicing an expectation, which over the course of the decade would be shared by large numbers of left-wing intellectuals and which was certainly partly responsible for eruptions of unrest of students across Europe in 1968. Williams’s position, optimistic in the general assumption that a wider access to learning and advanced communication was inevitable, reflects a longer tradition of connecting education and the development of a modern democratic society and the direction of much of reformist official policies in the 1960s. Yet it also implied that the terms of this development needed to be radically questioned against the background of increased material wealth and an emerging consumer culture, in order to avoid feelings of ‘cynicism, apathy, pointlessness’ which might otherwise jeopardise the realisation of a more democratic society. In identifying culture as a vehicle for social change, against conformism and the acceptance of existing social arrangements, Williams reiterated many of the arguments formulated by proponents of cultural reform since the French revolution and the emergence of an industrial society. It is the trajectory of the definition of the term ‘culture’ (and the ‘arts’) from the early nineteenth century to the 1960s, which is the point of departure for the discussion of the cultural policies in the post-war period and the debates that informed them.

### 2.2 Notes on historical definitions of culture

In contemporary language ‘culture’ has become a term that has acquired a broad meaning. There are cultural supplements in newspapers, cultural landscapes promoted in tourist brochures, food cultures and cultures of fashion, corporate cultures and those of particular institutions, subcultures and parallel cultures – as well as ministers, councillors or aldermen for culture. In broadsheet newspapers the replacement of the traditional ‘arts section’ with a ‘cultural supplement’ often has been accompanied by an extension of the scope of these publications; formerly the domain of specialised critics writing reviews of books, theatre, exhibitions or performances of classical music, they now appear as compendia of just about everything that is not covered on the main pages covering politics, economic affairs and sports. The annual presentations of fashion in Paris or Milan, the appearance of new media and uses of the internet, rock or hip-hop groups bursting onto the scene and becoming absorbed by the entertainment industries or gossip about the private lives of celebrity figures: all of these trends and events seem to be contained by one term, ‘culture’. Terry Eagleton writes:

> “Culture” is a slippery term, which can be either trivial or momentous. A glossy colour supplement is culture, and so are images of emaciated Africans it offers to our eye. In Belfast or the Basque country, culture can mean what you are prepared to kill for. Or – for the slightly less zealous – die for. It can also be a squalor over the merits of U2. You can be burnt to death because of culture, or it can be a question of whether to wear that rather fetching Pre-Raphaelite-style shirt. Live sex, culture if the kind of phenomenon which it seems one can avoid underrating only by overrating. In one sense it is what we live by, the act of sense-making itself, the very social air we breathe; in another sense it is far from what most profoundly shapes our lives.”

The extension of the meaning of the term ‘culture’ and its frequent appearance in everyday language suggests that culture has become one of the defining aspects of a society, which is no longer driven by innovations in the production of goods but by the speed by which communication technologies allow new forms of economic activity to emerge, for people in different places to interact and organise themselves. On the one hand culture is becoming a part of economic strategies of ‘branding’ cities and products; on the other, as the sociologist Niklas Luhmann argues, it is a ‘bearer of hope, which cannot be explained except in any other way than by the consciousness of a deficit in the actual social conditions.’ Culture then becomes a container describing the strategies of individuals and groups of people to create a temporary or stable identity against the background of a situation where everything appears to be fluid, undefined and unstable. This suggests that, rather than describing an autonomous field of human activities that is clearly defined by its connection to a set of traditions

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11 ibid., p. 12
14 Luhmann describes the ‘system of art’ (as a term denoting a more precise type of activity than culture) as ‘an exemplary case of a modern, highly differentiated, operatively autonomous (but causally dependent) functional system’. This definition implies a departure from the Marxist concept of art as part of a superstructure (Überbau) dependent on a base (Bau). Ibid. p. 436
and timeless values, culture has become absorbed into an economy of communication. The diffuse character of the term in its contemporary use, the fact that it covers a large range of phenomena, many of which are ephemeral in nature, contrasts significantly with the reference to eternal, universal values that was attached to culture well into the nineteenth century. The appearance of buildings for the presentation of art or musical performances from the late nineteenth century provides a potent reminder of this older and more strictly circumscribed definition of culture as an area supposedly outside the area of economic transactions or political considerations. This notion of culture was often visible in the geographic proximity of nineteenth century opera houses, theatres or museums to the ceremonial centres of cities or wealthy residential quarters and by the architectural references to classical traditions, as a distinct representation of a field in which mechanisms of economic exchange – ‘the market’ – were suspended. Inscriptions dedicating these buildings to ‘Dem Schönen, Wahren, Guten’ (Beauty, Truth, Charity) or other references to ethical or moral ideals mark them as repositories of immaterial ideas and objects which were not subject to the rules applied in the market of services and commodities.

Both the architectural appearance and the experience of the museum, concert halls or theatres in nineteenth century cities, with their references to monumental and religious buildings, formed part of a conscious attempt to represent the universal and unchanging nature of what was contained in them. The attacks in the cultural debates of the 1960s against the ‘Kulturtempel’ (temples of culture) and against the institutions housed in them as elitist and outdated merely echoed the way in which the architecture and the practice of presenting objects and performing music or theatre had been elevated to a ‘superior reality’ that offered an illusion of stability, covering the fact that the society that had produced these buildings was one of persistent social inequality and ruthless economic competition. The architectural form of the temples of culture, their grandeur and inaccessibility, seemed designed to serve a double purpose: both as representation of the autonomy of culture and as a means of social demarcation and distinction; it appeared as if the new bourgeois elite of the nineteenth century wished to protect its fortified culture against outsiders – the masses of industrial workers with whom they had to share the cities. The act of exclusion by means of architectural morphology and appearance supports what Pierre Bourdieu has called the ‘class ethnocentrism’ of the educated middle classes.

The critique of the separation between ‘culture’ as an autonomous field, outside the economic and social realities, forms the backbone of much of the writing on culture after 1945. This applied particularly to authors who departed from a Marxist analysis of capitalist society. Theodor W. Adorno, director of the Institut für Sozialforschung and one of the founders of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, for instance, described culture as a ‘fetish’, established to repress the fact that all creative practice is fundamentally embedded in and made possible by the social order of which it forms a part: ‘For no authentic work of art and no real philosophy have ever exhausted themselves in their proper sense in their “Existence-in-themselves”. Always they existed in relation to the real processes of life of the society, from which they separated themselves. The very negation of the guilty correlation of a life that reproduces itself blindly and cruelly, the independence and autonomy, and on a separation from the dominant realm of utility implies, at least unconsciously, the reference to a state in which freedom was once realised. This remains the ambiguous promise of culture, as long as its existence relies on bewitched reality, and ultimately on the disposition of the labour of others (fremder Arbeit).’

The elevation of ‘culture’ beyond ordinary realities and the question of how the relationship between culture and life in modern industrial society becomes a contested object of thought during the nineteenth century is the grand theme of Raymond Williams’s book Culture and Society. Williams identifies the fundamental shift in the late eighteenth century in the use of the term culture from a word denoting an activity supporting the natural growth of organisms to a process of human training human, as the prerequisite for attaining a state of perfection in both moral and intellectual terms. Williams argues that this move can be explained as a combination of two responses to the emergence of an industrial society: ‘first the separation of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society; second, the emphasis of these activities, as a court of human appeal, to be set over the processes of practical social judgement and yet to offer itself as a mitigating and rallying alternative.’ In other words, this implies a separation of creative activities from all other practices and forms of production. It allows ‘culture’ to be viewed as an abstraction and a striving for the absolute, and simultaneously a demand that culture, in its autonomous character, should provide something of a moral compass or a means of a fundamental critique of Utilitarianism. This contradictory set of expectations from culture and from the artist – the demand of solemn autonomy versus a claim to a form of intellectual or moral leadership – explains the ambiguous situation in modern society, or its ‘double character’ in the diagnosis of Adorno.

The distinction of culture as abstraction, according to Williams, has a parallel in the re-definition of the term ‘arts’ in the same period, which changes from referring to a human attribute (a skill) to an institutional category or a confined range of activities, reflecting the status of artists as creative persons and holders of ‘imaginative truth’, who are distinct from artisans merely using their skills.

Williams describes the effect of this separation both of ‘culture’ and the ‘arts’ on the development of creative practice, but also on the definition and self-definition of artists vis-à-vis society:

‘… first, that a major change was taking place in the nature of the relationship between a writer and his readers; second, that a different habitual attitude towards the “public” was establishing itself; third, that the production of art was coming to be regarded as one of a number of...’
specialized kinds of production, subject to much the same conditions as general production; fourth, that a theory of the "superior reality" of art, as the seat of imaginative truth was receiving increasing emphasis; fifth, that the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius was becoming a kind of rule.\textsuperscript{23} The liberation from the obligations to aristocratic patrons that had affected artistic practices well into the eighteenth century invests artists with a new status of independence and forces them to rely on their success with an anonymous audience.\textsuperscript{24} On the other hand it also means that the role of culture in the larger context of industrial society and the relationship between artists as intellectual pioneers, the educated middle classes as their main audience and the uneducated mass of the population is transformed into an increasingly problematised issue. Culture is still the prerequisite of a social, economic and intellectual elite, even if its audience is steadily growing. On the other hand, Williams argues, artists and writers increasingly define their role as one of a principled opposition against the prevalent set of utilitarian values of the middle classes and thereby work towards a redefinition of culture. Culture, which in the early nineteenth century denotes 'the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole', and 'the general body of the arts', in due course becomes redefined as 'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual', which is no longer exclusively connected to dominant social groups.\textsuperscript{25} In Culture and Society Williams makes an attempt to trace his shift in the meaning of culture in the positions of (among others) Samuel Coleridge, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin and William Morris.

The English context of the writings on culture selected by Raymond Williams is significant, and distinguishes them from other, particularly German positions (which, however, influenced them). This, one can assume, is mainly to do with the early emergence in England of a sizeable mass of industrial workers, whose existence and circumstances affected ideas about the role of culture in a society to a larger extent than in less developed Continental countries. It is this constellation that is reflected in the different positions of English authors through the century, some of whom invoked aristocratic values for essentially conservative cultural revolutions whereas others developed early Socialist concepts of culture as a means of self-improvement and emancipation.

Aesthetic sensibility and personal improvement

In 1780 the painter Joshua Reynolds delivers a speech on the occasion of the opening of the Royal Academy. Reynolds, a well-established artist whose patrons include members of the aristocracy as well as the landed gentry, serves as the first chairman of the institution and in this capacity could be described as one of the founders of professional art education in Britain. His address to the members of the new academy is therefore programmatic, setting out the task of the arts and of the artist to strive for universal values and for excellence in his (and rarely her) works. 'Art' – not 'culture' – is presented by Reynolds as a means of improving society by raising people from sensuality to reason:

'It is therefore necessary to the happiness of individuals, and still more necessary to the security of society, that the mind should be elevated to the idea of general beauty, and the contemplation of general truth; by this pursuit the mind is always carried forward in search of something more excellent than it finds, and obtains its proper superiority over the common senses of life, by learning to feel itself capable of higher aims and nobler enjoyments.'\textsuperscript{26}

Reynolds' proposal of art as an instrument for elevating the mind towards beauty and truth suggests a process of individual self-improvement. The reference to the 'security of society', though perhaps telling, is subordinate to the need for the individual to attain a greater sense of judgement and the capacity for noble enjoyment. The way in which members of society might use their 'proper superiority over the common senses of life' for the well-being of the commonwealth, is not part of the consideration. The claim that art is a necessity for a well-ordered society, too, implies a limitation, as 'society' itself, in the understanding of Reynolds' contemporaries, exclusively applies to the educated and propertied. Reynolds' appeal for artistic education as a civilising force relies on the assumption that it is through the use of reason that the individual would take up his proper role in society, but it is not a theory of the role of the arts in the creation of a enlightened society.

It is in the philosophy of the German Enlightenment that a body of theory about the relationship between the development of culture as a means of educating human beings and the collective development of a society is more consistently formulated. Johann Gottfried von Herder had established a connection between culture and a nation as the collective united by a common language and a \textit{Volkgeist} (the people's spirit), which manifests itself in an original creativity, in folk songs and narratives.\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Kultur des Volkes} (culture of the people) needed to feed the \textit{Kultur der Gelehrten} (culture of the educated) which in turn was to exert a civilising influence on the common people. Culture, therefore was necessarily rooted in a common experience, a \textit{Gemeinschaft}, and its objective was a fuller realisation of humanity for all members of the community.\textsuperscript{28} Immanuel Kant, in his \textit{Kritik der Urteilskraft} (Critique of Judgement), assigns culture the task to form an individual capable of reason, 'according to his liberty'.

In Friedrich Schiller's \textit{Briefe zur ästhetischen Erziehung des Menschen} (Letters on the aesthetic education of man, 1793–94) these two demands – of the connection between culture and collective experience and of the individual striving for reason – are drawn together. Here it is the ideal of cultural development, in a society that has overcome the primitive phase of unmitigated natural law (the dynamic state) and the intermediate one of absolute rule (the ethic state), to reconcile the will of the individual with that of a whole society and its formation as an aesthetic state.

'The dynamic state can only make a society possible by taming nature through nature; the ethic state can merely make it (morally) necessary by subjecting the will of the individual to a general will; it...
is the aesthetic state exclusively which can truly realise it, because it executes the will of the whole through the nature of the individual.\(^\text{29}\)

In Schiller’s view it is through culture and education that man is capable of combining a fully developed experience of human existence with the ‘highest independence and freedom’ and of reconciling reason with sensual aspects. Reason and a desire for beauty require each other, in the individuals striving for harmony and in the harmony of a society based on the free will of its members.

‘If necessity invites man into society and reason plants the seeds for social principles in his mind, so beauty alone can afford him a social character. Taste alone takes harmony into society, because it provides harmony in the individual. All other forms of imagination separate men, because the are based exclusively on the sensual or on the spiritual part of his existence (*Wesen*); it is the imagination of beauty alone which makes man whole, because it requires the consent of both his natures. All other forms of communication separate the society, as they are related to the private susceptibilities of individual members, and thus to what separates man from man; the communication of beauty alone unites the society, because it relates to what is common to all.’\(^\text{30}\)

Schiller’s concept of culture can be seen as a response to the historical circumstances in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century. His concept of an aesthetic state is developed against the background of the reality of a nation divided into small territories governed, generally, by absolutist rulers. The discrepancy between the actual political arrangements and those proposed by the writer, and the idealised view of a society of individuals free of economic constraints will later cause Friedrich Engels to criticise Schiller’s argument as a flight from ‘trivial into effusive misery’.\(^\text{31}\) The assumption that the aesthetic state relies on a harmonious exchange between essentially equal citizens – this informed by the revolutionary events in France – ignores the fact that this condition exists nowhere in Germany, but can be seen as a summary of the aspirations of the German *Bürgertum* for political emancipation, in its most metaphysical and abstract form.\(^\text{32}\) The specific historical background of Schiller’s philosophy – Norbert Elias describes it as the ideological response of a powerless, petit-bourgeois intelligentsia operating in the geographic isolation of small towns\(^\text{33}\) – did, however, not prevent its reception, in Germany as well as in England. Even in the

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Schiller’s letters were addressed to Frederik-Christian of Schleswig-Holstein-Sonderborg-Augustenburg as an act of gratitude for the financial support the writer had received from the Danish court.

30 ibid., p. 121


32 Norbert Elias points to this and describes the definition of *Kultur* as a core term of German Idealism (and seen in opposition to an essentially French *Zivilisation*) as part of the ‘polemic of the German, lower middle class intelligentsia against the attitudes of the ruling, aristocratic upper class’. Norbert Elias, *Über den Begriff der Zivilisation*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp) 1997, p. 97

twentieth century the letters on the aesthetic education formed a crucial point of reference; André Malraux, for instance, repeatedly acknowledged that his case for aesthetic sensibility as a means to achieve a deeper humanity is explicitly indebted to Schiller’s concept of culture. 34

It is the Prussian diplomat and educational reformer Wilhelm von Humboldt who makes an attempt explicitly to connect the ideal of personal perfection with a redefinition of the responsibilities of an enlightened state. Humboldt states that ‘true purpose of man … is the highest and most proportionated education of his forces into a whole’,35 and assigns the state (as organisational form of an ordered society) a decisive role in realising this objective, noting that ‘the possibility of a higher degree of freedom always demands an equally high degree of education, and the decreased desire of acting in uniform masses a greater strength and richness of the active individual’.36 The author, whose ideas about general education are of eminent importance for the nineteenth century reforms of the Prussian schools and universities (hence the contemporary reference to the Humboldtsche Bildungsideale), is aware that the search for perfection is the privilege of few citizens ‘whose external circumstances allow them to devote a large part of their time and their energy to their inner education’.37 This is where an enlightened state has to become active: ‘One should not believe that this freedom of spirit and enlightenment is only attainable for a few members of the people, and that for the majority, whose daily business is exhausted by the care for the physical necessities of life, they are unnecessary or disadvantageous’. In order to reach the uneducated, who in Humboldt’s view are entitled to knowledge, will extend down to them and the beneficial consequences of a free and unfettered examination reach the spirit and the character of the whole nation, including its lowest individuals’.38

Culture and industrial society

In England the existence of a class of industrial workers in the early nineteenth century is reflected in the unease with the development of society that keeps surfacing in cultural and political debates. More than once, from most notably in the 1840s and again in the 1860s, the upper and middle classes are reminded of the circumstances of the working population by signs of unrest and revolt. The concentration of a large population in industrial towns and in factories becomes a matter for the concern, and the absence of education and by extension civilisation a threat to an orderly society. The emphasis on utility and fitness for economic processes, which Charles Dickens describes vividly in the novel Hard Times and which critics depict as a pervasive force in England (and other parts of Britain), is invariably identified as a force destroying the fabric of society. Utilitarianism, in the view of writers like Samuel Coleridge, Matthew Arnold or John Ruskin, is the great enemy of a harmonious development of society, and an indicator for a deep crisis.

It is against this background, as Raymond Williams argues in Culture and Society, that the cultivation of the individual and of culture as a societal phenomenon is summoned as a remedial factor and a force of defence against Utilitarianism and the predominance of the economical. It becomes ‘a court of appeal’, a measure ‘by which a society construing its relationships in terms of the cash-nexus might be condemned’.39 At the same time culture, or the degree to which a sizeable proportion of the population has experienced a process of cultivation, becomes an indicator of its progress. What in the eighteenth century was formulated as an ideal for the development of a personality, and a step towards participating in polite society, is now, against the background of a situation of crisis, reformulated as a condition on which society as a whole depends.40

The direction of proposals for a reform of society through cultivation is more often than not informed by the reference to an idealised, mediaval past invoking the particular responsibilities of a ruling, that is aristocratic, class and its institutions. In his essay On the Constitution of Church and State (1837) Samuel Coleridge proposes a re-organisation of industrial society along corporate lines, in which members of a ‘National Church’ identified as ‘Clerisy’ were to serve the ‘harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity’ and ‘to preserve the stores and to guard the treasures of past civilization, and thus to connect the present with the future’.41 Coleridge’s concept of a renewed society organised around an institution providing moral guidance and instruction is indebted to both Schiller’s view of culture and ideas of Romanticism about the development of a national culture. In order to achieve a general cultivation of the population the members of the ‘National Church’ (not a ‘Church of Christ’ but more generally a force for spiritual improvement) are to be distributed around the country ‘so as not to leave even the smallest integral part or division without a resident guide, guardian, and instructor’. Cultivation is no longer an individual process, but supports individuals in taking up their proper place in society and acting morally.

In the 1850s and 60s, and under the experience of renewed attacks on the established order, the opposition to Utilitarianism and the proposal of culture as a force of civilising society acquires a more urgent tone. Culture is now proposed as an alternative the anarchy that is inevitably going to emerge from the existence of an uneducated, disenfranchised and exploited working population. In 1866 the rejection of a bill to extend the franchise (the right to vote) to working-class men leads to large protest meetings in London’s Hyde Park.42 How the incentive to give access to education and culture to the working classes was identified as a matter of urgency, if such unrest is to be avoided, becomes clear from a speech delivered to a working men’s college in Manchester in 1859. The speaker describes the reasons for the establishment of the college as an educational institution:

‘We believed and felt that unless the classes of this country which had received any degree of knowledge more than their fellows were
The educational impulse and the proposal of access to culture as a means to avoid chaos returns in Matthew Arnold’s influential book *Culture and Anarchy*, published in 1869. Arnold is revoluted by the scenes of the rioting protesters in Hyde Park and supports the authorities ‘in repressing anarchy and disorder; because without order there can be no society; and without society there can be no human perfection’. Based on a long experience as a schools inspector, Arnold’s demand for a dissemination of excellence and human values was framed as an act of defence against anarchy, but also as an act of self-improvement and, through this, society at large:

“We recommend culture as a great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thoughts upon our stock notions and habits, that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.”

Culture, and the process of attaining it, is ‘a study of perfection’, a goal in itself which raises the individual to a higher state of humanity. This implies a criticism of the utilitarian view of education as an act of instruction for a particular measurable purpose. For Arnold, the aim of culture is implies a criticism of the utilitarian view of education as an act of goal in itself which raises the individual to a higher state of humanity. For Arnold, the aim of culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thoughts upon our stock notions and habits, that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.

“...The calculations informing the support for initiatives for raising the standard of education here concur with those for cultivating the working classes through access to culture. Both are defended as necessary for maintaining a stable society. In the debate following the publication of the report one Member of Parliament reports watching the ‘peasants of the mountains of Tyrol holding up their children, and explaining to them the scenes of Bavarian history almost every Sunday’ from the frescoes of the Munich Feldherrnhalle, suggesting that a work of art might contribute to elevating the lower orders in their morals and foster patriotic feelings in them.”

In the two last decades of the nineteenth century these ideas materialise in a range of philanthropic initiatives in the East End of London, the capital’s largest working class area near the docklands. The objectives of an exhibition of fine arts in 1881 with pictures of Royal Academicians in a church, and the foundation in 1901 of the Whitechapel Art Gallery could be described as a mixture of philanthropic social engineering and an attempt at moral improvement, as well providing an alternative to the distractions and dangers of public houses, taverns or popular music halls. The organisers of the art exhibitions, the clergyman Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta Weston (a former co-worker of the social reformer Octavia Hill), propose that by being confronted with works of art the local working class population would develop religious feelings and adopt cleanliness and refinement. Ultimately, the Barnettts hope, cultural action is to neutralise the threat of political unrest and turn the

Anarchy has left a lasting impression on the British debate on the role of culture in an industrial society. 48

Culture for the ‘great unwashed’ – Philanthropic initiatives

The development of a series of initiatives to establish cultural institutions for the industrial working classes in Britain appears both as a response to the fear of social instability and to the absence of educational and cultural policy on the part of the state. In his Reflections on the French Revolution Matthew Arnold demands that an attempt should be made to ‘take all our fellowmen, in the East End of London and elsewhere’ along in the ‘the progress towards perfection’. For the general state of a civilised society he deems it unacceptable to leave large parts of it as ‘a multitude of miserable, sunken and ignorant human beings’ in a state of ‘degradation and wretchedness’. 49

Arnold’s appeal directed at the middle classes resonates with widely held ideas about the beneficial effect of confronting industrial workers with works of art as exemplary objects of human endeavour. The effect of giving an increased access to works of art is seen as two-fold; on the one hand it is supposed to elevate the lower orders of society to a higher moral status, on the other it is seen as an incentive to their productive capacity and training. An 1841 parliamentary report on the promotion of fine arts states that ‘…the collection and exhibition of works of art have only tended to the moral elevation of the People, but have also given a fresh stimulus to their Industry…’. 50 The calculations informing the support for initiatives for raising the standard of education here concur with those for cultivating the working classes through access to culture. Both are defended as necessary for maintaining a stable society. In the debate following the publication of the report one Member of Parliament reports watching the ‘peasants of the mountains of Tyrol holding up their children, and explaining to them the scenes of Bavarian history almost every Sunday’ from the frescoes of the Munich Feldherrnhalle, suggesting that a work of art might contribute to elevating the lower orders in their morals and foster patriotic feelings in them. 51

Arnold departs from an assumption that culture as a way to human perfection is firmly in the possession of members of the educated classes of society, who have an obligation to hand it down to the uneducated. His ideas of a transmission of culture through the education of the masses appear similar to those of Wilhelm von Humboldt half a century earlier, but they seem to lack the liberal realism of the Prussian education reformer’s acceptance that the civilisation of the lower orders required a certain tolerance in the forms in which culture would appear, and operate in a situation where the state is absent as a force taking responsibility for the civilisation its citizens. The effect of Arnold’s position through the emergence of a series of philanthropic initiatives for bringing culture to working class neighbourhoods in London and other British cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, however, according to Stephen Collini, allows the conclusion that Culture and
working class into sensible and moderate members of society.\textsuperscript{53} Culture becomes an instrument for the realisation of the concept of a united society, in which rich and poor stand side by side instead of eyeing each other with hostility.\textsuperscript{54} The initiative of the Barnettts does not stand on its own; in the same period a ‘People’s Palace’ opens its doors, attracting 310,000 visitors in the early 1980s, which, however, offers popular entertainment as well as educational activities (and in the 1960s will become an important point of reference for the Fun Palace project of theatre director Joan Littlewood and architect Cedric Price).\textsuperscript{55} Pressure groups such as the ‘Sunday Society’, established ‘to obtain the opening of museums, art galleries, libraries, aquariums and gardens on Sundays’, complement the work of the philanthropic initiatives in the East End, advocating allowing the urban working class access to national collections and museums.

The arts exhibitions in the church form a prelude to the establishment of educational institutions. It is in the establishment in 1884 of Toynbee Hall (named after the Oxford historian Arnold Toynbee, with whom Barnett is closely connected), that the educational programme receives its full realisation. The hall, or ‘settlement’, offers accommodation to scholars and others,\textsuperscript{56} who live among the poor, and support their efforts at educating themselves. In a description of the work of Toynbee Hall Barnett sets out the objectives of the cultural action as ‘the encouragement of knowledge which is not saleable’, and of education to ‘aim at adding joy to life rather than of pence to wages’. These intentions, and the emphasis on the full development of the individual rather than on professional training, are visible in the lecture programme with ‘university’ classes in place of ‘technical’ classes in historical, cultural and social subjects.\textsuperscript{57} Barnett’s characterisation of the institution as ‘a centre of education, a mission, a centre of social effort’ but essentially a ‘club house in Whitechapel occupied by men who do citizens’ duty in the neighbourhood’\textsuperscript{58} is revealing. It effectively portrays the philanthropic work as an act of missionary activity, or of internal colonisation – even if Barnett stresses its openness to all faiths and convictions. To secure this, the definition of the hall, which is somewhat reminiscent of a mendicant monastery institution (‘the environment of a cultured life’, in which each

man pursues his own vocation’), is of fundamental importance. Barnett also clarifies: ‘There is no affection of equality with neighbours by the adoption of mean or dirty habits.’\textsuperscript{59} Under all circumstances the mission post has to maintain its moral and cultural purity.

The question is how the relation between the philanthropists and the recipients of their activities, and between artists and those confronted with their work, should be analysed. It seems that the basic tenets of Samuel Barnett’s model of cultural diffusion, and that of other groups for reform, are informed by Matthew Arnold’s appeal for an educational campaign to cultivate the mass of industrial workers. Like Arnold before him, Barnett assumes that the fine arts are a specialised activity executed by professionals relating to universal and eternal values rather than the actual circumstances of those who are invited to view them. In no case should the arts be allowed to give up their autonomy, which alone guarantees their status in the process towards perfection, as stipulated by Arnold. A questioning of the fundamental separation of industrial labour and artistic creation – the demand of John Ruskin and later William Morris – is not only not intended, but actively discouraged; the distinction between art and the crafts, and between the amateur and the professional, is an essential aspect in the process of cultivation.\textsuperscript{60}

That the assumptions of Barnett and Arnold about a cultivating influence of the settled scholars did not always correspond with the realities of the day may be inferred from a passage in the 1935 Survey of London Life and Labour.\textsuperscript{61} The survey mentions that the attempts to extend the work of philanthropically inspired educational institutions like Toynbee Hall through the establishment of ‘workmen’s clubs’ open to all had ‘recently been passing through a difficult period, and their financial situation has often been precarious’. Toynbee Hall in particular, which managed two of these clubs with about 100 members each, had faced difficulties in keeping up the numbers ‘owing to the many counter attractions of modern London life’. Cultural or educational activities which had been organised to address a local working class audience failed to reach their intended audience or had been adjusted: ‘Debates and lectures are not found to be popular, and all that is done in this line is a fortnightly informal talk on some political or economic subject. The musical activities … are confined to a periodical “sing-song” or “free” and easy organised by the members. The library is not much used, except by the younger men, and their demand is almost entirely for the lighter kind of fiction, though occasionally there is a request for books on questions of the day, such as housing or unemployment.’\textsuperscript{62} All in all, it seems that the civilising work of the workmen’s clubs attached to the settlements was an uphill struggle, possibly because the intended recipients objected to what they may have seen as well-meaning paternalism, possibly because other, more outspokenly radical associations like the Labour Colleges attracted those sections of the working class that were both more culturally eager and politically aware.\textsuperscript{63} ‘The general conclusion of the Toynbee authorities is that very little cultural work in men’s clubs is found possible, and that games are the real and abiding attraction.’\textsuperscript{64}
Socialising the arts – Georg Pauli’s proposal for a new museum system

Initiatives to foster a greater access to works of art as part of a reform of industrial society were not the exclusive domain of philanthropists. Artists and theoreticians, too, sought to redefine the role of the arts in society, ‘not as a toy, but as a thing necessary to the life of man, as a token of his freedom and happiness’. In his lecture ‘Art and Socialism’, a lecture delivered to the Leicester Secular Society, William Morris formulates a social agenda of artistic reform, attacking Utilitarianism, which has ‘trampled down Art, and exalted Commerce into a sacred religion’ and which has led to a slavery ‘of what is called luxury, which in the modern sense of the word comprises a mass of sham wealth’. The commodity produced in this system, Morris argues, ‘enslaves not only the poor people who are compelled to work at its production, but also the foolish and not overhappy people who buy it to harass themselves with its encumbrance’. For Morris, the separation between decorative and fine arts has undermined the value of the creative activity altogether: It has made the decorative arts ‘become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable of resisting the changes pressed upon them by fashion or dishonesty’ and the fine arts ‘are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts, and become nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich and idle men’. The aims of art, to invest labour with pleasure and to create objects or buildings which are part of everyday life, both of the individual and collectives, are lost in a situation in which art has become a privilege of the leisure class, and relies on the exploitation of the weaker members of society. Conversely, ‘… art made by the people and for the people as a joy both to the maker and the user would further progress in other matters rather than hinder it, so also I firmly believe that that higher art produced by great brains and miraculously gifted hands cannot exist without it: I believe that the present state of things in which it does exist, while popular art is, let us say, asleep or sick, is a transitional state, which must end at last either in utter defeat or utter victory for the arts. …’

Morris’s ideas about remediying the ‘hurrying blindness of civilisation’ by restoring connections between art and life resurface in a remarkable small booklet published in Stockholm in 1915. The author was Georg Pauli, an artist and writer, who was to edit the influential Modernist art journal Flämman and whose salon operated as one of the social centres of modern painters in Sweden’s. The booklet, part of which had been published as a series of articles in the newspaper Dagens Nyheter in the autumn of the previous year and titled Konstens Socialisering (The socialisation of the arts), sketched out a proposal for a total overhaul of the structures of art education and public patronage.

Pauli’s concept for a museum that ceases to exist as a repository of cherished treasures was informed by a desire ‘to provide a stronger social justification and secure anchoring in society for either the entire or a part of the production of the arts’. The author’s analysis of the position of the arts in the developed industrial society is based on an analysis of the most prominent European museums of the period and the art market, particularly in Paris and Germany. For him the emergence of movements of artists who seek to distinguish themselves from other artists has led to an enormous increase in the production of art works; an ‘unhealthy use of energy’ wasting talent and financial resources. As a counter model, and probably influenced by Ruskin’s remarks on the Nature of Gothic, he invokes the collective practice of the cathedral builders of the twelfth and thirteenth century and their ‘order and well-poised proportions between supply and demand’, adding: ‘Then the monumental arts, architecture with its sister arts (the decorative arts and wall-painting) existed as overarching and dominant artistic disciplines’. The practice of master-builders, Bauhütten and artists employed to fill religious spaces with sculptures and other figurative works of art offered an example of the concept of a collective art, ‘a natural and continuous interplay existing between the artistic effort and the needs of society which allowed the ideals of the arts to give expression to the collective personality.’

The contrast between the socially and ideologically embedded art production of the Middle Ages and the ‘vortiginous productivity’ of his own period, according to Pauli could hardly be greater. Now the value of this production is so disputed that ‘for the largest part it would be sent straight back to the producer if advertising, commercial agents or philanthropic institutions did not unite their propagandistic efforts to claim necessity for the arts and succeeded in finding a place for a certain percentage of the annual harvest’. This specifically also applies to art institutions and the market: ‘Whoever talks about “museums”, “art exhibitions”, “art dealers” or “galleries”, also says too many paintings, too many sculptures, too much art.’ Pauli’s rhetorical attack on the funding arrangements of art institutions is directed at the existing institutions, the museums and their directors, but it does not spare the progressive opposition either: ‘We might have hope for a salvation from the chaotic situation, if some great and powerful movement in our time found a use for the arts – comparable to the religious movements of former times, or, more recently, autocratic regimes – and if through this a new centre might emerge. Yet the social democracy, which one could identify as the most powerful movement of our time, has so far exclusively devoted its energy to ethical problems, and did not consider the aesthetic ones.’ Pauli’s argument for radically reformulating the objectives of the state’s policy for the arts, their funding and organisation arrangements anticipates much of what was to become official Swedish cultural policy much later, after World War II and particularly in the late 1960s:

‘It seems to me that these arguments [for ‘socialising’ the arts] are not unconnected to keeping the weight and importance of a social arts policy, in which the state applies the same principles in its funding for aesthetic purposes that are also applied in all other cases or, in other words, that the state’s expenses for art education and the collec-
Pauli’s rhetorical aside targets both artists and the institutions. On the one hand, he notes, the literary avant-gardes of the 1880s (the writer August Strindberg being their most prominent figure) assumed the role of half-gods, whose distance from the ‘sullen, prosaic human children’ have forced them to become absorbed by a desire for recognition from an academic and commercial elite, a role that is consistently reinforced by the academic institutions training artists. On the other hand museums in Sweden are uncritically following the directions from the much larger and more generously endowed institutions in the larger European countries. The existing museums are involved in a continuous battle of competing with each other, producing a waste of energy on the part of the art producers and overemphasising the museum director’s role, who reinforces the system: ‘So we travel to Hamburg to admire Lichtwark’s museum in that city, and to Bremen to see Gustav Pauli – a Bode here and a Tschudi there …’. Any direct contact with the work of art is polluted and overwhelmed by its status, and the artificiality of the surrounding of the museum. Even the decorative arts are not secure, as whole interiors are ransacked (especially from Italy) to adorn private collections and public galleries in Paris or Berlin.

If, in the larger European countries and cities, the competition of art institutions has the effect of an over-accumulation of art works leaving audiences tired and confused, in smaller countries (Pauli does not explicitly mention Sweden) the limitations of the museum as a parade ground of master works are even more obvious. For the inhabitants of smaller cities and rural communities it means that none of the celebrated works ever comes into their reach, leaving them with the inferior works of recognised artists. Pauli’s solution is a radically changed system for presenting art to the public:

‘Modern museum arrangements are on the wrong track. … Wherever you look, everywhere you find the same depressing result, as far as the large public museums are concerned. … Rooms with walls filled with paintings in long rows, stacked upon each other, room after room, without end, floor above floor. In long rows, with double corridors, in niches, on piers, in window reveals, in vitrines and glass show cases, there are busts, smaller and larger sculptures, reliefs and medallions, in bronze and marble, plaster and terracotta – all of this arranged according to curatorial methods, historically, chronologically, alphabetically, the result being that the notion of the art museum has become a offence to normality, from which no way out will be possible, except for a radical change of the system of presenting the collections of the state.’

Pauli’s proposal for an alternative museum system contains three main elements, which alter the valuation of art as authentic works and imply a departure from the model of the museum as a repository of national treasures. The educational task of the museum, he suggests, might be served by good reproductions allowing the dissemination of art works to large audiences. The museum would be limited to a selection of carefully selected works, which allow the study of particular artistic concerns, while works of art would also be distributed outside the main centres. ‘Instead of vandalising walls, even whole rooms with one and the same product’ – the collected painting of one particular artist, for instance – a museum might then be allowed to focus in detail on the process of painting, or other aspects that can only be studied by viewing originals.

Radically reduced in size, the museum would become more manageable for a larger audience and offer opportunities to ‘socialise the arts in broader circles’ and spread art works geographically. Pauli concludes: “The arts then appear as a refreshing, strengthening and ennobling herb in our daily bread, instead of remaining a more or less indigestible Sunday Roast served in overfull art museums.”

*Konstens socialisering* is clearly indebted to the ideas of William Morris and the English Arts and Crafts, which influenced National Romanticism in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries. The faith in a synthesis of crafts and decorative arts and the concept of a collective workshop along the model of the mediaeval Bauhütte locates the text in its period, during which Continental Modernist experiments were cautiously introduced in Sweden. Pauli’s objective, to reform society by empowering artists-craftsmen, could be described as an artistic day dream typical of its time and attempting to cope with the effects of a rapidly developing industrial society, and what Eric Hobsbawn has described as an identity crisis of bourgeois society. The proposal to take works of art out of museums and into buildings which were part of the everyday life of ordinary citizens is, as we have seen, not unique and it is probably part of a series of initiatives which sought to increase the access of art to the public in the first two decades of the century. From 1915 to his death in 1919 the National Museum under its director Richard Bergh, for example, organises a series of exhibitions outside Stockholm and an art education programme; this at a time that in England the Medici Society is selling cheap reproductions of well-known paintings to a large and culturally aspiring public. In its demand that public or state patronage of the arts is to be measured by its social impact, Pauli’s book illustrates how artists are trying to align themselves with the direction of the Social Democracy (as an emerging political movement) and formulate claims for the essential role of cultural production in the development of a democratic society. The demand for, effectively, an abolition of the museum as least in its then current form, in *Konstens socialisering* also shows surprising parallels with the curatorial ideas of Pontus Hultén, the director of Stockholm’s Moderna Museet and instigator of the Kulturhus in the 1960s. The step from Pauli’s concept of presenting art works in a quotidian context and stressing the opportunity for artists to collaborate in the execution of pieces of monumental art in public buildings, after all, seems to anticipate Hultén’s notion of an art intervening directly in urban environments and society at large.
The development of philanthropic initiatives for culture and education may have had a particular importance in Britain, where state abstention in cultural matters provided a vacuum that had to be filled, if the uneducated and supposedly uncultivated were to be addressed at all. Perhaps also the early formation of a class society posed particular problems and a larger proportion of the middle class was more than elsewhere gripped by a fear of sudden eruptions of dissatisfaction among the urban working classes. Yet, this fear was not an exclusively British phenomenon; this is indicated by the emergence of initiatives with a similar objective of cultivating and thereby pacifying the mass of the working class elsewhere, notably in German-speaking countries, in Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium and France.

For a reconstruction of the sources of the extraordinary emergence and growth of state cultural patronage after World War II, the precedents of the cultural initiatives of the late nineteenth century and their continuation in the early decades of the twentieth seem to be of critical significance. This may be obvious, especially if one takes into account how strongly the personal experiences of many of the protagonists of post-war politics were associated with the institutions which originated from philanthropic impulses. The list of former residents of Toynbee Hall, who appear as major figures in the development of the British system of welfare (including, for instance, William Beveridge and Clement Attlee) points to a direct connection, even if the actual intellectual positions of reform politicians developed away from those of the nineteenth century philanthropists.

The great political and ideological conflict of the late nineteenth century between various bourgeois factions (from liberals to national reactionaries) and those of the working classes (either Social Democratic or explicitly revolutionary in nature) was always also framed as a struggle between two cultures. Culture as one of the means by which the bourgeoisie had defined itself against the aristocracy in the eighteenth century was a contested issue and the political leaders of the emerging trade union and workers movements were aware of this. References to the necessity of adult education appear in the early manifestos of the emerging workers movement. The criminalisation of Socialist political movements – Bismarck’s Sozialistengesetz of 1878 being a prominent example, but similar forms of repression existed across Northern Europe – and the ‘deliberational of the liberal Bourgeoisie’ may have strengthened the impulse towards the formation of cultural associations controlled by members of the working class, and the rejection of associations for the working class which had their origin in liberal middle class philanthropy. Eric Hobsbawm noted that ‘culture represented not only individual but collective aspirations, nowhere more so than in the new mass labour movements.’

Arbeiterbildungsvereine (workers associations for education) and various cooperatives devoted to adult education in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium and France testify to the importance of culture and education for workers movements in these countries. In Sweden the so-called Folkets hus (people’s houses) were also connected to the initiatives for cooperative adult education and self-improvement that had been established following the Danish model of Grundvig’s Folkhøjskole. The simultaneous emergence of denominational workers associations, for example for the protestant YMCA in England or Northern Germany, the catholic Kolpingwerk in Southern Germany and similar organisations in Holland or Belgium, in the same period confirm the view that the cultivation and education of especially the young urban working population was quite generally regarded as a decisive factor for the outcome of the political struggle between left and right, bourgeoisie and workers.

Many of representatives of Social Democratic movements in these countries had depended on the offerings of working men’s colleges or cultural associations (or on the Maisons du Peuple, Volkshäuser or Folkets hus, which were established in industrial centres, from France to the north of Sweden in the last three decades of the nineteenth century) for their socialisation and had spent a large part of their formative years in these environments. In the Scandinavian countries, and particularly in Sweden which went through the transition from a largely aristocratic to an industrial society within just over three decades, the existence of the Folkets hus, the ‘houses for the people’ in small country towns and the large industrial cities may have had a decisive influence in forging the historically unique alliance between poor farmers and workers upon which the dominant position of the Swedish Social Democratic Party in the twentieth century was based. In all of these cases, however, the existence of centres of culture, cooperatively managed and directed by leading members of the working classes, meant that there was a real experience of an alternative to the existing cultural bastions of the bourgeoisie, and a precedent also for a type of cultural policies that was to acquire a defining importance after 1945. In his 1952 book In Place of Fear the British Labour politician Aneurin Bevan recalled the crucial influence on his own intellectual development of the working men’s clubs and their libraries: ‘which had been built up by the pennies of miners and given its distinct quality by a small band of extraordinary men, themselves miners and self-educated.’

87 In Marxist historiography the development of the working class as a political and cultural formation, with a defined class consciousness, is a prominent object of study, culminating in Thompson's monumental study of the process of constructing the English working class. E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1968 (original edition London: Victor Gollancz, 1965).
89 Examples for the influence of middle class reformers on institutions for mutual self help and education are the ‘Mechanics Institutes’ in various English cities, which E. P. Thompson describes as a ‘coming-together of the traditions of the [nonconformist church] and of the Radical’, and whose history in the mid-nineteenth century is one of a continued conflict about who was to be in control of the institutions. As Thompson points out, in most cases the middle class reformers overlooked the representatives of the artisans who had founded the ‘Mechanics Institutes and took over control of the activities. Thompson (1968), p. 81.
90 Hobsbawm (1994), p. 222
91 For an overview of the different developments in these countries cf. Annick Braunmann et al. (ed.), Maisons du Peuple – Architecture pour le Peuple, (Brussels: AAM) 1984.
92 For an extensive discussion of the Swedish folkets hus see Margaretha Ståhl, Mötet och människor – Folkets hus och Folkpark, (Stockholm: Aftalen) 2005.
The workers houses were both a self-help communal effort and a centre of political struggle. A small booklet published for the inauguration in 1902 of the first Folkets hus in Stockholm mentions that the initial reason for constructing a new building had been the impossibility for working class associations to find venues for their activities. Even the relatively innocent Social Democratic Choral Society had faced rejection when trying to find rooms for its rehearsal and performances. The new building, expressing ‘pride of victory’ and ‘solidarity’, offered not only accommodation for a very large range of trade unions, associations and reading groups, but also for the printing works of Socialdemokraten (the workers party’s journal) and Arbetaren (its publishing house). The role of the Folkets hus as a centre of political and cultural emancipation was given explicitly religious overtones in a poem written for the inauguration by Ernst Hellborg:

‘Here shall our collective strength dwell
And here shall for ever be our safe fortress
Here shall we always gather so faithfully
To share our stride, our happiness and our sorrows’

The emergence of a particular branch of politics combining the responsibility for cultural patronage with ideas about the social welfare of the citizens, which occurred, almost without exception, after the end of World War II, is a remarkable phenomenon. The active role taken on by the state and the creation of an institutionalised system of public patronage for creative production – including museums, theatres, film institutes and libraries – may have had some predecessors in local initiatives in the 1930s. As a comprehensive policy, however, it was unprecedented. Even in countries like Germany, France or Sweden, where some sort of state patronage (for example for the performing arts or museums) had been inherited from the ancien régime, the scale of this patronage and the financial support that was part of it was new. The precise reasons for the dynamics of a policy allocating large amounts of public money to culture and to cultural institutions differ from country to country. Here I will make give an outline of the specific developments in Britain and Sweden, discussing them against the background of contemporary visions of culture elsewhere in Europe.

Two aspects will recur in the analysis of the factors affecting the particular nature of post-war debates on cultural policies in these countries and the policies themselves. These are, first, the continued influence of ideas about culture as a civilising force and, secondly, the absorption of earlier forms of philanthropic or state patronage into a comprehensive set of cultural policies. It is the objective of this discussion to analyse, if and how far the new cultural policies were informed by the ideal of a fully developed, successfully ‘cultivated’ personality, which is a recurrent theme in the cultural debates of the nineteenth century, and how this ideal interacted (or contrasted) with ideas about the creation of an egalitarian society.

95 K.A. Tendahl, Folkets Hus i Stockholm – Historik och Beskrivning (Stockholm: Arbetarens Tryckeri, 1902, p. 10
96 ibid., p. 87
From boosting the nation’s morale to art administration: culture in the British welfare state

In 1949 Ifor Evans and Mary Glasgow, the Vice-Chairman and the Secretary-General of the Arts Council of Great Britain, introduced a study of the organisation of artistic institutions in England with a broad statement about rather deep transformation of British cultural life in the aftermath of World War II. Evans and Glasgow describe the post-war developments as ‘change in the nature of patronage’, but also in the ‘size and constitution of the audience’ and the ‘types of organisation which artists have found necessary in order to present their works to the public’. These three aspects, in the administration of the arts, the audience that is being addressed and the organisation or self-organisation of cultural producers, in their account are not only interrelated. They are clearly connected at some fundamental level of objectives, and informed by a broader view of the role of culture in the new post-war society.

Glasgow and Evans illustrate the change in English (and by extension British) culture in the first half decade after 1945 with the description of a typical audience of a theatre performance in London: ‘The audience, with a few exceptions, is not in evening dress. It is often an audience that has come to the theatre directly from work and is going to make a journey to a distant suburb once the play is over. The narrow circle on which the “West-end” theatres relied under pre-war conditions has been replaced by an audience sartorially less prepossessing, but more varied, on the whole younger, and more generally intelligent.’

The description of a London theatre audience at the end of the 1940s may have been partial or perhaps idealising, even if Glasgow and Evans are quick to assure their readers that it reflects a larger development, experienced also in concert halls, galleries and even the opera house, and in both the capital and the provinces. The passage can be seen as a summary of the assumptions of professionals in charge of the provision and the administration of culture – or at least the set of beliefs of an influential section of British art administrators in this period. The description of post-war audiences not only as ‘sartorially less prepossessing’ (this at a time when clothes available on the market were mostly items from the severely limited ‘utility design’ catalogue introduced during the war), but also as reflecting a larger part of the population with regards to social background and age, is noteworthy, particularly because of the suggestion that this audience is not only broader but also ‘more intelligent’. In their account of the establishment of art institutions Glasgow and Evans explicitly align the changes in the administration of the arts with a larger egalitarian programme for British society. In doing this they locate developments in the arts and a supporting infrastructure within the broader agenda of the welfare state, which was in the process of being institutionalised, and in line with the measures for social security and state planning which their readers would have known to be vital parts of the welfare system.

In 1945 the British Labour Party won the first election after the victory
in World War II with a manifesto of setting out a blueprint for the transformation of the country into a ‘Socialist Commonwealth’.100 The election programme envisaged far-reaching reforms in the economic organisation, including the nationalisation of vital industries, and the creation of a system securing the welfare of all citizens. One passage of the document explicitly stated the objective of the party with respect to culture: a new Labour government would do everything in its power ‘to ensure to our people full access to the great heritage of the culture in this nation’.

The acceptance of responsibility of state for access to heritage marks a significant change in British politics. In contrast to other European countries, the involvement of state agencies in cultural matters had been minimal throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.102 In 1835 the then Prime Minister Lord Melbourne stated: ‘God help the minister that meddles with art’, a position which continued to be the official line of any government for many decades.103 Where there had been publicly funded cultural institutions, mostly libraries, these were often partly the initiative of local authorities or philanthropists. Theatres, even those with a reference to royal affiliation attached to their name, were commercially run private companies, censored but not subsidised by state agencies. Only a small number of museums, most prominently the National Gallery and the British Museum (both in buildings from the 1820s) in London and their Scottish counterpart in Edinburgh, were directly funded by act of parliament.104 The cultural policy of successive British governments before World War II, if this term could be applied at all, was largely one of abstention.

Its substantial victory in the 1945 election provided the Labour Party with a parliamentary majority to set in motion the development of the ‘tremendous overhaul’ of British society it had promised the electorate.105 The establishment of the infrastructure for state support for the arts, remarkably, was one of the first parts of the reform policies to be implemented – remarkably, since the economic situation of the country might have suggested that cultural provision was not exactly a priority.

100 Let us face the future – Declaration of Labour policy for the consideration of the nation, published by the Labour Party, April 1945, p. 6
101 Let us face the future (1945), p. 9
102 There had, in fact, been occasional support for the opera directly from the private means of the royal household and members of the nobility. Only in the 1930s a short-lived Labour government had started to support the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden via the BBC. Eric W. White, The Arts Council of Great Britain, (London: Davis-Poynter) 1975, p. 17
104 Evans and Glasgow make the point that even with the establishment of the Arts Council British support for the arts remained at an unparalleled low level: ‘In Denmark, in 1945, the State spent more on its own theatre in Copenhagen than the cost to the Arts Council of its whole dramatic programme for the same period. The Paris Opera, with the Opéra Comique, in 1946 cost the State the equivalent of £600,000 or nearly twice as much as the Arts Council’s total grant from the Exchequer for the same year.’ Evans/ Glasgow (1949), p. 33
107 Bevan was married to Jennie Lee, Labour’s first Minister for Culture in the 1964 cabinet of Harold Wilson and responsible for the government white paper A Policy for the Arts
108 Aneurin Bevan, In Place of Fear, (London: Heinemann) 1952, p. 28
109 ibid., p. 50
110 ibid., p. 50
111 ibid., p. 50
112 ibid., p. 51

Yet in July 1945, barely two months after VE day, John Maynard Keynes (at the time the chief economic advisor of the British government and its representative in the difficult negotiations with the United States about repaying American loans incurred during the war) announced the creation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, a new agency responsible for state patronage of the arts:

I do not believe that it is yet realized what an important thing has happened, State patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way – half way if you like. A semi-independent body is provided with modest funds to stimulate, comfort and support any societies or bodies brought together on private or local initiative which are striving with serious purpose and reasonable prospect of success to present for public enjoyment the arts of drama, music and painting.108

The fact that the new system for supporting the arts was established so quickly after the war – that it was allowed to creep in, as Keynes stated – may be explained with the great expectations vested in state cultural policy in the new social democracy and the welfare state. Inside the Labour Party the rejection of laissez-faire politics gave another strong impulse for active cultural patronage. In 1952 Aneurin Bevan, who as minister for health was responsible for the establishment of the National Health Service but left the cabinet in 1951 over the introduction of prescription charges for dental care and spectacles, re-stated the ideas of the Labour left for a progressive cultural policy.109 Bevan notes that ‘… the present makes Britain the classic country in which to study the action and interaction of free democratic institutions in their relationship with the transition from capitalism to socialism …’.109 For culture this implied a departure from the tradition of private patronage, connoisseurship and the ‘vulgarisation which is characteristic of modern commercial civilisation’.109 The context of art produced for a small group of wealthy clients, in Bevan’s view, had an undermining effect on the value of the works themselves, which remain ‘immured in museums and art galleries, where they look reproachfully down on the long procession of sightseers, who can catch, in such a context, only a small glimpse of their beauty’.110 Like Keynes, Bevan invokes the image of an art that is organically connected to a social and communal purpose and which he presents as having existed in some unidentified past and in which ‘the skill of architect, sculptor, painter and builder-craftsmen were united in the construction of public buildings where the cost counted less than the graciousness they brought to the lives of those who lived around them’.111 It is this ideal situation that an enlightened Socialist policy was to recreate, restoring artists to ‘their proper relationship with civic life’.112 The new communal art was not only to take up its place at the service of society, it was also bound to cut across disciplinary boundaries which commercialism had established: ‘Some day, under the impulse of collective action we shall enfranchise the artists, by giving them our public buildings to work upon; our bridges, our housing estates, our … Civilising force or Experiments with Equality? Cultural politics and cultural policies
industrial canteens, our factories and the municipal buildings, where we house our civic activities.\textsuperscript{113}

The introduction of a system of state patronage organised through an intermediary body (this in contrast to most Continental countries with a tradition of direct administration through ministerial departments, usually of education) followed similar models used at university funding and the organisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation.\textsuperscript{114}

It was also the BBC which provided an example of the ethos of the new agencies of state patronage. In the late 1920s and 1930s, under the chairmanship of John Reith, the BBC had successfully established itself as the ‘key institution of a liberal natural culture, the guardian of a new agencies of state patronage. In the late 1920s and 1930s, under the chairmanship of John Reith, the BBC had successfully established itself as the ‘key institution of a liberal natural culture, the guardian of a certain kind of communicational or cultural citizenship, and a bulwark itself as the ‘key institution of a liberal natural culture, the guardian of a new agencies of state patronage. In the late 1920s and 1930s, under the chairmanship of John Reith, the BBC had successfully established itself as the ‘key institution of a liberal natural culture, the guardian of a certain kind of communicational or cultural citizenship, and a bulwark against extremes of Left and Right’.\textsuperscript{115} Reith’s mission of the BBC committing the corporation to ‘Educate, Inform, Entertain’ informed the broadcasting policy after the war, which materialised in the introduction of a Third Programme entirely devoted to classical music and cultural affairs. The new channel, which went on air in 1947, was explicitly seen as part of a general campaign for cultivating the citizens of the post-war democracy. Its declared ambition was ‘to lend listeners from the Light Programme to the Home [programme], and from the Home to the Third until eventually the Home and the Light should wither away leaving the Third over all’.\textsuperscript{116} This echoed John Maynard Keynes’ statement on the establishment of the Arts Council, suggesting that ‘the theatre and the concert-hall and the gallery will be a living element in everyone’s upbringing, and regular attendance at the theatre and at concerts a part of organized education’.\textsuperscript{117} How much the ideas behind the Council and its work were indebted to the concept of culture as a civilising force may also be illustrated by the following passage:

‘The purpose of the Arts Council of Great Britain is to create an environment, to breed a spirit, to cultivate an opinion, to offer a stimulus to such purpose that the artist and the public can each sustain and live on the other in that union which has occasionally existed in the past at great ages of communal civilized life.’\textsuperscript{118}

Following from the Labour manifesto’s promise of giving a ‘full access’ to the arts, it seemed natural that the state should assume a role in realising this objective through all the existing channels and the new agency of cultural administration. The underlying assumption, ‘that the good things of life customarily enjoyed by the leisure classes were now to be available to everyone’\textsuperscript{119} was strongly connected to a clear concept of what constituted artistic quality. By invoking the image of the ‘great ages of communal civilized life’, however, Keynes also assigned the newly subsidised culture a larger task of forging a reconstruction of ‘union’ in society, which he presents as having existed in an unspecified past.

Keynes’ definition of the arts as ‘drama, music and painting’ was revealing. It seemed not only explicitly to exclude popular forms of expression, but also literature and any other kind of writing (presumably assuming that these typically relied on private publishers and a developed market). At the same time Keynes explicitly stated that it would not be the ‘task of an official body to censor, but to give courage, confidence and opportunity’. The new body was to support new work, which was to ‘spring up more abundantly in unexpected quarters and in unforeseen shapes when there is a universal opportunity for contact with traditional and contemporary arts in the noblest forms.’ The work of the Arts Council was not to be limited to an audience in London: ‘How satisfactory it would be if different parts of this country would again walk their several ways as they once did and learn to develop something different from their neighbours and characteristic of themselves. Nothing can be more damaging than the excessive prestige of metropolitan standards and fashions.’ The address of the first chairman of the Arts Council also included a combative note: ‘Let every part of Merry England be merry in its own way. Death to Hollywood!’\textsuperscript{120} This outburst (which is rather out of tone with the general drift of the radio talk) may have reflected Keynes’ own difficult discussions with the American allies about repayments for the war credits, but it also revealed a considerable unease with a prominent aspect of mid-twentieth century mass culture.

How can the broad appeal of state patronage of the arts be explained against the background of the British situation in 1945 and 1946, which was characterised by economic difficulties and continued financial crisis?\textsuperscript{121} Evans and Glasgow offer a series of explanations all of which relate to developments in the 1930s. One influential initiative anticipating the institutionalised support for greater access to art was the campaign of the British Institute of Adult Education to organise exhibitions of art works in industrial cities under the title ‘Art for the People’. A second factor seems to have been the influx of Continental, mainly German, refugees which materialised not only in the relocation of the Warburg Library from Hamburg to London, but also the development of the Glyndebourne Opera Festival, founded by John Christie, into an artistically significant event.\textsuperscript{122}

The most directly influential development for the formation of the Arts Council, however, was the revival of the Entertainment National Service Association (ENSA), intended for boosting the morale of the troops, and the creation of a new civilian pendant, the Committee of the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in 1940. The circumstances surrounding the origins of CEMA were particularly characterised by a mixture of pragmatism and the desire of some of the individuals involved to exploit the extraordinary circumstances of the war, and the argument that cultural access would contribute to a spirit of national unity in times of crisis.

It was Tom Jones, the secretary of the Pilgrim Trust, a private body founded by an American railway entrepreneur, who in December 1939 took steps to bring together various existing initiatives for organising performances and exhibitions. Initially the impulse seems to have been informed by the desire to support all types of cultural activities, ranging from rural music schools and Townswomen’s Guilds to professional institutions and organisations. With the additional modest funding agreed by the British parliament in 1940 CEMA could afford to support...
the national symphony orchestras as well as financing touring theatre performances of plays by William Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw in schools and miners' welfare halls in South Wales, Lancashire and County Durham.\textsuperscript{123}

Initially CEMA’s activities were of an ad hoc nature. Evans and Glasgow write about an ‘arbitrary beginning’, the exact function of the Committee remaining ‘undefined’.\textsuperscript{124} The very different (not to say contradictory) ideas associated with the initiative, illustrate this. While Jones regarded the new committee as an opportunity ‘to maintain the highest possible standard of the arts in wartime and to distribute them as widely as possible to those, who on account of war-time conditions, were cut off from them’\textsuperscript{125}, others had less elevated motives, as an account of one first preparatory meetings demonstrates. Herbrand Edward Dundonald Bracey Sackville, better known as the ninth Earl De La Warr (and the client of Erich Mendelssohn’s pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea), who occupied the post of President of the Board of Education (minister for education), is reported to have been thrilled by the idea of a new agency for supporting the arts, both as part of the war effort and the CEMA administrators organising concerts, drama performances, were cut off from them’\textsuperscript{126}, others had less elevated motives, as an account of one first preparatory meetings demonstrates. Herbrand Edward Dundonald Bracey Sackville, better known as the ninth Earl De La Warr (and the client of Erich Mendelssohn’s pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea), who occupied the post of President of the Board of Education (minister for education), is reported to have been thrilled by the idea of a new agency for supporting the arts, both as part of the war effort and continued after an envisaged victory:

‘De La Warr was enthusiastic. He had Venetian visions of a post-war Lord Mayor’s Show on the Thames in which the Board of Education led the Arts in triumph from Whitehall to Greenwich in magnificent barges and gorgeous gondolas; orchestras, madrigal singers, Shakespeare from the Old Vic; ballet from Sadler’s Wells, shining canvasses from the Royal Academy; folk dancers from villages greens – in fact Merry England.’\textsuperscript{126}

This vision of a grand procession of the arts in the combined traditions of medieval pageants and eighteenth century aristocratic fêtes galantes was quite different from the rather more earnest concerns of Tom Jones and the CEMA administrators organising concerts, drama performances, miners’ halls and art exhibitions in factory canteens, adult education centres, YMCA clubs or workers restaurants.\textsuperscript{127} In their circles there was a certain pride about the achievements of an effective arts policy brought about by the new agencies. As a wartime survey noted the art shows and concerts across the country had generated ‘an incalculable leap ahead, creating for the first time in England since folk-days a genuine mass-audience for drama, song, music.’\textsuperscript{128}These successes seemed to justify the continuation of these policies, something De La Warr had anticipated when fantasising about nautical festivals in a post-war London. With the nomination of John Maynard Keynes as chairman of CEMA in 1941 the institution could also rely on the support of an influential public figure and cabinet advisor who had shown himself committed to the idea of active state patronage as early as 1936 when he stated that ‘it would be a manifest public scandal’ if the state did not take the opportunity for expenditure on a broad education of the population by supporting the ‘non-economic purposes’ of the arts.\textsuperscript{129}

The acceptance of a need for public support of the arts was probably much enhanced by the extraordinary commitment of artists in the early years of the war. Evans and Glasgow note the tremendous effect of experiences of unprecedented encounters between often celebrated London actors, who were lodged with local audiences while touring industrial Northern towns and in hostels for ammunition workers which had been hastily set up across the country. One particular episode in their account reflects the effect these encounters must have had for the audiences as well as for the performers:

'It is a startling fact that, at the beginning, only about two per cent of these hostel audiences had ever seen a stage play before. In the early days many of them did not know how to behave before live players. They hardly seemed to realise that the people stage before them was not an inanimate cinematographic screen. Gradually they acquired a theatre etiquette and ceased to talk, walk about and drink tea during performances.'\textsuperscript{130}

The experiences of people, who had never been in contact with artists and performers, of the energy and discipline required in these activities and their contributions to boosting the morale of the population – in the Blitz of 1940 musicians played in London air raid shelters and underground stations – seem to have allowed CEMA to become widely accepted. Yet, as Evans and Glasgow point out, they also helped to ‘found a new audience’ and provided a basis for the permanent organisation of support for the arts after the war:

‘The emergency work in factories and in air raid shelters, although it was largely an improvisation and an unanticipated development, regarded as something incidental and transitory, had the merit of bringing the work of the new organisation to the notice of the public, and of gaining a place in their affections. There was a ‘story’ in these shelter concerts more effective than any number of statistics about the salvaging of village choirs or the attendance of amateur dramatic readings. Here was something that was exciting and rewarding to those who took part in it and it fired the imagination of all those who heard about it.’\textsuperscript{131}

The ethos of CEMA, summed up as ‘The Best for the Most’, was to some degree retained in the post-war arrangements. Reading the 1946 Charter of the Arts Council carefully, one will find (underneath a layer of monarchical phrasing) a series of rather remarkable statements concerning the objectives of the new institution. The Council’s purpose is described as ‘developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively’ but also and ‘in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm’ (italics added), in order ‘to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts and to advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies …’.\textsuperscript{132} These three stated objectives cover the main directions of a comprehensive cultural policy, but they
also seem to point to a series of contradictory and potentially conflicting expectations as to where the emphasis of this policy should be. On the one hand the reference to ‘the fine arts exclusively’ and the reference to a need to raise standards could be seen as an endorsement of those seeking to improve the conditions for established institutions. The explicit demand to increase the accessibility of the arts for a wider public, by contrast, introduced a distinctly egalitarian notion of culture as the intrinsic property of each individual citizen, everywhere in the country.

In his 1946 radio talk Keynes painted a picture of an arts policy that was to support cultural activities in the English regions and in ‘unexpected quarters’. The wartime exhibitions and performances in canteens and clubs in the country, but also the activities of the Unity Theatres operating in working class communities, provided a precedent for cultural activities outside the metropolitan centre. Keynes identified the shortage of adequate buildings as the most difficult problem, especially in smaller towns, which he described as ‘absolutely bare of the necessary bricks and mortar’.135 In 1945 the Arts Council staff responded to this situation by initiating a study into the feasibility of building arts centres across the country, where professionals and amateurs were to collaborate, and which combined facilities for exhibitions, theatre and music performances. A model and an accompanying booklet Plans for an Arts Centre showed details of a multi-functional building including an all-purpose hall, a foyer with exhibition spaces, practice rooms and a restaurant, and toured around the country. The brochure was presented as a practical proposal for a centre in a medium-sized town with a population of 15,000 to 30,000:

‘The arts should be honourably housed; but their accommodation must be properly related to the size of the community they serve. One will look to metropolitan centres for a wide range of specialist buildings. At the other end of the scale, the village is never likely to be able to provide anything more ambitious than a modest multi-purpose hall as part of a social centre. But between these extremes come numbers of medium-sized industrial, county and market towns, some at present with partial provision for the arts and some with nothing at all. … Such an arts centre can and should play a vitally important part in the life of the community it serves … for … an arts centre, if it is to be of full value, must be designed to accommodate the local amateur as well as the visiting professional.’136

The proposals for a building campaign did not materialise, partly because it was unclear who would manage and fund these centres, but also because of outspoken opposition from Keynes, who rejected the idea as ‘rubbish’.137 There was, however, one arts centre in the Somerset town of Bridgwater which was realised ‘as an experiment in order to gain experience in the practical possibilities’ of such an institution.138 Accommodated in an eighteenth century house requisitioned from its use by the War Office in 1946, the centre offered spaces for the Bridgwater Arts Club, class and lecture rooms, a tea room and a newly constructed 320 seat performance hall. Evans and Glasgow noted that the arts club, which was envisaged eventually to manage the centre, had a ‘considerable say in the choice of outside visitors’ and that the programme was ‘a heavy one’. At the same time the house is described as offering ‘an indispensable base for rehearsals by local amateur societies and for conferences national and even international in character’.139

In his 1948 report the Arts Council’s regional director celebrated the Bridgewater Arts Centre as ‘an aesthetic and spiritual revolution in this small Somerset market-town’, fundamentally changing the role of the arts in the community and in the individual citizen’s everyday life: ‘People are beginning to look upon the arts not mere as amusement, or as pretty decoration for occasional spare-time leisure, but as an integral part of everyday life’. The arts centre, in the view of the art official, ‘holds the key to the ultimate solution of most, if not all, of our problems’.140 One can doubt if this was really the case. Images of the premises at Bridgwater show interiors with an decidedly domestic middle-class air. The furnishing of the rooms with tasteful pieces, as if inherited, seems to indicate the idea that the culture offered here would have felt pleasantly familiar or ordinary to some inhabitants of the town, but not to all.

‘Few, but roses’: the Arts Council as an arbiter of cultural quality

The conflict between the Arts Council’s staff and its chairman about the initiative for building arts centres illustrates the inconsistencies in the cultural policies of the new funding body and of the Labour government. Although Keynes had explicitly referred to the fact that significant works of art might have their origins outside the cultural establishment, and despite his criticism of an ‘excessive prestige of metropolitan standards and fashions’, much of the money was allocated to reasonably well-established London institutions. In the first period of funding via the new body the largest sum for an individual institution was committed to the opera house at Covent Garden, allowing it to compete with the New York Metropolitan opera for international fame.141 This decision revealed an emphasis on rather more established forms of cultural production than what had been implied in the radio talk. The contradiction between the claim to provide culture for all and the direction of a large percentage to a form of art that could be attacked as catering for a small, well-educated and wealthy section of the population was apparently, at this stage, clearly felt. Keynes himself suggested that the popular operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan appear in the repertoire of the opera house for at least one month each year and in 1947 Arts Council officers were still urging that the council ‘must not lose sight of its mandate to make the fine arts easily accessible to every section of the population’.142 Occasional subsidies for such popular performances did not, however, question the general distinction between subsidised ‘high’ and commercial ‘low’ culture. How much this remained a perennial problem of state provision of culture, and one which concerned critics both on the left and on the right of the political spectrum, comes across in the desperate tone of an article published in 1958 by Michael Kullmann in the Universities and Left Review.
We complain of the lack of a National Theatre, of the paltriness of Arts Council grants, of the ravages of commercialism in art. We deplore much of the content of the mass media. Yet we have no answer to the justification offered that it is what the people want, save to say that the people could be made to want something better. We live in a society that lets culture be the appanage of the minority. Art, poetry, philosophy are by and for the few. Few have had the education to appreciate the finest things in our cultural heritage and these things are resented and rejected by those who have not. Few amongst the best educated really desire to share their culture, because an appreciation of the finest things has come to be a caste mark whose significance would be lost if it were more widely shared. Our culture itself suffers from this. Much of our present day music, our painting, our poetry, our philosophy, has the obscurity, the sophistication or the second order character of a set of messages couched in the code of a cultural elite. It is not meant for mankind. Much of the best in broadcasting is not put over the Home or the Light, it comes over the Third and is introduced by the monotone of the don. It is addressed to Oxbridge in diaspora.\textsuperscript{141}

As funding for the Arts Council increased (the amount in 1958/59 was almost five times as high as it had been in 1945/46), the emphasis on excellence rather than breadth seems to have increased.\textsuperscript{142} Funding was drawn away from the small initiatives, which had emerged as part of CEMA’s war effort, towards larger established institutions and in 1951 the Arts Council report explicitly advocated a shift away from spreading cultural opportunity towards raising professional artistic standards: ‘in reconsidering the exhortation of its Charter to ‘Raise and Spread’ the Council may decide for the time being to emphasize the first more than the second word’.\textsuperscript{143} In line with this policy the Arts Council withdrew its support for politically engaged cultural activities in industrial cities, such as the Theatre Workshop and the Glasgow Unity Theatre in favour of London West End theatres.\textsuperscript{144} Support for popular initiatives was cut back, including promotions in holiday camps, small exhibitions in schools, canteens, shops and factories, symphony concerts at one shilling

\textsuperscript{140} Keynes wrote this in a letter to the Arts Council’s first Secretary-General Mary Galloway. Hutchinson (1982), p. 63.


\textsuperscript{142} The increase in spending was formidable. While the Arts Council grant in 1945/46 had been £235,000, by 1958/59 this had become £1,100,000 and by 1963/64 £2,700,000. Outside the Arts Council arts expenditure also increased from £764,125 in 1945/46 to £5,662,126 in 1958/59 and £9,041,804 in 1963/64.

\textsuperscript{143} Joan Littlewood between 1946 and 1955 and then granted a sum of £500 on the condition that the theatre workshop would find an additional £1,000 from local authorities. Hutchinson (1982), p. 85/86.

\textsuperscript{144} Eric W. White mentions Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop in Stratford, established in 1953, and its ‘parlous’ financial situation, but does not reveal whether or not this experimental stage received Arts Council funding at this stage. Cf. White (1973), p. 116/117. However, as Robert Hutchinson points out the Arts Council refused to support Littlewood between 1946 and 1955 and then granted a sum of £500 on the condition that the theatre workshop would find an additional £1,000 from local authorities. Hutchinson (1982), p. 85/86. For an extensive discussion of Joan Littlewood’s career and her Fun Palace project see chapter 5.
The increased stress on professionalism and excellence, and the belief that these objectives were best served by established national (and by implication London-based) institutions, implied a departure from the ethos of decentralisation which had guided the work of CEMA during World War II. The substantial increase in government spending on the arts (although Eric W. White writes that during the 1950s the council ‘felt itself negligibly restricted by the slow reluctant pace at which its grant was supposed to rise’), was almost exclusively earmarked for maintaining the established forms of creative production. The impulse of state-subsidised cultural patronage was clearly defined by the Arts Council charter and its reference to the ‘fine arts’. If Keynes had identified regional variety as one of the qualities of English cultural life which the new policy was to foster, this did certainly not extend beyond the established definition of a cultural tradition inherited from the leisureed classes. As such, even at moments of occasional largesse, a rare example of which was the organisation of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the building of the Royal Festival Hall on this occasion, the policy operated well within the confines of this tradition, despite marginal and essentially nostalgic celebrations of (mainly English) folk traditions.

The reasons for the rappel à l’ordre in the Labour Party’s cultural policy in the post-war years seem varied. On the one hand the conservative definition of culture may have been the result of the absence of a strong countercultural tradition in the party itself and a deep-seated suspicion of both the avant-garde and the cultural experiments of the ‘people’s front’ in the 1930s. On the other hand, as the historian Kenneth Morgan has suggested, the ambition to reach out to the middle-class electorate found its reflection in a policy that relied on the judgement of well-respected and accepted arbiters of taste, and did not offend the voters, either by being too innovative or too politically charged.

If post-war cultural policies stemmed from an assumption that the state had to create conditions in which museum directors, artists, writers, directors or actors could work productively, this also implied an acceptance of the fact that they operated as and were employed by agencies of the state. In some fields, for example the music and performing arts, subsidised status in fact corresponded with cultural sanctioning: the institutionalisation of patronage established a new distinction between the commercial (popular entertainment) and the subsidised (fine art), investing the traditional conception of ‘high culture’ with the added benefit of state validation. In a country where many of the protagonists of the modern avant-gardes in literature and the visual arts shared an upper middle class background and could often rely on inherited money, the appearance of the salaried civil servant operating as art administrator and the practising artists receiving state commissions or grants marked a significant shift, not necessarily welcomed by everyone.

Despite its tendency to seek consensual approval, the government’s commitment to state support for the arts was under constant attack from the conservative newspapers, which sought to identify evidence of Labour’s tendency to squander taxpayers’ money, and by intellectuals like T.S Eliot who opposed the very idea of a state directed cultural policy, stating that ‘the aim to make everyone share in the appreciation of the fruits of the more conscious part of culture is to adulterate and cheapen what you can give’.

The development of the policies of the Arts Council, based on the assumption that state funding was to provide access to essentially accepted forms of art and cultural production, also ended the hopes of the more radical sections on the Left, within and outside the Labour Party, for a structural change of British society. Rather than facilitating the creation of a common culture that would help overcome existing class differences and inequalities, the state-subsidised art policy seemed constructed to reaffirm these. In a study of the politics of the Arts Council Robert Hutchinson concludes that ‘the 1940s emphasis on taking the arts to the people and encouraging the art of the people had largely evaporated by the late 1950s’. Kenneth Morgan puts this reluctance to pursue a radical cultural policy in the context of Labour’s fear of losing the middle class electorate: ‘Culture failed to bridge the class divide. So far as it flourished that after 1945, it can probably be related to the middle class recovery, … which so concerned the strategists of the Labour Party’. The reference to artistic excellence, and the emphasis on established forms of art, may have reflected a supposedly realistic assessment on the part of Labour politicians of the fragility of the political and cultural consensus of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Raymond Williams later voiced his disappointment at the failure of the new arts administrators to use the momentum of 1945 for achieving the radical cultural change that had been envisaged by Aneurin Bevan and others on the left of the Labour Party, when he wrote: ‘I thought that the Labour government had a choice: either for reconstruction of the cultural field in capitalist terms, or for funding institutions of popular education and popular culture that could have withstood the political campaigns in the bourgeois press that were already gathering momentum. In fact there was a rapid option for conventional capitalist priorities …’

Though not incorrect, Williams’s term ‘capitalist priorities’ was, in fact, misleading. Rather, it seems that an existing consensus about what constituted the forms of art worthy of support was shared by the members of the Arts Council and those of the various advisory panels for visual arts, drama and opera. The Charter of the council had specified that ‘members of the Council shall, from time to time be respectively appointed by Our Chancellor of the Exchequer after consultation with Our Minister of Education and Our Secretary of State for Scotland’. This wording shows that the appointment procedure for members of the council and its panels was far from transparent. No criteria for the selection are given, nor is there any suggestion as to from which backgrounds or disciplines these persons were to be drawn.
In reality the absence of criteria implied the tacit assumption that decisions about which types of cultural production were eligible for funding were best placed neither with the producers nor with active politicians, but with knowledgeable academics or connoisseurs of art and music. The latter category in particular was predominately represented by well-established individuals with a social network derived from a shared education in public schools and at Oxford or Cambridge. The oligarchic background of the council members and to a lesser degree of those of the advisory panels – the precedent having been set by the appointment of John Maynard Keynes – ensured a culture of patrician disinterest and detachment. Yet it also resulted in an ‘overlapping and multiple-holding’ of trusteeships, directorships and adviser positions, connecting the Arts Council with the Royal Opera House, the trust striving for the establishment of a National Theatre and the major galleries. These overlaps seem to have been particularly prominent with the opera house, possibly explaining the sustained and substantial commitment of the council towards this institution. For the visual arts they seem to explain the emphasis on maintaining a gallery-based fine art tradition. In his study of Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain Alan Sinfield has summed up the effect of the biases of the Arts Council and its advisors, concluding: ‘The “high” culture to which everyone was now to have access was almost the same as that which had previously identified with a class fraction.’

The reliance on members of a social stratum that was distant from most Labour politicians and certainly their electorate is notable in itself. Just as remarkable is the absence, with the notable exception of Henry Moore, of artists and art critics form council and panels. One can only speculate about the reasons for this. Perhaps the decision to keep a clear distinction between producers and those allocating the funding stemmed from the idea that arbiters were to maintain the measured view of the outsider, while the artist was to ‘walk where the breath of his spirit blows him’, as Keynes had suggested in his radio talk. Conversely, if these same artists were to fulfil the demand to lead ‘the rest of us into fresh pastures’, the council members needed to develop a receptive apparatus for identifying new developments within the arts ‘enlarging into fresh pastures’, the council members needed to develop a receptive apparatus for identifying new developments within the arts ‘enlarging into fresh pastures’, the council members needed to develop a receptive apparatus for identifying new developments within the arts ‘enlarging into fresh pastures’.

The arrangements of the Arts Council, the presence of an established social elite at the top, but also of the maintained influence of staff members inherited from CEMA dedicated to the objective of equal access to culture, set against the officially stated task to support both quality and access; all this seems to have produced a powerful mixture of conflicting demands and expectations, or to quote Alan Sinfield, a ‘looseness of structural fit between ideologies and institutions’, which allowed both for the survival of rather traditional ideas about culture and decorum and the fostering of progressive ones, in different corners of the same agency. This concept of a well-defined culture informed not only the work of the Arts Council, but also, as we will see, the programmes providing ‘bricks and mortar’, and for the construction of buildings for culture. It is clearly visible in the first large public building for the arts, the Royal Festival Hall on the South Bank in London, but also, despite their less representational architectural apparatus, in the adjacent buildings constructed in the early 1960s.

Representation and morality – politics and culture in Sweden in the twentieth century

If the establishment of the British system for supporting the arts was a new phenomenon, a corollary of the construction of the post-war welfare state with antecedents in forms of enlightened war propaganda, Sweden’s twentieth century cultural policy largely matches the patterns of state patronage across most of the European continent. To a large degree the responsibility for the main theatre or opera companies, galleries and museums of the country had been inherited by the nineteenth century liberal state from a receding royal household. This process of state agencies increasingly taking over from the monarch, a development reflecting the gradual dissolution of absolute power and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, is a pattern that can be observed (with a series of significant variations) in other northern and central European countries, following the more abrupt and dramatic turn in France in the aftermath of the 1789 revolution.

There are, however, some characteristic aspects of Swedish culture that are worth noting, as they seem to have affected the particular development of state policies on social welfare and on the arts in the twentieth century, and which are generally explained by the geographic isolation, the low population density and the history of the country. First, the geographical isolation of the territory is reflected in the incomplete development of a feudal system in the middle ages, leaving much of the rural population as independent small landowners – the bondeklass – with a degree of personal autonomy, a fact which is so generally invoked as an explanation for the apparently pervasive egalitarianism that it has become part of the predominant definition of Swedish identity. Secondly the Reformation and the establishment of Lutheranism in the sixteenth century occurred without a longer period of religious conflicts investing the ministers of the state church with a clearly defined and unchallenged authority. The absence of conflict also allowed subsequent Swedish kings to intervene on a large scale in European conflicts and thus created the conditions for the country’s rise to the status of a regional power. The military successes of Swedish kings, who operated as what could be described as early modern warlords, and the territorial gains in large part of northern Central Europe as a result of these interventions, provided the means for transforming the Stockholm court into an important centre of representation in the seventeenth century.

The geopolitical development of the country from a small nation on the periphery to the main regional power in northern Europe was reflected in the royal patronage of the arts as a means of political representation and as a form of using available political financial means, for example for contracting celebrated artists, following the model of the Italian and French courts of the Renaissance. It also helped...
intellectuals were part of cosmopolitan diplomatic and artistic networks, court society composed of Swedish aristocrats and foreign artists or class forming alliances with members of the peasants on the other side of the Øresund strait. Swedish eighteenth century culture could be described as two parallel systems, published from the late eighteenth century until the middle of the nineteenth century. The creation of a first royal orchestra and the building of the royal palace coincided with the period of greatest power. Much of the newly established court culture was imported from abroad (as were most of the artists and the architects of the palace and representative buildings). When, in 1782, the Royal Theatre received its first building, Italian and French opera were explicitly prioritised, the national language being dismissed as too unrefined for the performance of courtly drama. Swedish eighteenth century culture could be described as two parallel worlds. A people of small independent peasants lived across the country, the Lutheran church operating as ‘an organisation for centralised control of the population’s piety’. Both physically and culturally separate, the Stockholm court was confined to a small enclave of largely foreign (French and Italian) sophistication, an exclusive sphere of action, operating at a large distance from the rural and very small urban population.

In the country the state church exerted its influence on the moral well-being of the population and engaged in a continuous struggle against ‘blasphemous’ forms of popular culture. In the capital, a small court society composed of Swedish aristocrats and foreign artists or intellectuals were part of cosmopolitan diplomatic and artistic networks, with rules that were disconnected from those outside the palace. In between both, the small urban middle class occupied a week position. The tensions between the court on one side and a small urban middle class forming alliances with members of the peasants on the other side are the subject of a revisionist study of Swedish society in the period of the prime ministerial of Olof Palme: Claes Arvidsson, &zt;att annual land – Sverige och det lilla tålet, (Stockholm: Timbro) 1999. Tobias Harding, Nationalising Culture – The Reorganisation of National Culture in Swedish Cultural Policy 1970-2002, Doctoral Thesis, (Linköping: Linköping University) 2007, p. 83.

Sweden has a long history of serving – and presenting itself as a model for a civilised society. There is an extensive body of literature on the Swedish welfare system, published from the 1930s to the 1950s, among which Marquis W. Childs, Sweden – The Middle Way (New Haven/ London: Yale UP) 1939 and the report of the Fabian Society, Magaret Cole/ Charles Smith (ed.), Democratic Sweden (Fresport, New York) 1939 (with a contribution by the later British Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell). The ‘long 1970s’ occasionally came to the surface: in the 1760s a short-lived government formed by The Mössor, the Swedish counterpart of the Whigs in England, legislated a ban on luxury and the consumption of tobacco, coffee, chocolate and wine.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century opposition to the absolute monarch and the leading noble families also affected the cultural institutions: after the violent murder of King Gustav III by a group of disaffected aristocrats in 1792 the opera company was closed as a sign of the victory over royal despotism. With the dissolution of absolute monarchy in the early nineteenth century the Riksdag (parliament) took over responsibility for the court theatre. Cultural patronage became a prime concern for civil officials often originating from the nobility, the dominant estate in the upper chamber parliament, and had to be defended against the representatives of the peasantry in the lower house who regarded these institutions as expressions of aristocratic largesse.

Compared with other European countries, Sweden’s industrial development in the nineteenth century was relatively late and started only in the 1870s. It had been preceded by a reform of land ownership, which strengthened the position of the small landowners. Agricultural innovations had, however, made a large proportion of the population in the country redundant who, in the absence of industrial centres ready to absorb them, formed a rural proletariat of seasonal workers.

The limited size and political weakness of the middle class meant that they were frequently forced to communicate across class boundaries, preventing the development of a specifically bourgeois consciousness. The slow cultural emancipation of an urban middle class is illustrated also by the relatively late emergence of new cultural institutions. The National Museum of Fine Arts, for example, was established in 1841 and the first purpose-built municipal theatres in the larger cities only after World War I.

The late industrial development and migration of the population towards industrial centres in Sweden offer an explanation for the particular strength of social reform movements in the country. The industrialisation was almost from the very beginning accompanied by campaigns to improve the material and cultural situation of the emerging urban working class. Initiatives for social reform, allied to the growing Free Church and temperance movements, sought to prevent the destitution and cultural deprivation of the masses, which so worried the middle class in Sweden as it did in England. Whereas in England social reformers had to refer to an idealised past society onto which the desire for an organic union of different social groups was projected, in Sweden most inhabitants of the industrial cities brought with them a direct experience of the patterns of mutual help and support in rural communities. Consequently it was the ideal of a rural communal existence, which served as the point of reference for social reformers as well as cultural critics. The ‘radical re-grouping in the social landscape’ which affected Sweden in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and up to 1918 was not only contracted when compared to the much longer process of the industrial revolution in other countries, it also coincided in time with the industrialisation of Sweden.

Tobias Harding challenges Larsson’s view that there is no evidence of a developed bourgeois public sphere in nineteenth century Sweden, pointing to the existence of the earlier private theatres. His examples of a developed bourgeois cultural production including Strindberg, Zorn and Larsson all refer to the late nineteenth century and thereby provide evidence of the late development of Swedish bourgeoisie as a cultural force. Harding (2007), p. 88.
a broad cultural reaction and the first stirrings of movements for social reform. The effect of initiatives extenuating the consequences of industrial concentration was psychologically important. In 1927 the general director of Socialstyrelsen (national social administration) presented this accepted view in a lavishly produced two-volume book on ‘Sweden in our days’. Our social development is predominantly determined by economic factors, and since inequality has not been an all too prominent phenomenon in this area, our social life is characterised by a relative calm and moderation, for which many countries have a reason to admire us.’

The rapid emergence of the so-called folkrörelser, best translated as popular movements, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century had a direct influence on the cultural development in Sweden after 1900. In the first two decades of the twentieth century the combined adult membership of the temperance, Free Church and Socialist workers movements increased to around 840,000 from a population of approximately 6 million citizens. Between the three groups membership was more or less evenly spread, and there was a significant number of dual memberships: in 1911 87.5 per cent of the Social Democratic members of the Riksdag were also members of the temperance movement. It was only during and immediately after World War I that the balance shifted towards the workers movements, as the events in Russia and Germany started to affect opinions in Sweden and politicised the workers. Despite the relative growth of the Socialist movements between 1909 and 1917, however, it is evident that the existence of the popular movements functioned as a mitigating force in a period of rapid social change, and even as a substitute for revolution.

Artistic reactions to the social questions were mixed and contradictory. The perennial conflicts of the writer August Strindberg with his Swedish environment, for instance, resulting in extended periods of voluntary emigration to Copenhagen, Berlin or Switzerland, and the Bohemianism of the protagonists in his novels such as Röda Rummets (The Red Room, 1879) oscillating between on the one hand the rejection of the philistinism and hypocrisy of the new bourgeoisie and on the other a pragmatic acceptance of the existing social order, seem to have been symptomatic of the attitudes of a significant section of the artists in 1880s Stockholm. This attitude could be and was observed by contemporaries as individualistic and anarchist, essentially anti-political. Yet Strindberg also showed explicitly activist tendencies supporting the Social-Democrats and their leader Hjalmar Branting for a lack of nerve. His Little Catechism for the Lower Class is a precise and fearless – no less subtle than Herbert Marcuse’s analyses – if we are to believe his biographer Olof Lagercrantz – analysis of the ideological methods used by the economically powerful to influence the urban and rural working class.

Towards the turn of the century artists started to reject the highly individualistic – ‘nihilistic’ according to the Conservative critics, ‘aristocratic’ according to Georg Pauli – position of the artist as both visionary critic of society and as the eternal outsider. The appearance of the Social Democracy as a major political force fuelled hopes for ending the isolation of the artist and locating the arts within a larger social and aesthetic project. The feminist writer Ellen Key formulated such a programme in a widely read publication titled Skinnet for alla (Beauty for all, 1899), in which she argued for a role of the design of everyday objects and for aesthetics in an egalitarian and democratic culture. These ideas seemed to resonate with the increasingly reformist direction which the Social Democrats were adopting under the leadership of Hjalmar Branting. As the ideology of the party shifted away from a radical reorganisation of the organisation of society towards a gradual improvement of the life of the ordinary citizen, the proposal of a contribution by artists in the project of social reform may have acquired a certain plausibility, while artists nurtured the hope that their work might be invested with a new urgency and necessity. However, as Pauli noted, the hopes invested by artists in the Social Democracy were not always reciprocated by the political leaders, who failed to see the opportunities of a socially engaged arts policy. Instead, he notes, ‘radicals are as eager as the bourgeoisie to vote for funding state museums, assuming that this provision itself fulfils all aesthetic duties’.

The reluctance on the part of the Social Democrats to formulate the desired cultural policy may well be explained by the polarised politics of the early twentieth century. The party’s preoccupations of the period with the struggle for the equal voting rights, social and working conditions, culminating in a general strike in 1909, and class instinct did at least not initially favour an alignment with artists, whose social background was utterly different from that of the leaders of the workers movement. Besides, the strong roots of the Swedish workers movement in industrial and agricultural towns was also evident in an emphasis on local initiatives, and perhaps a certain degree of resentment against urban artists. The establishment of the Folkets hus in any case, had its origins not in Stockholm, but in smaller centres. In 1883 one of the first houses was inaugurated in Malmö, long before the opening of the Stockholm Folkets hus. From the start the houses had a political as well as a social and cultural function, ‘where we can meet undisturbed and discuss our affairs, but also find a secure refuge in order to develop our thoughts.’ Far from being a centre for cultural experiment but a working class fortress staging dance events, variety and amateur theatre (all without state support), the Folkets hus at this stage were firmly embedded in the political struggle of the workers movement. Meanwhile the movement increased steadily, managing 154 houses in 1910 and 306 in 1920.

At the same time the complicated relationship between the Social Democratic leader Hjalmar Branting and August Strindberg illustrates that some sort of coalition between the workers movement and artist was possible and potentially productive. During their long friendship the writer repeatedly attacked the politician for his increasingly reformist political position and an emphasis on material rather than spiritual matters. Yet, despite these differences, Branting’s characterisation of Strindberg after the author’s death reveals admiration for ‘a revolutionary, … [and] a poet loved by the people and the most faithful enemy of the upper class.’ While the ideological conflicts between an

Orebro Folkets hus, a typical Folkets hus in the Swedish provinces

180 Lundqvist, in Koblik (1973), p. 161
181 Hennigsen, (1986), p. 236
182 Olof Lagercrantz, August Strindberg, translated by Anselm Hollo, (London: Faber and Faber) 1984, p. 117
183 cf. Pauli (1913), p. 13
184 Widenheim (2002), p. 78
185 Pauli (1915), p. 48
186 The Swedish general strike of 1909, one of the largest in the period, was widely and internationally supported, particularly by the German Social Democracy. Jan Peters, Branting und die schwedische Sozialdemokratie, (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften) 1975, p. 69
187 Both Richard Bergh and Georg Pauli, for example, were closely connected with the painter Prince Eugen, an unmarried son of King Oscar II, who played a major role in the Stockholm art scene at the turn of the century.
188 Stühl (2005), p. 18
189 Larsson (2001), p. 197/198
190 Peters (1973), p. 82
emerging and increasingly powerful Social Democracy and the conserva-
tive ruling elite were entering their most critical period, the grand
coalition for a modernisation of society constructed by trade unionists
and the liberal middle class seems to have been gradually prepared in the
first two decades of the twentieth century.

In 1912 (following the introduction of general franchise for men)
the Social Democracy established itself as one of the large fractions in the
Riksdag, and became a stable factor in a series of governments over
the next decade. A small change of wording in the party programme
of 1911, which identified ‘the oppressed classes’ as the group whose
emancipation was to be achieved (replacing the more specific ‘working
class’ reference of earlier manifestoes), reveals that by this time the
Social Democracy was transforming itself into a pragmatic political force
appealing to a large part of the Swedish population. The programme also
states that the party’s political struggle will not cease ‘until society has
been so organized that the fruits of the labour go to those who labour’.191
This wording left open, which exact form social liberation might take,
and could also include the rural small landowners, agricultural workers
and the lower middle class. By and large, the strategy of the Social
Democratic leadership appears to have been very successful. It secured
a stable coalition with the farmers’ party, and in the 1930s helped to
attract a larger electorate than the industrial worker on which the party
had initially relied.192

For the development of cultural policies in the 1930s and 1940s two
elements in the development within the Social Democracy seem to be
significant.

First there is the gradual replacement of the language of class struggle
by one stressing the inclusive nature of a common project for Swedish
society. This concept of a consensual development, which could be
presented in terms of an inevitable tendency towards equality and a
rational organisation of both society and the economy, is summarised
by the notion of folkhemmet (the people’s home). The term, which had
been coined by young intellectuals associated in the ‘young-conservative’
academic circles of Uppsala university (and is generally related to the
notion of an organic community), was first used in 1928 by Per Albin
Hansson, Branting’s successor as leader of the Social Democrats and
Swedish prime minister from 1936 to 1946.193 As a notion establish-
ing an emotional and imaginary all-inclusive collective of interests,
folkhemmet operated as powerful metaphor for the integrating, opti-
mistic and moralistic vision of a society in which economic forces
were civilised by state planning and class divisions transcended.194

Secondly, the opening of the Social democratic party towards elector-
ates outside the urban, industrial working class allowed the integration
both of farmers but also of civil servants, intellectuals and artists. As
the example of Strindberg illustrates, individual members of the intel-
lectual avant-garde had accompanied the Social Democracy in its early
period as difficult but necessary supporters. In the 1920s and 1930s this
support started to extend to larger groups of the middle classes and its
upper echelons,195 gradually transforming the former workers’ party
into an organisation including representatives of the trade unions, but
also individual members of traditional elites and immigrants who had
sought refuge from pogroms in Central and Eastern Europe and, later,
the National Socialists.196 The connections between Social Democratic
politicians and industrialists such as, for instance, the Wallenberg family,
with whom Branting had agreed a truce as early as 1914, probably
helped to establish the Social Democratic party as a broad left-leaning
political force with an enlightened economic programme and an interna-
tionalist cultural vision.

As far as state patronage was concerned the Social Democratic party
seems to have taken the support for cultural activities as self-evident,
contending that it was the duty of a democratic state to support cultural
institutions and education, but on a limited basis. This included encour-
aging artists and the fixed allocation of one percent of construction costs
of public building for monumental art, and earmarking a fixed portion
of lottery income for cultural activities.197 It also meant a continuation
of initiatives of increasing access to art and music, with an emphasis on
playing symphonic music as part of an educational campaign and the
‘people’s concerts’, which a liberal government had established in 1909.198
In the 1930s existing Stockholm institutions were obliged to
reach a wider audience, the first Social Democratic Minister for
Ecclesiastical and Cultural Affairs (Ekskélastiknimister) compelling the
Royal Dramatic Theatre to tour the country.199 Generally, the support
for cultural institutions followed the models of patronage established
by liberal governments at the turn of the century, fundamental issues of
cultural policy being relegated to the lower end of the political agenda
for through the 1930s and beyond, well into the post-war years.200

Ironically, in their unquestioning support for the arts the Social
Democrats also continued a type of cultural patronage which the liberal
state in the nineteenth century had inherited from the royal household.
This inheritance pertained to the character of cultural production as
part of court society, and its transformation into a representative public
sphere that had allowed the middle class to become culturally assimili-
ated with clergy, academia and nobility. In spite of continued resistance
of the coalition partners from the farmers’ party, who tended to regard
the public institutions as objects of aristocratic and urban largesse,
Social Democratic cultural policy produced a synthesis of older aristo-
cratic traditions and its own egalitarian objectives, relying on ‘a close
relation between aristocratic cosmopolitanism and Social Democrat
internationalism’.201

The conflicts between the smaller farmers’ party and the larger Social
Democrats, the two partners in the ‘red-green’ coalitions governing
Sweden through the 1940s and the early 1950s, suggest another under-
lying divergence between two different concepts of culture. They may
relate to the distinction between the two social spheres – court and people
– and the opposition between capital city and the country, which had
characterised Swedish society for at least three centuries. Certain forms of
cultural life such as theatre, opera, film and the fine arts carried associa-
tions with the court, a centralised state and possibly a morally dubious

191 Frans Sverris, The Ideological Development of Swedish Social
Democracy, (Stockholm: Swedish Social Democratic
Labour Party) 1956, p. 22
193 ibid., p. 313
194 cf Harding (2007), p. 88
195 In Swedish the term överklass
(upper class) is more diffuse than in English, referring to a relatively large group of
professionals, businessmen, merchants and industrialists and including the residues of
former nobility.
196 Both Hjalmar Mehr and
Harry Schein, who played a
central role in Social Demo-
cratic cultural policies and
Stockholm urban planning in
the 1960s, had a Central or
East European background.
Cf chapter 6
197 State and Culture. (1720), p. 9
198 Larsson, (2003), p. 192
199 ibid., p. 199
200 ibid., p. 196
201 Duelund (2003), p. 483
bohemian elitist subculture in the city. The parliamentarians and politicians of the farmers’ party whose electorate was based in small towns and villages, and for whom culture was largely connected with reading books, may have regarded all this with a certain amount of distrust. There is, in any case, no indication that the extensive support for libraries, a matter of pride for commentators from all political quarters, was ever as controversial as the performing and visual arts. Yet, the farmers’ party was not alone in its reluctance to fund cultural institutions. In 1913 Social Democratic Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson stated publicly that culture in folkhemmet should remain a private matter: ‘If a person wants to use his free time for car driving, another to grow roses, a third for collecting stamps, a fourth for music, a fifth to dwell in the world of books, a sixth to watch races or play football, that is not our concern.’

Administratively, culture was located in a ministerial department also responsible for church affairs, the eklesiastikminister. This arrangement suggests a connection between culture and the church’s function as established moral arbiter. On the one hand it may be taken as evidence that culture remained relatively low on the list of priorities, as it were lumped together with church matters. On the other it might also suggest that the link between cultural and moral matters was logical, connecting two areas that pertained to immaterial values and invested with a similar air of traditional respect and influence. Much of the cultural discourse of the 1950s and 1960s combines self-confidence, demanding the status formerly assigned to the clergy of the state church, with serious self-examination. The positioning as a fundamental component of the social arrangements may have invested culture with a certain degree of moral improvement into a cultural debate and the perennial danger of an ideological undercurrents of culture for a variety of political agendas. In any case, the first initiatives of governments led by Social Democrats in the 1930s, to improve the funding situation of the arts, were delivered a setback by cuts during the war years and even in the 1950s the financial situation of art institutions and individual artists remained difficult. Although the government appointed several committees of enquiry to propose measures for realising ‘a cultural and social asset for all classes of society and all parts of the country’ in the post-war years, this situation does not appear to have improved much.

Cultural workers and the people’s home: the Swedish cultural debate of the 1960s

The continuation of the status quo of limiting state support to the existing cultural institutions is notable, given the financial situation of a national economy that did not have to shoulder the costs of large-scale reconstruction which most other European countries faced in the period. The half-hearted character of initiatives to complement the programmes for social welfare and housing, for which Sweden was widely admired in the late 1940s and 1950s, with an equally ambitious cultural policy contrasts rather starkly with the diligence of the 1943 British Labour government and the establishment of a whole infrastructure for cultural support. Possibly, and this is speculation, one can explain this by fact that the end of the war was not perceived as the start of a new epoch – at least not to the degree that it was in Britain – but as a moment of accelerating an existing project of modernisation, which had been somewhat delayed by an external conflict. Euphoric sentiments about the end of the war and the defeat of National Socialist Germany were almost immediately tempered by the global conflict between the two superpowers, and fears of an economic downturn after the war. In his 1944 book Varning för fredsoptimism (Warning against peace optimism) the economist Gunnar Myrdal warned against too great expectations after the war, suggesting that America would succumb to a depression once the hostilities were over, and that ‘all the beautiful plans for a liberalisation of the global economy and its stability may turn out to be empty promises.’

Frequently the terms, in which historians and political scientists described 1950s Swedish society, have been those of ‘consensus’ and the ‘death of ideologies’. The latter notion referred to the thesis of Herbert Tingsten, formerly professor of political sciences and chief editor of the newspaper Dagens Nyheter between 1946 and 1960, that ideologically motivated projections of future societies were no longer tenable in the post-war situation. Instead, a ‘happy democracy’ (of which Sweden was the ideal typical example) would have to rely on a belief in rational solutions for its various problems. With his faith in technological progress, efficiency and rising living standards, Tingsten had a major influence on the state of sensibilities and the ideological and political basis of public opinion in this period. This consensus was both necessary loyalty of Sweden towards America and the North-Atlantic

202 In the post-war period this office was held by the Social Democrats Ragnar Edénman and subsequently by Olaf Palme. Cf Harding (2007), p. 97

203 Palme held the post of Eklesiastikminister from 1967, until he succeeded Tage Erlander as prime minister in 1969.

204 cf Duclard (2003), p. 181


206 Gunnar Myrdal, Varning for fredsoptimism, (Stockholm: Bonniers Förlag) 1944, p. 7

207 Part of the consensual arrangements were the annual meetings of leaders of industry, the large banks and the trade unions, upon the invitation of prime minister Tage Erlander, to discuss the directions of policy and economic planning. Harpound, the name of the venue, where these meetings took place, is a reference to the 1950s as Haroldnaden. Gunnar, conf. Olaf Rehn, I valfrihetsstämman – Tage Erlander 1946-1968, (Stockholm: Tiden), 1986, p. 166-167

208 Recent research on Swedish culture and politics in the 1950s has paid attention also to the silent repression, which was also part of the picture of the consensus and the ‘happy democracy’. Two studies examining the ideological undercurrents of Swedish social politics in the period should specifically be mentioned. Anders Fernander, Debattens vapen – Om politisk-ideologiska frågor i eftervärldens svenska kulturdebatt, (Gothenburg: Arachne) 1999, Kjell Östberg, 1968 – när allt var i rörelse, Sexuella rättigheter och de sekulära rörelserna, (Stockholm: Prisma) 2002

209 Fernander (1999), p. 113/114; Östberg (2002), p. 15

210 Ola Sigurdson, Den lyckliga filosofin: etik och politik hos Hegerstrom, Tingsten, makeras Myrdal och Hedenerus, (Elin: Symposium) 2000, p. 249; Fre- nander (1999), p. 113
block and against the communists and ‘semi-communists’.\textsuperscript{211} While Tingsten relied on his authority as a powerful leader of public opinion, another contributor to the debate on Sweden’s position in the Cold War between the two power blocks, the philosopher Ingemar Hedénius, speculated about making short shift with intellectuals who were openly questioning the belligerent stance of the defenders of Western democracy. Silencing the protagonists of Moscow’s fifth column and its supporters through benevolent censorship and by sending them to prison, for Hedenius, was a serious option.\textsuperscript{212} That many of those attacked in the most powerful media of the country chose to remain silent in such a climate is hardly surprising. Under the surface of a broad consensus Sweden was not free of the repressive atmosphere that characterised many Western societies after 1945.

It was only towards the end of the 1950s that the ideological consensus, which had been constructed in the main organs of public opinion, started to be questioned on a larger scale; a development which incidentally coincided with a shift to the left in the elections in 1958.\textsuperscript{213} In 1959 the literary journal \textit{Upptakt}, edited by Göran Palm, noted that the past decade had been characterised by a ‘bad conscience’ – for its lack of engagement, for its unsatisfactory lack of faith and the absence of collective and collecting ideas.\textsuperscript{214} In the same year the Social Democratic writer Roland Pålsön concluded a self-critical analysis of the effect of the politics of his party with an unsentling remark: ‘The story of the welfare state is in danger of becoming the next great conservative myth.’\textsuperscript{215}

The ‘bad conscience’ affecting a part of the liberal left-leaning intellectual intelligentsia expressed itself in an increased attention to injustices, for which there had been no place in a public opinion dominated by the ideological alignment with the West in the Cold War of the 1950s. Signs of unrest appeared, for example, in \textit{Författarar tar ståndpunkt} (Writers take position, 1960), which included articles on colonial liberation movements, apartheid in South Africa and race relations in the US, but also cautious attempts at a critique of the arrangements of the Swedish welfare system.\textsuperscript{216} Despite the title of the book, the authors were noticeably ambivalent about their initiative, wary as they were about being typecast or exclusively associated with their political stance. These doubts, however, disappeared quite quickly. In the following years a particular and new form of tourism emerged, which thoroughly directed Swedish public attention to problems across the globe. The writers Pär Westberg, Sara Lidman and Arthur Lundkvist (whose contributions to the leftwing \textit{Morgon-Tidningen} the American ambassador had made an attempt to suppress by asking for the dismissal the author)\textsuperscript{217} travelled to Rhodesia, South Africa and South East Asia and published their experiences in a series of books that almost immediately reached a mass audience.

In a curious book published in 1964 in English and designed to explain the ‘public dialogue’ to a foreign reading public, the writer Lars Gustafsson (who later emigrated to Texas and followed Swedish society as a mixture of maverick and oracle) describes the wave of articles, comments and public statements in \textit{Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Stockholms-Tidningen, Afstonbladet, Expressen, Göteborgsposten} and virtually all regional papers as ‘especially ambitious’ in covering questions of ‘morals, social problems, international questions, art and public education’.\textsuperscript{218} Gustafsson, who could be described as an exponent of the intellectually positivist generation formed during the 1950s, offers a description of the cultural debate in the Swedish media and the effect of the travel reports on it:

‘Certain phenomena in the world today, such as the treatment of South Africa’s coloured population or reports about the torture of prisoners in Algeria have vitally and passionately engaged public opinion in Sweden. … For this generation of young radical Swedes it has become rather an everyday experience to sign one’s name to protest lists to be delivered to foreign embassies, notes in which we have expressed our indignation, our abhorrence, our repudiation of phenomena which have violated our feeling for democracy and human worth. Naturally a feeling of powerlessness has been associated with this, but also the experience of a necessary, practically hygienic act.’\textsuperscript{219}

Gustafsson’s sardonic characterisation of the interest of writers in politics and the acts of purification associated with it was probably intended as satire (even if this may have been lost on the international readership of the booklet). Yet it also presented the new lust for debate to an audience that was used to seeing Sweden as an example of rational and calm pragmatism and showed that, after a lengthy abstention from engaging in politics, intellectuals and other cultural producers were exploring their influence on a public opinion.

Meanwhile, and after a long period of being relegated to a position rather low place on the list of priorities, culture also reappeared on the agenda of politicians. In a 1959 speech to the Riksdag, church minister Edeman reminded his audience that in a developed welfare state, culture and its producers – he introduces the term \textit{kulturarbetare} (cultural workers) had to be supported – by the state:

‘We must tackle the task of providing artistic creators and cultural workers with better conditions – not in order to direct or command, but to help and support. … Artistic creations cannot and must not be regarded simply as market products, for which there is a temporary stream of demand that may or may not arise …. We run the risk of seeing eminent culture bearers and people who create culture lose their foothold in society.’\textsuperscript{220}

The reference to the ‘cultural workers’, as used by Edeman, was significant in two ways. On the one hand it reflected the way in which the process of decision-making for funding was handed over to artists associations by the state. The Swedish interpretation of the arm’s length principle was notably different from arrangements elsewhere. Whereas in Britain the main agency responsible for funding the arts, the Arts Council, was dominated by independent individuals (usually of some
established position outside the arts, in Sweden the principle was essentially one of self-administration by the ‘workers’ themselves, essentially a system of corporative self-determination.\(^{221}\) On the other hand the categorisation as ‘workers’ invested artists with a clear role in public discourses. Being identified as members of the general working population both empowered artists and assigned them a position as productive contributors to the people’s home.

As it turned out, Edénman’s fear that artists might lose their foothold, or interest, in society was unnecessary. The attention to the world outside \textit{Väljarderiverge} (Welfare Sweden) may initially have been romantic and naive. It was also a lasting phenomenon and one that seems to have triggered a profound politicisation of artists, which became increasingly clear in the course of the 1960s (and well before 1968). In \textit{Har vi våd med kultur? – Kulturpolitiska Skisser} (Can we afford culture – sketches on cultural politics) Harry Schein mentions that the 1962 May Day demonstrations had been used by groups of artists as a venue for their protest against the French army’s atrocities in Algeria.\(^{222}\)

Schein sees the presence of artists at the traditional political rally of the trade union movement as a sign of a renewed interest on the part of artists in politics and questions of society: ‘... it is obvious that the participation of so many cultural workers and the desire for stronger support of society for the arts raised particularly large attention and contributed significantly to the success of the event.’\(^{223}\)

Schein’s book may be taken as an attempt at forging a coalition between the intelligentsia and his party. His sketch, above all, defines the new policy as an instrument for establishing a position of cultural hegemony. In order to do this he needs to convince his own party that it will have to respond to the demands of the cultural workers. In a passage primarily directed at his comrades, Schein reminds them that ‘all parties are currently discovering that it is tactically wise to develop an active cultural policy’, adding that for the Social Democracy this ought to be ‘not just a tactical problem but a moral duty’, and that it will have to respond to the demands of the cultural workers. In a semi-professional applicants who claim to represent a general opinion’;\(^{226}\)

One passage in the text seems specifically to refer to the polemics about the nature of arts and culture as they had been developing since the late 1950s. Schein notes that ‘the cultural conservatism which can be found among leading politicians, not least within the Social Democracy, should not be underestimated’.\(^{229}\) The conservatism in cultural matters persisted not only to the occasional interventions of the government in artistic matters, such as the censorship of art works in public galleries. It also referred to the quite violent debate triggered by two publications, which had strong influence on the direction of the cultural debate after 1960.

The first of these was the book \textit{Spejare} (Spies) by the art critic Ulf Linde.\(^{230}\) In the publication Linde, who was closely connected to Pontus Hultén, the director of Moderna Museet, and who was actively participating in the experimental activities for which the newly founded gallery dedicated to modern and contemporary art quickly became famous, sketched out a radically changed relationship between art works and their context. Linde stated that, rather than being universal and static products of artistic genius, art works were ‘made’ by the beholder, and that it was only through being presented in the context of an established – ‘bourgeois’ – museum that they acquired the status of exceptional objects invested with meaning. The rejection of the stability of the art work and its meaning undermined one of the central assumptions, not only of nineteenth century concepts of art and creative practice, but also of the cultural notions of the reform movements of the twentieth century. If ‘everything can be or become art’, everyday objects as well as elements of industrial mass culture, the very idea of art as a reference to perfection was obsolete, and with it the notion that a work of art – and, by implication, other cultural products or practices – could be vehicles of civilisation was no longer tenable.

The second book, \textit{Demokratins kultursyn} (Democracy’s view on culture), implied an attack on the very foundations of the educational and cultural programmes of the Social Democracy and its affiliated organisations, especially in the institutions of \textit{folkbildning}.\(^{231}\) Its author Bengt Nerman had a background in exactly this field. Nerman’s target of attack were the traditional cultural notions, which as we have seen had been fully absorbed in the cultural policies of the post–war Swedish Social Democracy. The ambition of these policies, Nerman writes, ‘to lead the man of the people, who was viewed as some sort of Caliban, up to the entrance of the privileged few, in order to undergo a metamorphosis into something more human’, departs from a concept of culture as static and ‘bears unhappy traces of the Christian-Platonic dichotomy of man as body and soul’.\(^{232}\) Defined as eternal, spiritual and unchangeable, culture cannot be anything but a gift of an enlightened state; something that is to uplift and lead an uncivilised population towards an ideal.

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221 Dueland (2005), p. 508

222 Harry Schein, \textit{Har vi våd med kultur?}, Kulturpolitiska skisser, (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag) 1962. Born in Vienna in 1924, Schein immigrated in the 1930s to Sweden as a fourteen-year-old and later became head of Svenska Filminstitutet (The Swedish Film Institute), and closely related to Olof Palme. According to Wikipedia, he never accepted Swedish nationality. Wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Schein (German version), accessed 20 April 2009

223 ibid., p. 18

224 ibid., p. 14

225 ibid., p. 25


227 Schein (1962), p. 21

228 ibid., p. 28

229 ibid., p. 29


232 ibid.
According to Nerman the moralising assumptions of this concept of culture, as well as its artificial and problematic distinction between a ‘good’ high and an ‘authentic’ popular culture and ‘vulgar’ mass culture were inhibiting and unrealistic. Artistic and creative processes were essentially expressions of new experiences of reality and need to reflect these. The author’s sketch of a democratic view on culture is developed from this basic premise.

Nerman’s alternative concept of culture is formulated around the thesis that the distinction between professional cultural producers and a majority of consumers are as artificial as those between the different cultural practices. He writes:

‘One starting point for a different image is to see every person in principle as operating in the same way that an artist or writer works. We can see him in and through his entire existence – his way of working, talking, dressing, walking, loving, eating, playing, dreaming – searching for and creating an expression for his experience of reality and sometimes, perhaps, creating/searching this expression by using this material. (…) The difference is a gradual one, but also a question of the media and materials used for expressing oneself.’

In eliminating the essential distinction between artist and audience and between professional and amateur Nerman reiterates the argument for a fundamental reformulation of the role of creative work, as had been proposed by Ruskin and Morris (and, following in this lineage, Georg Pauli). This also suggests a connection between cultural production and a critique of society:

‘… culture becomes a word for the activity of each individual to express himself and for the outcome of this activity. The crucial thing for the result are the opportunities for individual growth from one’s own thesis, a growth that can only come into existence from a genuine contact with reality which emerges if the individual is an independent ego in some sort of harmony with the larger pattern.’

It is only through a radical redefinition of culture and a reformulation of the objectives of cultural policies that the moralising undercurrents of official cultural provision – and, woven into this fabric, a disappointment that the recipients may not live up to the expectations – can disappear and each individual is allowed to ‘to experience his own value as a person, his rights as human being’. And for the professional artists or writer there is a perspective of reducing the distance between themselves and their fellow citizens, and ultimately a new role in the construction of a modern egalitarian society: ‘The task [of cultural production] should not be to ‘lift’, ‘lead’ of ‘foster’, but … (to) provide material of reality and take away hindrances, open ways, to help people to establish a more genuine connection with their own existence.’

The effect of the positions of Linde and Nerman on the debates in Sweden at the time or their publication is evident from the large number of articles on cultural institutions and patterns of presentation appearing between 1960 and, roughly, 1965. A physical focus of this debate was Moderna Museet and the events and exhibitions organised by Hultén and his collaborators, Linde among them. The collaborative nature of much of the work presented here, the experiments with temporary art projects and the direct appeal to a wide audience that characterised the museum’s activities invested it with the role of a laboratory. For the limited circle of its visitors the museum became an environment where a new concept of culture was brought into practice, challenging the idea of art as a form of expressing ideal and accepted projections of humanity and society.

The theoretical underpinning of Nerman’s questioning of the assumptions of Social Democratic cultural policies, combined with its practical expression at the museum – and the discussions about relocating to a new ‘house of culture’, Kulturhuset, in Stockholm’s commercial centre in the mid 1960s – effectively created the ground for the thorough change in the system of state support for culture, the Ny Kulturpolitik that was to be developed at the end of the decade. At the same time, the public debate and the artistic experiments in the early 1960s was to large degree a first, ‘liberal’, stage in a continuous process of radicalisation in Swedish society and its transition from the ‘pessimistic reformism’ of the post-war years to the ‘revolutionary reformism’ and demand for a radical change of institutions.

**Cultural action as an act of internal colonisation: André Malraux’s Action Culturelle**

In May 1965 the international press reported the presentation in Paris of a project for a cultural centre of spectacular proportions. In an interview with journalists André Malraux, the French minister for cultural affairs, announced the plan for a thirty-storey tower, to be situated near the Avenue des Champs Elysées, a ‘living centre for modern culture’. The new building, funds for which were to be provided partly by the French state, partly be private parties, would contain theatres, cinemas and rooms for exhibitions of contemporary arts as well as old masters, but also bookshops, restaurants and cafés. There would be an audiovisual centre, establishing the building as a centre for ‘arts and technology of the twenty-first century’. Malraux presented the initiative as the outcome of a change of mind about the objectives and methods of cultural policy. The new building, situated in the middle of the capital and explicitly modelled on corporate architecture, according to the minister, marked a new stage in his campaign to disseminate culture across France. Earlier, Malraux noted, he had envisaged sending works of art out of the national museums and organising exhibitions of paintings from the Louvre in Renault factories. This idea, now dismissed as ‘ridiculous’ by the minister, had never actually become state policy. With the new art centre for the twenty-first century its main objective – that of stimulating the encounter of large audience with works of art – was reinforced and redirected to settle
in the epicentre of the nation in the limelight of public attention. This position reflected the crucial role of culture for the personal development of the individual citizen: ‘... I would like to lead people to the arts by making them understand that they are the alpha and omega of their life, and that you simply cannot live without them.’

The project for the ‘culture on thirty storeys’ remained a utopian project of an ambitious minister, who was to resign together with General de Gaulle two years later. Its appearance in magazines and newspapers outside France suggests that the project was regarded as the significant initiative of man whose profile as a well-known intellectual and government minister attracted considerable, and perhaps predictable attention. The fact that Malraux’s idea coincided with the initiative of Pontus Hultén to relocate the Stockholm Moderna Museet to the centre of the Swedish capital and the proposal of this new Kulturhus as a ‘department store’ allows the conclusion that the French project was not an isolated mayfly. In Paris, too, the idea resurfaced a few years later, in the concept of a new large cultural centre – ‘the first cultural cathedral as André Malraux had dreamed of’ – with the competition for the Centre Beaubourg (or Centre Pompidou, as it was called after the Gauille’s successor as president of the French republic).

Malraux presented the tower near the Champs Elysées as a new phase in the cultural policies of the French government and the ultimate consequence of the Action Culturelle instigated by de Gaulle. Both in its scale and location the project expressed the claim that culture was a core concern and responsibility of the state, a position that Malraux had advanced with great rhetorical flair since his appointment as the first minister for cultural affairs in France. The combination of Malraux’s status, his skills as a communicator and figurehead and the declared ambitious nature of the policies of his department invested French cultural policies with an exemplary and unique character. Both in its scope and because of the fact that references to France (and particularly the Maisons de la Culture which were part of it) appeared in the central documents on cultural policies in Britain and Sweden justify a comparison of Malraux’s politics and his Action Culturelle with the cultural policies of the two Northern European social democracies.

The numerous speeches, essays, articles and policy documents

241 ibid.
242 It is not clear whether and how the project mentioned by the Danish paper was related to the project for a ‘museum of the twentieth century’, which Malraux had discussed with Le Corbusier. Early in 1965 Malraux had commissioned Le Corbusier with the design for a museum and four art schools near la Défense. Le Corbusier, who found the site ‘hardly engaging’, suggested the alternative of building the museum on the site of the Grand et Petit Palais. After the architect’s sudden death André Wogensky (and Jean Dubuisson, whose contribution is, according to Amouroux, not traceable) produced two consecutive schemes for the site between the new business district and Nanterre. Cf Dominique Amouroux, ‘Le ministre, l’architecte et le musée de leur siècle’, in: André Malraux et l’architecture, edited by Dominique Hervier, (Paris: Éditions le Moniteur) 2008, p. 131-153; see also Annick Pérez-Gudin, André Wogensky, (Paris: Éditions Cercle d’Art) 1993, p. 77-82.
246 Ibid., p. 17.

produced by Malraux and his department reveal a significant difference from the self-consciously ‘unostentatious’ statement of, for example, John Maynard Keynes or the even more implicit and modest phrasing chosen by Swedish politicians, critics and writers at the time. Malraux’s assertion that enlightened state patronage was to ‘bring the mysterious realm of metamorphosis within the reach of everybody’ was hardly the type of political statement expected from a politician, probably not even in France. Yet Malraux, the writer of widely read novels attacking European colonialism and nascent Fascism in the 1930s, the celebrated combatant in the Spanish civil war and the French resistance and author of highly idiosyncratic and erudite books on art, was not a normal politician, and the cultural politics of his department were as exceptional in post-war Europe as they were influential.

The mission statement issued on the occasion of the establishment of the new ministerial department in July 1959 is not very different in tone and wording from similar statements elsewhere. Vaguely echoing the 1945 Labour manifesto and the 1946 charter for the Arts Council in Britain it pleaded ‘to make accessible the main works of humanity, and above all of France, to the greatest number of French citizens and to ensure the greatest possible audience for the cultural heritage...’. The new department, an amalgam of the existing secretariat of the state for the fine arts and new administrations responsible for supporting and disseminating culture may have been unique at its time, its establishment preceding that of similar ministries by a decade or more. Yet it was the connection of this new administrative structure to the idea of the Action Culturelle that afforded the French development its unique status. The essential difference between France and the social democracies further north stemmed from an extraordinarily pronounced and rhetorically ideological vision and the coherence of the programme. It was the latter, and particularly the programme for building Maisons de la Culture in a series of smaller and medium-sized towns and cities that attracted the attention of critics, theatre makers, museum directors and politicians from outside France and which prompted Malraux to boast in the French national assembly that the Maisons were truly unique: ‘Ministers from this or that great power come to pay private visits [to the houses of culture], but I do not visit theirs.’ Such public display of self-confidence and chauvinism apparently functioned well in forging an alliance with a parliament critical of the use of considerable amounts of public money for public cultural buildings – although ultimately Malraux’s friendly relationship with de Gaulle was probably decisive.

The achievements of Malraux’s programme were substantial. Between 1959 and 1968 nine Maisons de la Culture were built and three more planned, numerous ancient monuments cleaned and palaces and gardens opened to the public. Studies of the development of post-war French cultural policy (of which the sociologist Philippe Urfalin’s L’invention de la politique culturelle appears to be the most exhaustive) suggest that it was the panache and intellectual independence of the minister combined with an effective and pragmatic administration that allowed the department of cultural affairs to cope with its extensive portfolio.
and fundamentally to reorganise the system of cultural provision across the French territory. The explicit rhetorical underpinning of the project of the Action Culturelle, the fact that it was directed by a public intellectual and ‘anti-minister’, and the fact that it could rely on the explicit support of the President of the Republic provided the basis for a forceful formulation of a social and cultural programme amounting to a revolution.

The choice of Malraux as an anomaly and without parallel in the arrangements of cultural policies in the period in other European countries. An ardent supporter of anti-colonial and anti-Fascist movements who renounced communism after the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact and a writer of key literary texts on the Spanish Civil War, Malraux was brought into the cabinet by de Gaulle himself. The reasons for this move appear to have been twofold. On the one hand Malraux brought distinction to the government, as a writer and public hero of the French resistance. On the other hand there may have been an element of calculation on the part of de Gaulle in empowering a man whose credentials as a representative of a modern and progressive culture seemed beyond doubt. The position of Malraux and his agenda for the ‘Action Culturelle’ formed important elements in a larger attempt to appease the left-wing intelligentsia dominating the French public debate in the 1950s. To quote Philippe Urfalino: ‘By making the democratisation of culture the principal objective of his political activities, André Malraux did nothing less than claim (…) in the name of a government still associated by more or less the entire Left with a dictatorship, the progressive culture of which the same Left thought to have the monopoly.’

The democratisation was assigned a position at the very core of state policy. Malraux was not only a member of the core cabinet; his own public statements and those of his senior civil servants transmit a strong belief in the transforming nature of culture and the pivotal importance of cultural politics for the French state. The tone, particularly of Malraux’s own statements, suggests that the direction of the Action Culturelle was both defensive and essentially progressive. Culture, it appears, is invoked as a remedial agent for reinvigorating French self-esteem and moral fibre after the mixed experiences of the war and the loss of collective purpose and an absence of spiritual authority. In 1959, as Malraux was formulating the objectives of his cultural policies, the country was not only gradually recovering from the material and social damages of the war. It was also involved in one of the more unsettling and violent episodes in the longer process of decolonisation. The Action Culturelle was not only brought in to redirect national attention towards social developments inside France (possibly to deflect from the painful loss of international status and the North African colonies), it also took the form of a campaign of internal colonisation. In the international new world order and as it were compensating for the loss of strategic or economic power, France was to reappear as a leader in the field of culture. Malraux formulated the mission of French cultural politics as a universal claim: ‘France was never great when it was concerned solely with itself, … (it is) fighting not for itself but for all men’. However, the calculations informing the Action Culturelle were not exclusively guided by considerations of national prestige. In the late 1950s rapid economic developments were beginning to leave their mark on French society, especially in the regions. Large segments of the population found themselves detached from their old lives and joined the ranks of the cadres of national or international organisations. For the sustained development of the country within a modern industrial society, the material and spiritual well-being of these cadres was of essential importance. An enlightened cultural policy would have to ensure that the talented and educated could live as if they were in Paris, and people in the regions had their share of both consumer goods and access to cultural experiences. With the Action Culturelle the state was to take up its role as an instituting agent in the development of a modern society, creating collective experiences and social spaces with which the new, and overwhelmingly young cadres would be able to identify.

In order to develop the whole national territory the Action Culturelle necessarily needed to reverse the tendency of a concentration of all major social developments in Paris. Malraux explicitly identified a broad decentralisation as one of the main objectives of the policies of his department, demanding that ‘before ten years have passed, that hideous word “provinces” will have ceased to exist in France’. This cultural mission implied not only significant financial provisions for new institutions in the regions, it was also intended as a broad campaign to improve access to the best elements of a universal culture.

Malraux’s idea of universal access to an equally universal culture – formulated also in his concept of a musée imaginaire comprising works of art from different ages and different cultures – was indebted to the pre-war traditions. In its scope and direction it seemed to be an implementation of the ideal of a democratic culture as it had emerged in the years of the Popular Front in the 1930s. In the context of the emerging consumer society of the reconstruction years this universal culture was in danger of being overwhelmed by the effect of the globalisation of culture industries and their products. Malraux repeatedly invoked these dangers in order to emphasise the importance of counter-action in the form of the Action Culturelle:

‘Never has the world known such dream factories (usines de rêve). Never has the world seen such power of make-believe (puissance d’imagination). Never before has the world seen the flood of grossness (deluge d’imbecillité) on the one hand and on the other, the sometimes very fine things which have created that mysterious unity in which a Swedish actress played the part of Anna Karenina, the work of a Russian genius, directed by an American to make children cry in India and China. The imaginative power of our civilization is without precedent, and here lies the problem …’

Malraux’s statement illustrates that the ideas informing French post-war cultural policies originated from two quite distinct, but probably interrelated angles. On the one hand there is an egalitarian and ‘anti-bourgeois’ impulse, which materialises in the support for...
cultural events and buildings that are explicitly open to all citizens of the state.\textsuperscript{258} On the other there is a darker, more pessimistic side, even to the egalitarianism. In Malraux's view the culture provided by the state is to ensure that ‘everyone be given the chance to fight the darkness on an equal basis’, this ‘in the face of the immense powers of imagination that are working to crush man’.\textsuperscript{259} It is probably this powerful mixture of cultural pessimism and idealism with direct references to Schiller’s idea of an aesthetic state that defines the deeper motives of Malraux. Culture contains ‘the great dreams are much more lasting than a simple human life’ or ‘the wonderful moment when man, still only a half-civilized creature, raises his eyes and feels himself mysteriously in harmony with the universe.’\textsuperscript{260}

Malraux situates the role of art between two poles: it has the power to draw people together and compensate for the loss of religion; and it allows acts of resistance against aspects of modern mass society as embodied by the ‘dream machines’ of the culture industry selling ‘sex, blood and death’.\textsuperscript{261} The consequences are evident. On the one hand Malraux’s cultural concept is based on a universal claim, and is essentially an agenda for a universal culture. On the other it relies on giving the individual ammunition for a fight for his spiritual survival against the sinister forces of banality and vulgarity. This, as Malraux explicitly states, is a ‘culture for everybody’, not a collectivist ‘culture for all’ of the sort, he suggests, to be found in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{262} The Action Culturelle, in other words, explicitly addresses the citizen as individual and intends to raise him (and rarely her) beyond the level of ‘the most animal (les plus organiques) and the most terrible instincts of a human being.’\textsuperscript{263} The deep influence of a vaguely Existentialist idea of the nature of human beings is also illustrated by another quote from Malraux’s opening speech for the Maison de la Culture in Amiens: ‘Culture is what answers man when he looks in a mirror to see what his face will be like at his death (quand il y regarde que sera son visage de mort).’\textsuperscript{264}

\textbf{‘Un savant mélange de casino, Prusian, café du Commerce’ – the Maisons de la Culture}

The creation of the Maisons de la Culture was the centrepiece of the \textit{Action Culturelle}.\textsuperscript{265} If the agenda of this policy relied on a high degree of centralisation, viewing the state as an agency levelling social differences, the new cultural centres acted as mission posts of cultural modernity replacing existing institutions and eliminating provincial cultural practices. With its overtones of colonising the conservative backwaters of small-town France, the idea of substituting the ‘esprit de province’ with a universal culture selected by progressive, young and ambitious directors seemed to continue some of the basic tenets of traditional French policy, the \textit{mission civilatrice}, in North and Central Africa. It may, then, not be a coincidence that many of the civil servants chosen to implement the programme for the Maisons de la Culture in France had a background in colonial administration (which had been made redundant by the de-colonisation process).\textsuperscript{266} After an initial phase during which various concepts were discussed, the campaign for building the Maisons de la Culture was accelerated in 1961, following the appointment of Émile Biasini as head of the department of theatre and music.\textsuperscript{267} Within less than a year Biasini, working closely with Malraux’s friend the writer Gaëtan Picon who was in charge of arts and letters, managed to change the general direction of the policy and establish a programme for the planning and building of Maisons de la Culture across the whole of France.\textsuperscript{268}

The idea of Maisons de la Culture was not new. It had its predecessors in the form of the Maisons du Peuple, which were founded as places of reassembly of Socialist workers after the repression of the 1871 Commune.\textsuperscript{269} Essentially self-help institutions and similar to the \textit{Folkets hus or Volkshäuser} in Scandinavia or Germany, they combined adult education with political activities and, to quote Jean-Louis Cohen, developed into ‘the laicist equivalent of the parish church’.\textsuperscript{270} In the 1930s the Maisons du Peuple became associated with the People’s Front and the support for the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. The politicisation of writers, actors and other cultural producers, which was one of the by-products of the anti-Fascist movements, probably also provided the background for the idea of establishing buildings specifically serving a democratic culture. The first institution figuring under the name \textit{Maison de la Culture} and managed by the \textit{Association des artistes et écrivains revolutionnaires} opened in 1935, followed by the establishment of an \textit{Association des Maisons de la Culture} headed by the writer Louis Aragon.\textsuperscript{271} Already at this stage the initiative was intended to cover the whole of France and its North African colonies, as plans were made for new cultural centres in Rouen, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Montpellier and Lyons, and in Algiers and Rabat.\textsuperscript{272}

The fact that the idea of a network of cultural centres resurfaced two decades later, now championed by a member of a Gaullist cabinet must have appeared an ironic twist of history. If the nineteenth century \textit{Maison du Peuple} indeed functioned as non-secular cathedrals, this

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{258} Urfalino (2004), p. 53
\item \textsuperscript{259} Malraux, ‘Maison de la Culture’ (1946), p. 135
\item \textsuperscript{260} ibid., p. 135
\item \textsuperscript{261} Urfalino (2004), p. 19
\item \textsuperscript{262} ibid., p. 53
\item \textsuperscript{263} Urfalino, ‘Maison de la Culture’ (1946), p. 135
\item \textsuperscript{264} ibid., p. 135
\item \textsuperscript{265} Urfalino, (2004), p. 22
\item \textsuperscript{266} Lebovics (1999), p. 99
\item \textsuperscript{267} Urfalino, (2004), p. 37
\item \textsuperscript{268} Biasini had served as an administrator in various French colonies in Africa between 1945 and 1959 and spent time in Dahomey, French Guinea and Chad, where he and Malraux had met for the first time. Urfalino also suggests that the French cultural administration absorbed a considerable number of administrators who were becoming redundant because of the decolonisation in Africa. \textsuperscript{267} Lebovics also recounts the story that Malraux had initially asked Biasini to set up a cultural centre at the Maison Francaise in Fort Lamy, Chad. When this project was abandoned, a proposition from other French government ministers, Malraux is reported to have asked Biasini ‘What you did with the Africans, why not do it in France?’ \textsuperscript{269} Lebovics (1999), p. 98/99
\item \textsuperscript{270} Klein (2008), p. 110
\item \textsuperscript{271} Jean-Louis Cohen, ‘Des bourses du travail aux temps de loisirs … les avatars de la sociabilité ouvrière (France 1914-39), in: Brauman/Colut (1984), p. 159-183
\item \textsuperscript{272} Klein (2008), p. 111
\end{itemize}
referred mainly to the large assembly halls for political gatherings and performances. Yet, most of the maisons also included spaces for more informal sociability, bars or restaurants, or even sports facilities and swimming pools. The Maison du Peuple at Clichy, situated in the red ring of the Paris suburbs and designed by Eugène Beaudoin, Marcel Lods and Jean Prouvé in 1935–39 combined a market hall at ground floor level with a room for performances above, the two separated by a removable floor.

The Maisons de la Culture planned in the post-war period were initially conceived in continuity with these precedents; depending on the location there were to be smaller and larger types, with different combinations of facilities for performances or exhibitions. The early examples in Caen and Amiens also took from the contemporary designs for municipal theatres in the Federal Republic. This flexibility was, however, abandoned during the main building campaign in the 1960s, which prioritised the provision of technically advanced auditoria and galleries. This shift in the definition of what a Maison de la Culture entailed was explicitly formulated in 1962 by Emile Biasini when he stated that it was explicitly ‘not a salle des fêtes, nor a communal cultural centre, nor a house for local associations, nor a public living room for the use of the brave literary or music-loving circles of the neighbourhood. Neither is it a space for amateur actors, evening class teachers, Sunday painters or folklore societies, or the terribly-needed music school and it is not even that cultural space next to a green space without which no town planning project seems to be complete.’ Biasini adds that the cultural centres may well incorporate some of these uses, but he makes it perfectly clear that their essential function is more narrowly defined as a ‘permanent occasion to approach truth’.

Biasini’s definition is mostly formulated in negative terms and only very vaguely in positive ones. Later he gave a more inclusive description, characterising the maisons as ‘un savant mélange de caisson, Président, café du Commerce’. Another definition, which reveals more about the envisaged realities, was formulated in an article by the administrative head of the Comédie Française Pierre-Aimé Touchard:

‘What is a Maison de la Culture? It is above all a foyer where all creative activities in the domain of culture of a small town or a neighbourhood of a city are brought together. One cannot imagine a real Maison de la Culture without a radical reversal of architectural traditions that disperse the theatre, the library, the art house cinema, entertainment and conference spaces in the five corners of the city. Instead of being conceived as an isolated building, the theatre has to become the very centre of the Maison de la Culture and, since it draws from the majority of the other arts, it has to infuse the city with life.’

Indeed the central position occupied by the theatre seems to be one of the characteristics of the Maison de la Culture. The only exception to this rule was the house in Le Havre, which had originally been conceived as a museum. The emphasis on theatre, and more specifically drama, can be explained with the role theatre directors and actors had played in pre-war attempts at cultural diffusion across the population and into the regions. The second reason, Herman Lebovics has suggested, stemmed from Malraux’s idea that a modern secularised society was in need of spaces in which experiences of collectivity could be lived and ritualised – thereby reproducing the role of the theatre as moral institution at the service of the aesthetic state as envisaged by Friedrich Schiller in the eighteenth century.

If drama was of pre-eminent importance, this did, however, not mean that traditional organisational or architectural forms could be used as a reference. Pierre Moinot, who had preceded Biasini as head of the music and theatre department (and was to succeed him in 1966), explicitly ruled out the horseshoe type for new performance spaces, noting that the architecture of nineteenth century theatres constituted ‘factors of inhibition’. Consequently, many of the maisons were equipped with ‘democratic’ auditoria emulating Greek amphitheatres, usually accompanied by smaller flexible performance spaces (which would also be offered as ‘television rooms’). These facilities were complemented by extensive foyers or rues intérieures in which the egalitarian agenda of the Action Culturelle was to find its expression. All Maisons de la Culture included a restaurant or a cafeteria, which was open during the day and served the visitors of the library or the record library, which were usually included in the programme of the building. It was in these spaces, which could be entered without a ticket, that the function of the maisons as a ‘virtuous machine’ and a social transformer was most tangible.

1968: The Action Culturelle unravels

The effect of the events of 1968 on the Action Culturelle of André Malraux was immediate and dramatic. Following the student protests all of the Maisons de la Culture suspended their ordinary activities and were ‘occupied’ by groups of protesters. These manifestations were not only tolerated by the administrations of the centres, but actively supported: in almost all cases the directors whom Malraux had explicitly empowered as animateurs with a ‘free hand for his creation’ took a lead in the action. This could be described as a classic case of revolutionary posturing of a group of civil administrators deciding to bite the hand that had fed them more or less well for years. After all, the directors had been part of the organisational structure and the policies which now were the object of criticism. Yet the occupation also reflected some of the internal contradictions, which characterised the Action Culturelle and which were increasingly surfacing in French debates in the mid 1960s. Against the background of the changes in the cultural debates elsewhere – and particularly in Britain and Sweden – the unravelling of Malraux’s policy in 1968 provides a clear illustration of some of the systemic complications of post-war cultural policies – especially since they became so dramatically visible in the French events.

The very choice of Malraux as minister for cultural affairs had always had an element of appeasing the intelligentsia, a social group critical of
the post-war Gaullist agenda. In 1968 this attempt at infiltrating a sector of society by emphasising the ‘anti-bourgeois’ and ‘progressive’ objectives of cultural policy had proved successful for almost a decade, especially also because it had been given an administratively effective framework. Now, however, the contradictions between the professed egalitarianism and the quite exclusive definition of culture that informed the policies became visible. In the initial phase of the Action Culturelle and before the appearance on the scene of Picon and Biasini, there had been a certain amount of indecision as to whether the culture provided by the state was to include youth and educational activities – which after all had been an integral defining part of the pre-war culture of the Left.

In the definition which Malraux and Picon publicly adopted in 1961, culture was becoming more narrowly defined, as it were purified of the objectives of education. Malraux’s own statement that ‘the universities are here to teach: we ourselves are here to teach how to love’ illustrates this.280 In ‘La Culture et l’Etat’, an essay on the function of culture in the post-war state and published in 1961, Gaëtan Picon explicitly distinguished between learning and culture. Universities were ‘places where a conventional image of cultures of the past is transmitted’, whereas the Maisons de la Culture were to become places where ‘an unknown image of present culture’ was to be developed.281 In identifying culture as a sphere of individual encounter with works of art, and explicitly suppressing the social context of the work, the artist and the moment of encounter, Picon’s statement reflected Malraux’s idea of works of art as objects of aesthetic contemplation. As such it was in tune with Malraux’s own approach formulated in the Musée Imaginaire but also with the positions of international advocates of modern art and architecture, such as Siegfried Giedion’s concept of an ‘eternal present’ embodied in works of art and the ultimate values that are to ‘transcend the individual and his time and circumstance’, as proposed by Herbert Read in his Meaning of Art.282 The confidence of the authors of the Action Culturelle – Malraux himself as well as those in charge of its administration – in the intrinsic validity of culture, and the belief in the possibility of achieving progress towards cultural democratisation without engaging with the post-war political realities had remained unquestioned during the early 1960s. Now, against the background of the increasing politicisation of cultural debates which were to form part of the core events of 1968, the contradiction between the egalitarian objectives of the policy and its proposal of an autonomous sphere in which art was to operate free of constraints was attacked from outside and within. Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the class-bound consumption and reception of culture, based on a precise survey of the use of cultural institutions, showed that the Maisons de la Culture were hardly less likely to prioritise middle class audiences than the fortresses of traditional culture which they replaced.283 This was not to say that the new cultural institutions failed to create a ‘new public’, as their administrators claimed.284 Rather they seemed to function effectively as vehicles for the cultural emancipation of the upwardly mobile new middle class, the cadres, who formed the backbone of France’s economic modernisation after 1945. This was illustrated by the clientele of the Maisons de la Culture, which was overwhelmingly young – among the holders of the membership cards of the houses the age group under thirty made up around 50 per cent – and from the middle ranks of French society.285 The new cultural institutions, in other words, were largely marketed to the established elite – but they also failed to address working class and rural audiences.

These contradictions showed most clearly in the field of the theatre. The new performance spaces in the Maisons de la Culture often replaced existing provincial theatres and their companies. The emphasis on artistic excellence and an increased presence of a younger generation of playwrights and directors seems to have been successful in drawing an audience that was younger and better educated, but often this also meant that the existing audience was lost. In general the effect of the maisons was one of professionalisation: the animators of the local cultural centres, eager to make their mark on the national scene, selected productions for their possible critical acclaim rather than for their popular appeal and amateur performances were barred altogether.286 The emphasis on excellence and innovation clearly succeeded in eliminating the disdained provincial spirit and replacing it with a dedicated artistic programme that engaged the professionals and their critics. Yet it also ran a constant risk of turning the new cultural centres into white elephants of the cultural policies of an enlightened state. The English theatre director Joan Littlewood, who was at the time campaigning for her Fun Palace project in London, hinted at this wondering if the French state was not ‘building tombs’, when confronted with the newly opened Maison de la Culture at Amiens?287

The core tenet of the Action Culturelle, namely that the policy was to bring works of excellence in all fields to new audiences and parts of the country that had up to then been deprived of their experience paradoxically meant that the criteria for the programmes of the new cultural centres were effectively defined and developed in Paris. In that sense the system that relied on sending out ambitious young directors to maintain these standards across the country shows a surprising likeness to the Jesuit activities following the Council of Trent; in both cases success relied on a combination of male team spirit and a highly efficient administration supporting the missionaries in their work in the diaspora, which in 1960s France was defined in cultural terms. Yet, as Philip Urfalino has noted, it was astonishing that a policy envisaging a mitigation of the imbalance between the capital and the periphery should rely on a large per cent middle manage.

Malraux’s statement that culture was to give the post-war French citizen ‘the greatest possible liberty’ and the idea that new forms of art were to create their own new audience relied on a fairly precisely predetermined idea of the artistic value of different kinds of creative production. It excluded nostalgic celebrations of the past and subjected the accepted canon of French culture to creative scrutiny. It favoured innovation and sought to develop the experiments of the avant-garde of the early twentieth century further for a democratic mass society. Yet,
even if the general drift of the Action Culturelle was one of popularising new and possibly difficult forms of artistic expression, these assumptions did imply that the professionals sent out to disperse across France retained a clear privilege of arbiters of artistic quality. This assumption, which might have been seen to contradict the declared objective of a democratic cultural policy, remained largely unstated. In a 1967 policy directive (issued by Biasini’s successor Pierre Moinot) this contradiction became, however, clear for once. Moinot wrote: ‘The public can have no important role in running the Maisons de la Culture. It is normal that members of the public would prefer what they know already, that they would favour the certain values. How could it invent what it does not know?’

It seems as if the confidence and ambition of French cultural policy and its effective administration in the early 1960s, and with it an appeasement of significant parts of the artistic and intellectual avant-garde, had engendered a certain inflexibility. Precisely the unique strength of a policy that intended to make excellent works of art available to a mass society, inviting new audiences to engage with modern art works and practices and countering the influence of the commercial cultural industries, now appeared as an incapability to respond to the sweeping cultural change that affected France no less than other European countries in the period. The emphasis on the egalitarian and essentially modernist principles of the Action Culturelle provided the ammunition for a critique of the realities of content and effect of the policy – as analysed by Bourdieu – and made the fault-lines of its concept of culture painfully visible. French cultural policy, which was widely admired across Europe, proved to be particularly vulnerable. Malraux’s explicit and highly personal statements had persuaded the members of the national assembly in 1969 is not quite clear. In any case, the disappearance of the inventor and figurehead of the Action Culturelle marked the end of a period during French cultural policy offered a point of reference also for other European countries.

2.4 Two cultures? – challenges to the definition of culture in the consumer society

The disenchantment of intellectuals with the system of state-sponsored culture in France may have appeared as a sudden change, almost an eruption of discontent. It would seem obvious that the protests launched in the universities inevitably affected the Maisons de la Culture as symbols of the Gaullist state. Yet, the fact that cultural institutions were explicitly targeted cannot be sufficiently explained by the general atmosphere of unrest alone. As I have tried to show, the initiative of the directors of the maisons in aligning themselves with the protesters pointed to a set of unresolved contradictions within a state policy that at least on the surface had absorbed many of the objectives of the pre-war Left into official state policy while at the same time ignoring essential issues of access and the role of culture in society.

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As the appearance of the cultural centre for the twenty-first century in, for example, the Danish newspaper Information illustrates, Malraux’s initiatives had been registered widely throughout the 1960s. Cultural administrators and intellectuals in other European countries looked towards France with an admiration that was sometimes mixed with misgivings about the autocratic nature of the Gaullist state. Compared with the rather more cautious policies of in Sweden or Britain, the energy and commitment of the French state in cultural matters appeared distinctly enviable. Pontus Hultén, whose Kulturhus project in Stockholm partly coincided with the Action Culturelle, referred to the effective cultural administration in France as the counter-example of bureaucratic obstructions obstructing his work in Sweden. In Britain, too, references to the French situation occurred frequently and were used to illustrate the deficiencies in state patronage at home. The Maisons de la Culture in particular provided exemplary precedents for the cultural centres that became part of official policies formulated in Britain and Sweden in the
1960s. In both countries the cultural centre was not merely a pragmatic proposal, although ideas about efficiency indisputably played a part in the considerations. Rather it marked a decisive shift in the objectives of state patronage, and a larger reform of the systems of cultural provision that had been established in the aftermath of World War II. The cultural centre was both a product of this shift and its instrument, entailing a revision of post-war policies of reconstruction and social reform.

The effect of this revision on the planning of cultural centres in both countries is evident in in two official documents on cultural policies. The first, *A Policy for the Arts – the first steps*, was published as a British government white paper in 1965, the second, *Ny Kulturpolitik* (New Policy for Cultural Work) was prepared in Sweden in the second half of the decade and accepted by the Swedish parliament in 1974. Both these documents were milestones in their countries in laying out the objectives of cultural policy in a rapidly changing mass society. Both were also assigned the status of government reports – a *novum* in the British as well as in Sweden. Despite the fact that almost ten years separate the publication dates of both documents and regardless of their different scope and length – the British is short and general, the Swedish is monumentally exhaustive – both these reports share a set of ideas regarding their core objectives.

Although there is no direct evidence that the authors of the Swedish document had used the earlier British one, parallels in the structure of the reports can by its nature be regarded as a form of ‘social environmental policy’.

*Politics as a matter of will* – cultural policy as a form of designing a new society

The calculations behind the shift in the direction of cultural policy, initiated by Social Democratic administrations, invite some analysis. In Britain as well as in Sweden, it had been representatives of the Left of the Social Democracy who can be identified as the originators of the government reports. The British document was drafted by the ministerial department of Jennie Lee, the country’s first state secretary for culture in the government of Harold Wilson and the widow of Aneurin Bevan, who in the early 1950s had formulated a far more activist position on the role of culture than what was then the official party line of Labour. In Sweden it was the young Olof Palme, who in his period as minister for church (and cultural) affairs took the initiative for the exhaustive survey of the country’s existing cultural institutions and their functioning, by setting up *Statens kulturråd* (the national council for culture) that was to write the report for the *Ny Kulturpolitik*.

Although personally unconnected, Lee and Palme could be seen to embody two separate generational strands of the forces operating within the process of revising cultural policy in the 1960s. On the one hand the desire to reinforce the potential of culture to give individuals from all social backgrounds the opportunity to develop their minds and abilities continued in the tradition of the pre-war radical left, on the other it was also part of the agenda of the (essentially middle class) protest generation and the New Left of the 1960s.

Jenny Lee’s background illustrates the first connection. Lee had withdrawn from the Labour Party in 1931 with other members of the Independent Labour Party, a loosely connected group combining a radical position on issues of collective ownership with an outspoken anti-Fascist stance. Actively supporting the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War as well as taking decidedly anti-Capitalist positions in the economic crisis of the 1930s, the Independent Labour Party offered a home for disaffected members of the Labour left with a background in local trade unions like Lee herself. It, however, also attracted intellectuals like George Orwell who joined the international brigades in Spain. Initiatives such as the theatre workshop and the Unity theatre movement, the Left Book Club and individual writers like Stephen Spender or W.H. Auden became part of a newly politicised culture. An alliance emerged between activists with a working class background and left-wing intellectuals. In this milieu the idea that a democratic society would rely on culture and education was not only shared, it became an aspect central to the development of a civilised society. Elements of these ideas remained at work within the organisations which merged into the Arts Council in 1945–46 and the eventual wording was at least closely supervised by her. Raymond Williams, ‘A Policy for the Arts – Comments on the 1965 White Paper’, *Tribune*, 3 March 1965 In Sweden the Ny Kulturpolitik was formulated by committees, the members of which had largely been appointed by Olof Palme. Cf Harding (2007), p. 102

The term ‘New Left’ (Ny vänster in Swedish) might suggest a coherent political formation, which did not exist. In the Swedish context it could be seen to describe the academics who were affiliated with or contributed to a range of journals like the *Universitets och Litteratur* Review, the *Ny Revisor* and (from 1960) the *Ny Left Review*, and who included Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Perry Anderson, E.J. Hobsbawm, Charles Taylor and Stuart Hall. In Sweden the journal *Zon* formed a focus for this group. Perry Anderson, E.J. Hobsbawm, Charles Taylor and Stuart Hall. In Sweden the journal *Zon* formed a focus for this group. In Swedish it was a year earlier that Gørán Thörnbohm published Göran Thörnbohm’s article ‘Den nya vänstern är nästan tillbaka’ in *Ny Tid*, 9 March 1965. A year later Thörnbohm (together with Larse-Ola Borgbäck, Gunnar Oldsoh and Rune Wiklund) published the book *En ny vänster* (A New Left).
resurfaced in the stand-off between Keynes and the council’s staff on the question of the art centre initiative, as discussed earlier.

If Lee’s roots in the radical left had familiarised her with the idea that culture was essential for any progressive development, this seems to invite comparisons with France where the continuity between pre-war Popular Front culture and post-war Gaullist policy was clearly visible in the person of Malraux. This continuity suggests that, at least to a degree, the initiative for a new policy in Britain can be described as an attempt to revivify the connection between the arts and a larger project of emancipation that undoubtedly informed the creation of the institutional framework (with the Arts Council as its centre), but which had been eclipsed by the emphasis on quality in the early 1950s.

Besides these continuities there was, however, also a direct pretext for the development of culture as part of the central government policy at this particular time, in the early 1960s. Both the British and the Swedish report were related to, and arguably outcomes of, larger debates on the future development of a democratic society and its modernisation in view of technological and social change. As such the allocation of increasing financial resources – Tony Judt has described this as Labour’s ‘largesse’ – can be related both to the accelerated educational reforms setting in during the 1950s and the emergence of a robust critical discourse. Sweden had its so-called cultural debate, which Gustafson had tried to explain to foreigners, while in Britain the development of Cultural Studies as a newly constituted discipline fundamentally altered the terms and assumptions concerning the definition of culture and the relationship between actors and audience, producers and recipients. In both countries these debates offered a focus and a background for writers, artists, academics and political activists.

In 1961 Roland Pålsson, who was to serve as a leading civil servant in Palme’s ministerial department, observed that, at least in Sweden, the welfare state was in danger of turning itself into the next conservative myth. Even when accounting for the differences between a society ruled more or less continuously by Social Democrats, and Britain where the Conservatives had been in power since 1951, this analysis seems to stick in both countries. In fact, the establishment of the welfare system took shape irrespective of the political colour of the different administrations, as did reforms in education. The quite focussed cultural debate in Sweden and its more diffuse and literally polycentric counterpart in Britain show remarkable similarities. Where in Sweden Ulf Linde and Bengt Einarner challenged accepted ideas of the definition of the arts and the intrinsic value of its products, in London the more isolated activities of the Independent Group had been in a quite similar discussions in the late 1950s. In the political debate on the role of the arts in society and the question of how culture ought to be defined for an emerging consumer society one can find parallels between the writings of Raymond Williams and those of Swedish authors – even if there is neither acknowledgement nor concrete evidence of an exchange of ideas in the documents themselves.204

In a summary of the debate on the Swedish new cultural policy, published in 1973, the influence of Raymond Williams is, however, explicitly mentioned – and it seems obvious that his positions had informed the English document, too.205

In Sweden the argument for a radical change of the political and economic system and the organisation of the institutions of the state was prepared and formulated by a well-educated younger generation, which quite naturally associated with the ruling Social-Democratic Party.206 The almost total alignment of the New Left with an existing political organisation in Sweden (even if left-wing splinter groups emerged towards the end of the decade) seems quite remarkable when the comparison is made with other Western European countries. In France, Italy or West Germany none of the traditional parties on the left could rely on a similarly exclusive position. In Britain, too, a liberal intelligentsia and radical academics were to some degree supportive of some of the policies of the Labour Party, but there was certainly not a general alliance.

Harry Schein’s 1963 analysis in Har vi nådd med kultur? that the Social Democrats could only sustain their position if they actually claimed the field of culture – in a way an almost symmetrical move to de Gaulle’s choice of Malraux as minister for culture – proved highly influential.

In the competition for setting a general agenda for Swedish society, or Problemformuleringsprivilegiet, as Gustafson had called it, the New Left absorbed into the old workers party proved to be so successful as to eclipse other intellectual and political forces. In the mid to late 1960s, as Schein noted, the reformers within the Social Democratic Party, found themselves in a position of all but absolute power.207 This development could be seen to be embodied in the person of Olof Palme, whose career as minister for education and, in 1969, prime minister coincides with a general turn to the left in Swedish society and a ‘re-radicalisation’ of the Social Democrats.208 With his own personal upper middle class background Palme is also exemplary for the social transformation of the workers party and the emergence of a politically radical establishment as a dominant cultural and political force.209

Palme, like Schein, departed from the analysis that the modernisation of Swedish society relied on the sustained cultural dominance of a renewed Social Democratic party, education being a key factor in this. School and university reforms were part of this modernisation.210 The reform of the cultural institutions in the broadest sense was, however, equally important and this required a systematic survey of existing audiences, attitudes and systems of patronage of the sort Schein and Björn Hägquist attempted with an in-depth analysis of the attitudes of audiences to cultural expression, with an emphasis on the cinema.211

In contrast to Britain, where the private sector of the printed media was explicitly left outside the sphere considered by official cultural policy, the Swedish debate explicitly included passages on the media. Partly this difference in emphasis may well be explained by the desire to control the political and cultural debate. It has been suggested that the significant staff increases of Swedish radio and television from the mid-1960s were the result of a impulse to assert a stronger control over political debates or establish an ideological monopoly.212

Roland Pålsson’s book Det möjliga sambältet, published in 1967, could
be seen as the template for the discussion and eventually the direction of the Ny Kulturpolitik.\textsuperscript{313} The book opens with a structural analysis of the ‘fridge economy’, as the welfare system is called, and its internal contradictions. In Pålsson’s view the model of a social deal between capital and labour, as it formed the basis of the system in Britain and Sweden (the two cases which are examined in the book), is ultimately untenable, because of its reliance on indefinite growth and its failure to tackle the need to re-distribute existing resources. According to Pålsson, the ‘fridge economy’ with its increased concentration of economic power and the continued artificial creation of new consumer needs has a detrimental effect for the development of democracy. He identifies a ‘general conservatism’ and a focus on material and technological development that a radical cultural policy will have to address: ‘Against the conformism of a thoroughly commercialised and technology-dominated society we will lead a deliberate policy in order to maintain and create opportunities for everyone both to choose as an individual or as part of a group which we can at least associate with a set of ideas or values.’\textsuperscript{314} Eventually, Pålsson argues, that social change supported by an activist cultural policy, will have to rely on the young: ‘After all it is the young in the short period between school and being fully integrated in the machine of society, who experience the absence of content of the new economic freedom [of the affluent welfare society]. They express a vital desire for life, which society is not equipped to meet adequately. We could, if we so wished, say see the wild young as an avant-garde for the new discontent in the welfare state.’\textsuperscript{315}

The element of moral and ideological self-examination distinguishes the Swedish debates from contemporary discussions in Britain. Even if writers like Richard Hoggart or Raymond Williams had been offering a critique of the effect of media and the press, and despite the stated objective of the BBC as an instrument of education, there was a gradual acceptance that popular and commercial publications were inevitably part of a modern mass society and its culture. The Swedish debate, by contrast, seems to have had much stronger overtones of serious concern about the detrimental, banalising and dangerous effect of modern mass media. Pålsson, while admitting that international mass culture has many positive aspects, identifies also a tendency towards standardisation, commercialism and superficiality and fears for the national popular cultures, wondering if ‘anything can save their communal life, artistic impulses, sensibility for style or harmony.’\textsuperscript{316} Here both the New Left and conservative cultural critics found themselves in a common argument, which arguably had its roots in the traditions of moral guidance exerted by the state church. The argument also had overtones of a larger moral crusade against the commercial cultural industries and ‘the continuous colonisation of our cultural environment’, as a motion in the Swedish Riksdag stated.\textsuperscript{317}

The opposition against US policies in Sweden combined with a growing awareness of global economic inequalities prompted a fundamental critique of consumer culture and modern mass media, and especially television. This sentiment was certainly not a particularly Swedish one, yet the vehemence with which it was brought forward by key figures in 1960s Sweden is noteworthy and it is clearly reflected in the cultural debates of the period. In the most influential newspaper chief editor Olof Lagercrantz, for example, characterised American commercial television as being ‘in a state of fatal illness, overgrown with poisonous rotting funghi, inflamed with fever’, and as an ‘example for how an ideology can survive also in areas where its implementation leads to misfortunes and decay’. This, Lagercrantz warned his audience at home, undermined the very foundations of democracy and freedom of expression: ‘Free speech’ on TV means that the free word is lost, that the only remaining freedom is the freedom of the TV companies to eliminate their competitors in the gutters or even below them.\textsuperscript{318} An enlightened and active cultural policy, understood as ‘social environmental policy’, could therefore not shy away from addressing the diffusion of information through the mass media and the values that were transmitted in television programmes, films or the popular press.

Reform or fundamental critique of a system – two documents on cultural policy

A closer reading of the British Policy for the Arts and the Swedish Ny Kulturpolitik reveals a fair degree of similarities. Both are organised around fairly comparable sets of concerns and stated objectives. Broader statements about the importance of cultural experiences for a democratic society and the role of creative expression in a technologically advanced culture return throughout the text and frame more specific recommendations for the reorganisation of existing institutions or the creation of new ones. Both, at least to some degree, contain analyses of the functioning of existing museums, galleries or theatres, although the British text is much more general in its tone, while the Swedish document clearly shows that developments in the British establishment were explicitly absorbed. Both also include specific statements about the importance of reaching out to younger audiences, the integration of cultural institutions in the education system and the desirability of a greater degree of regional distribution. It is from these broader statements that concrete proposals are formulated, first for an increase and redistribution of money, secondly for the creation of a network of new cultural institutions or cultural centres.

The passages describing existing institutions seem to focus on their shortcomings. The British document notes that many of the museums, art galleries and concert halls radiate an ‘old fashioned gloom and undue solemnity’ and ‘have failed to move with the times, retaining a cheerless unwelcoming air that alienates all but the specialist and the dedicated’.\textsuperscript{319} While this might be read as a criticism of style rather than the content of the work of these institutions (and as such reveals of the popularising tendencies of the 1990s), the statement is further developed into a general critique of the patterns of exclusion that this supposed state of affairs was generating. The attitudes to culture reflected in the unwelcoming character of the institutions are described as exacerbating a sense of distance among those whose social background prevents them from actively engaging with cultural expression. The report also mentions that

\textsuperscript{313} Cf. Roland Pålsson (1967) ibid., p. 16
\textsuperscript{314} ibid., p. 70
\textsuperscript{315} ibid., p. 40
\textsuperscript{316} Harry Schein, Kulturindustrins negativa verkningar, (Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministeri) 1984, p. 20
\textsuperscript{317} Olof Lagercrantz, Dagens Nyheter, 1 November 1966, quoted from Arvidsson (1999), p. 121. Lagercrantz, who is known for his biography of August Strindberg, replaced Herbert Tingsten as chief editor of the newspaper Dagens Nyheter in 1960 and could be seen as another protagonist of the radical establishment.
\textsuperscript{318} A Policy for the Arts (1965), p. 5
too many working people have been conditioned by their education and environment to consider the best in music, painting, sculpture and literature outside their reach."\footnote{320} This situation, the authors of the Policy for the Arts note, is no longer tenable as ‘more and more people begin to appreciate that the exclusion of so many for so long from the best of our cultural heritage can become as damaging to the privileged minority as it is to the under-privileged majority. We walk the same streets, breathe the same air, are exposed to the same sights and sounds.\footnote{321}

This criticism returns in the Ny Kulturfpolitik, which states that it ‘is basically unjust that people are cut off from activities and experiences because of geographical, economic, educational or other reasons or because of the short-comings in the organization of cultural activities’. Here the argument for the necessity of greater access and creative engagement is explicitly connected with the recognition that these inequalities may impede the development of society and the individual: ‘Gaps in the frame of reference and the possibilities for expression create isolation and conflicts.’\footnote{322}

Both documents explicitly reject the idea that culture should occupy a position as a sphere distinct from everyday realities. However, while the British document states a general claim that ‘the arts and associated amenities, serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place in a “civilised community”, in order to “improve the quality of contemporary life.”\footnote{323}, the Swedish authors include more explicitly critical objectives. Cultural activities, in their view, aim ‘mainly at satisfying the needs of human beings for experiences, expression and contact’, but they are also ‘the tool for the investigation of reality and the critical examination of society’.\footnote{324} Culture is described as ‘taking people beyond the boundaries which their evaluations and experiences have previously set’, and becomes an ‘instrument for changing the views and attitudes of individuals and groups’.\footnote{325} Ultimately, it is not enough for a society to grant an abstract right to freedom of expression without providing the opportunities for developing the means of communication. Replacing the idea of a formal equality with a functional one, the Swedish policy paper is significantly more explicit and radical than its English counterpart, stating that:

‘Artistic activity is a form of investigation of reality. It often aims at critically investigating conditions in our society and of human life in general. Freedom of expression in institutions always runs the risk of being curtailed. … Freedom formally regulated in various ways may be a fiction if there are not real possibilities of using it.’\footnote{326}

The main argument of both texts clearly concerns the question of the relationship between cultural producers supported by the state and their audiences. The British reference to the ‘working people’ who felt that culture or creative expression was beyond their social position strikes a somewhat defensive tone. It appears as if the authors wished to lend some reassurance to an audience that had not much enjoyed the offerings of post-war cultural patronage: ‘… as adults we are more vulnerable than we should be to criticisms of our inadequate uses of literacy, of our failure to appreciate poetry, of our limited tastes in music and drama, or our ignorance of the visual arts and of our blindness to good design.’\footnote{327} In order to reach out to these audiences, the definition of culture itself was to be reformulated in order to include forms of expression with which large sections of the population were familiar:

‘… diffusion of culture is now so much a part of life that there is no precise point at which it stops. Advertisements, buildings, books, motor cars, radio and television, magazines, records, all can carry a cultural aspect and affect our lives for good or ill as a species of “amenity”. … It is partly a question of bridging the gap between what have come to be called the “higher” forms of entertainment and traditional sources – the brass band, the amateur concert party, the entertainer, the music hall and pop group – and to challenge the fact that a gap exists.’\footnote{328}

If a more inclusive culture was predominantly a matter of extending the definition, the Swedish approach had a decidedly activist side. Not only was culture to operate as a tool for the critical examination of society; it was also essential that no citizen would be deprived of contact with it and cultural workers had a moral duty actively to seek those audiences whom they had insufficiently reached before. The report here contains a sniper attack at the existing institutions which, it is suggested, had relied too much on their traditional middle class audiences, who ‘because of their training or other circumstances, want such activity’. Instead, special efforts were necessary in ‘culturally backward environments and with underprivileged groups’, starting ‘with the situation, prerequisites and needs of various groups.’\footnote{329}

Where, then, would these audiences be found? The British authors were confident that, in contrast to the older generations who had internalised the idea that culture and creative expression was a privilege, ‘a younger generation … are more hopeful material’.\footnote{330} These younger audiences would also have different expectations: ‘They will want gaiety and colour, informality and experimentation.’\footnote{331} In any case, the report suggests, it would be wrong to ignore ‘the growing revolt, especially among the young, against the drabness, uniformity and joylessness of much of the social furniture we have inherited from the industrial revolution’.\footnote{332} This was all the more important as ‘in an age of increasing automation bringing more leisure to more people than ever before, both young and old will increasingly need the stimulus and refreshment that the arts can bring’ and ‘provide for diversity’.\footnote{333}

The fact that culture was to offer ‘stimulus’, ‘refreshment’, ‘diversity’ and ‘adventure’ points to a significant difference between the British and the Swedish document. Throughout their text Jennie Lee’s ministerial staff show an almost obsessive keenness to emphasise how culture was to make Britain a ‘a gayer and more cultivated country.’\footnote{334} Possible or predicted reservations that this emphasis might make state supported cultural expression indistinguishable from the products of the commercial cultural industries are explicitly rebuffed: ‘… there is no reason why attra
active presentation should be left to those whose primary concern is with quantity and profitability.\textsuperscript{335} The Swedish authors seem to be a little more pessimistic. Not only are the references to a gayer and more cultivated future absent; the Ny Kulturpolitik is also much more explicit about the dangers which the influence of commercial culture would have on the individual citizen and society as a whole. An enlightened cultural policy, in this view, actively needed to counter these damaging influences:

‘Many people, especially young people and those with less education, would easily become victims of one-sided influences by cultural offerings which are scanty and of bad quality, products which, for example, use violence for speculative purposes or give a picture of society which is controlled by producer interests.’\textsuperscript{336}

It is in passages like this that the differences between the two documents are most marked. The tougher Swedish wording, with its pessimistic and moralistic overtones, seems to reveal a set of assumptions about the role of collective processes in society that English readers would have perceived as dirigiste and illiberal. Conversely the English report explicitly and repeated states that the a democratic state has no business in prescribing or judging taste, and that artists, however eccentric, have a right to autonomy. These differences could be explained by the different historical backgrounds of two Northern European welfare societies. However, the emphasis on the role of culture as a tool for examining society also shows how much the Swedish report was the product of the radical cultural debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Unlike the English white paper the Ny Kulturpolitik is clearly informed by the fundamental critique of society and the role of cultural institutions in it, as formulated by Bourdieu in France and a range of writers in Sweden. The fact that this fundamental – and intentionally revolutionary – critique was absorbed into official state policy and thus incorporated into a strategy for reforming the welfare system could be seen as one of the ironies in the history of Swedish post-war policy.

The cultural centre and its audiences

Despite these differences in tone and content the Policy for the Arts and the Ny Kulturpolitik placed similar hopes in new institutional concepts which were to advance change in the way in which culture would be presented, produced and received. Both documents contain a set of recommendations for the creation of new types of cultural centres. In England, the report notes, post-war priorities had not allowed building campaigns for culture, with the result that ‘habits of neighbourliness and co-operation in community projects were not developed.’\textsuperscript{337} This was only half the truth, as any comparison with other European countries would have shown. ‘The other, and probably decisive, half is also revealed in an aside to the conservative-leaning press campaigns: ‘Certain sections of the press’ the authors note, ‘by constant sniping at cultural expenditure, made philistinism appear patriotic’, effectively impeding the creation of an infrastructure of concert halls, theatres and public galleries.\textsuperscript{338} Now, however, a new initiative for a comprehensive building campaign was to start. Moreover, this campaign could benefit from experiences with new institutional concepts for art centres or cultural centres as they had been developed not only in France, but also in an ad hoc fashion in Britain:

‘In meeting contemporary trends the concept of the arts centre is most valuable since such a centre can be of almost any size and cover any range of activities. A single hall can provide a place where local people can meet, perform an amateur play, hold an exhibition of their own or of professional work, put on a film show, lecture or recital and generally act as focal point for cultural activities and amenities. It may be solely run by amateurs or by a mixture of amateurs and professionals. At the other end of the scale the arts centre may cover a long stretch of the South Bank, with Festival Hall, Recital Room, National Theatre, Art Galleries, restaurant and Film Theatre.’\textsuperscript{339}

The Swedish report, too, stated that proposed ‘more space is needed for collective forms of activity – group activities based on active participation or the individual’s own creative work.’\textsuperscript{340} These ‘spaces’ were more likely to be found outside existing institutions than within them and ‘attempts should be made to arrive at a basis of multiple-use premises’ which were to promote ‘contacts among various forms of culture and various participants.’\textsuperscript{341} This wording of the objectives of the cultural centres seemed to contain an almost direct reference to the debate that had accompanied the building campaign of the new Kulturhus in Stockholm, which was approaching completion as the report became official government policy in 1974 and which will be discussed in chapter 5. Ironically, both the South Bank (which is explicitly mentioned in the British white paper) and the Kulturhus were more or less finished by the time that the policies which supported them were officially recognised.

The terms in which the cultural centres – or ‘arts centres’ as they were referred to in the British white paper – were surprisingly general in tone. In both documents their description does not extend beyond the idea that the existence of different activities under one roof – or not, in the case of the South Bank – would somehow bring about the desired realities of active participation and communal spirit. Neither do the documents reveal how these institutions might be managed and how exactly the audiences, whom the earlier efforts of state sponsored cultural provision had visibly failed to reach, might now be addressed. Instead there is a rather vague evocation of a situation in which amateurs and professionals and citizens from different social backgrounds would develop their creative potentials and participate in public debates. The reference to the youth as the prime target group, a theme that can be found in both documents, and an emphasis on the way in which an enlightened cultural policy would infiltrate schools is the only concrete reference to where the new audiences for culture would be found in the future.

Even so, the idea that culture and its heritage should be made accessible to all members of society, and especially the young, whom the Policy...
Buildings for culture in Europe
Types and compositions

for the Arts had identified as ‘more hopeful material’, did not resolve the question as to how exactly ‘the arts’ or ‘culture’ were to be defined. The new the Midlands Arts Centre for Young People in Birmingham, which opened in March 1964, for example, was characterised by its director ‘as a training ground, as nursery slopes leading on to the major cultural provisions of the community’ quoted from John Lane, *Arts Centres – every town should have one*, (London: Paul Elek), p. 1.

The Swedish document too has a reference to the fairground, the ‘Folket Park’ (People’s Parks) which are said to ‘offer considerable possibilities of reaching groups of people who are not ordinarily reached by institutional cultural offerings’ quoted from John Lane, *Arts Centres – every town should have one*, (London: Paul Elek), p. 1.

As Raymond Williams was tireless in pointing out, what was supposed to be disseminated more broadly was also bound to change with the dissemination. Jim McGuigan summarised this dilemma in an analysis of the impulses behind Labour’s 1960s cultural policies: ‘Trouble arose around the meaning of ‘access’. Was it confined to creating the conditions for more people down the social hierarchy and in the regions to consume established art forms? Or, did it mean popular control over the means of cultural production, redefining what counts as ‘culture’ and participation for groups hitherto excluded by the established structures of public patronage?’

The main innovation, perhaps was location: many of the British cultural centres opened after 1964 (but quite probably conceived while the Policy for the Arts was being formulated) were situated outside London and in exactly the medium-sized towns that the Arts Council staff had wished to reach with the arts centres initiative of 1945–6.

Apart from geographic distribution the most significant aspect of the new direction – more strongly in the British white paper than its Swedish counterpart – is the emphasis on the potential of each member of society to be creatively active. Herbert Read had proposed the artist as ‘a man [sic] who by his special gifts has solved our emotional problems for us’ quoted from John Lane, *Arts Centres – every town should have one*, (London: Paul Elek), p. 1.

In this view, which can be taken to summarise the view of a modernist establishment in the immediate post-war years the experience of art was predominantly contemplative; an experience of looking at art – ‘soothing’ rather than ‘agitating’, according to Read – and an ‘emotion totally different in kind from the emotion experience and expressed by the artist in the act of creating a work of art’ quoted from John Lane, *Arts Centres – every town should have one*, (London: Paul Elek), p. 1.

The idea of the experience of art and artists limited to silent appreciation was challenged by the mid 1960s when the British white paper was published and had almost disappeared in the early 1970s as its Swedish pendant was drafted.
Felix Meritis, Amsterdam, 1777, Jacob Otten Husly

London Institution, 1815-19, William Brooks

Reform Club, London, 1838, Charles Barry

Casino im Augarten, Brno, 1855, Ludwig von Förster

Künstlerhaus, Vienna, 1866-68, August Weber

Masonic Lodge, Dublin, 1867, Edward Holmes

Institution of Civil Engineers, 1866/1896, T.H. Wyatt/Charles Barry

Flora, Berlin, 1872-74, Hubert Siter

Gesellschaftshaus des Osnabrücker Hüttenwerks, before 1875

Cercle d'ouvriers, Le Havre, 1875, Théodore Huchon

Concordia, Hamburg, before 1877, Haller and Lamprecht

Cercle de l'Union Crétienne, Paris, 1893, Bénard

Casino Municipal, Tréport, France, 1896-97, Fivaz

Reformtheater, Vienna, 1887, Andreas Streit

Maison du Peuple, Brussels, 1899, Victor Horta

Maison du Peuple, Brussels, 1899, Victor Horta

Künstlerhaus, Munich, 1900, Gabriel von Seidl

Arbeiterheim Favoriten, Vienna, 1902, Hubert Gessner

Bourse du Travail, Lyon, 1919, Tony Garnier

Maison du Peuple, Charleroi, 1924, Joseph André

Lenin people’s house,* Ivanovo-Voznesen, 1924, G.B. and M.G. Barchin

Lenin people’s house,* Ivanovo-Voznesen, 1924, I.A. Golosov

Stockholms Konserthus, 1926, Ivar Tengbom

Zuev Club, Moscow, 1927, I.A. Golosov
Rusakov Club, Moscow, 1927, Konstantin Melnikov

Kongresshalle Berlin,* 1927-28, Hans Poelzig and Martin Wagner

Palace of Culture,* Moscow, 1930, Ivan Leonidov

Deutsches Haus, Flensburg, 1932, Ziegler/ Rieve

Maison du Peuple, Herstal, 1933, Joseph Moutschen

Casa del Balilla, Forlì, 1933-35, Cesare Valle

Maison du Peuple, Clichy, 1939, Lods, Beaudouin, Prouvé, Bodiansky

Royal Festival Hall, London, 1948-51, LCC architects

Medborgarhus, Eslov, 1947-47, Hans Asplund

Kulturhaus Mauhütte, Unterweltborn, 1952-55, Hanns Hopp and Josef Kaiser

Nationaltheater Mannheim,* 1953, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

House of Culture, Helsinki, 1955-58, Alvar Aalto

Medborgarhus Örebro, 1957-65, Erik and Tore Ahlsén

Mobiles Theater,* Düsseldorf, 1959-60, Werner Ruhnau

Kongresshalle,* Berlin, 1958, Werner Düttmann

Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery, London, 1959-68, LCC architects

Akademie der Künste, West-Berlin, 1960, Werner Düttmann

Leverkusen cultural centre,* 1960, Alvar Aalto

Folks hus, Stockholm, 1961, Sven Markelius

Kulturzentrum Wolfsburg, 1958-62, Alvar Aalto

Schouwburg Tilburg, 1962, Bijvoet and Holt

Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham, 1962, Jackson, Edmonds

Maison de la Culture, Caen, 1963, A. Bourbonnais

Theater für morgen,* 1964/65, Norbert Wömer
* Unrealised project
Public and counter-publics
Buildings for a
democratic culture
3.1 Introduction

At 8.45 on a Tuesday morning in November 2004 the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh was stopped while cycling to work and stabbed to death, a notice pinned to the body fixed with a small knife. The assassin, as it turned out, was a 'second-generation Morrocan', as the Dutch media tend to identify the ethnic background of residents with an immigration background. The incident took place in a busy high street in a nineteenth century district of Amsterdam, immediately outside the local town hall and amidst the traffic of trams taking commuters to work and transport bicycles loaded with children on their way to one of the several primary schools in the vicinity. News of the murder spread fast across the neighbourhood and beyond. Even before the assassin was arrested by the police, national radio and television channels interrupted their morning programmes to announce the murder.

The public reaction was immediate and enormous. Work in offices stopped, as employees gathered around coffee and Xerox machines to talk to their colleagues. In schools ordinary class activities were suspended. Everywhere people turned to their computer screens or radios to follow the latest developments of the arrest of the murderer or listen to statements by politicians calling for calm and restraint. These appeals were only moderately successful. In the days after the event mosques and Islamic schools became targets of arson attacks across the country. In Amsterdam no acts of violence against immigrants and their institutions occurred. In Dam square, the city's ceremonial centre, a notably solemn crowd gathered around the national monument commemorating the victims of the German occupation in 1940-45 to protest against what was felt to be an assault on democracy and free speech with a continuous banging of pans and other household utensils.

Meanwhile the site of the murder, which had been cordoned off by the authorities, underwent an extraordinary transformation. The barriers set up to protect possible evidence acquired heavy layers of wreaths, flowers, small statements written on pieces of paper and drawings dedicated to the victim (who was also provided with cigarettes as a form of votive deposit). For a period of eight days this temporary shrine, about two metres wide and twenty metres long, became a destination for groups and individuals of different ages, occupations and ethnic backgrounds. What had been hastily constructed as a means to fend off the public during the murder investigation turned into a monument and its surroundings into an open-air debating chamber bisected by the rails of the tram which resumed its service on the day after the murder.

All of this was as unplanned as it was the result of grass roots activity, tolerated by the authorities. School teachers, pensioners, housewives, tram conductors, community activists or local politicians appeared and literally raised their voice, found an audience, and this audience responded, engaging in impromptu debates. The temporary use of an ordinary street engendered by a situation of crisis had allowed the street to become a 'space of appearance'. Discussions and public appeals, which

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1 A collection of these deposits, drawings and statements is kept in the Amsterdam Municipal Archive.
in normal circumstances are rarely situated in a physical environment, but in the mediated context of television or radio programmes, newspapers or, occasionally, in (usually subsidised) institutional spaces, were played out in an existing urban space.

References to the ‘public’ character of urban spaces permeate contemporary theoretical discourse on urbanism and architecture. Since the 1980s a large number of publications have sought to analyse and critically examine the realities behind the notions of ‘public space’ or ‘public sphere’. These notions could be said to define the disciplinary cores of philosophy, political thought, cultural history and architectural theory, but they are also part of a field of ‘semantic confusion’.2 How exactly terms such as ‘public sphere’ or the ‘public domain’ as the physical manifestation of the former is defined often remains unclear. In English-speaking discourse this vagueness is exacerbated by the fact that the term ‘public sphere’ itself, unlike the abstract German noun Öffentlichkeit (or its Dutch and Scandinavian equivalents), has spatial connotations that make it difficult to distinguish between references to specifically socio-functional spheres on the one hand and spatial domains on the other.

The allusion to the ‘public’ nature of spaces inside and outside buildings has entered the standard repertoire of planners and developers. Airport terminals are called ‘cities’ or ‘plazas’, promising total accessibility and implying a form of spatial democracy.3 The characterisation of the Amsterdam airport terminal, for instance, as a space that is open to anyone, ‘twenty-four hours a day, without a ticket’ illustrates this claim. The designers state: ‘Because the space doesn’t belong to anyone, it belongs to you. This type of public domain is an essential feature of the city.’4 The qualification of a privately owned and rigorously controlled space like the terminal as ‘public’ suggests that in this account the term’s definition is reduced to one criterion – general accessibility – although even this is, as it turns out, limited. Access is effectively denied to members of the public (drug addicts, beggars, male prostitutes or ‘the homeless’) whose presence is seen as undesirable by the owners.5

Meanwhile the reference to a desired or claimed ‘public’ character of a space often operates as a magic word, lending an air of legitimacy to new buildings or urban projects. The ‘accommodation of the public’ has become an explicit aim of architecture as practice.6 Expressing and facilitating the public character of buildings occupied a central position in the dominant architectural discourse in Europe and North America after 1945. The final statement of the 1951 meeting of the Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) at Hoddesdon summarised this aim, demanding that cities were to ‘provide opportunities – in an impartial way – for spontaneous manifestations’, for ‘leisurely intercourse and contemplation’.7 The preoccupation with manifestations of the collective in the immediate post-war years was following two strands. On the one hand the expressed need for an adequate representation of the public character could be seen as a continuation of the debate on monumentality in modern architecture, which Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion had instigated in the early 1940s.8 On the other, collective purpose and by extension the public character was, as the Hoddesdon declaration illustrated, to be found in the quotidian realities of using buildings or cities. This emphasis on the expression of social content in its use, as Adrian Forty has observed, had been part of the fundamental convictions of the pre-war European avant-garde. Forty writes: ‘Through what went on in works of architecture, through their use, the ideal raised by European modernism was that architecture might give expression to the collectivity of social existence, and, more instrumentally, improve the conditions of social life.’9 From this perspective, the idea that the design of spaces, inside and outside buildings, was to facilitate encounter, communication and – ideally – public debate became firmly absorbed into architectural and urbanistic discourses.

The description of buildings by the German art historian Paul Frankl as ‘moulded theatres of human activity’10 which suggested that architecture was a form of scenography of human activities seems to connect directly to the idea of the public debate as a type of performance. This equation of the public sphere as a space of appearance is one of the central themes in Hannah Arendt’s influential 1958 book The Human Condition.11 Arendt here introduced the notion of a public space as a stage for people ‘appearing on the stage of the world’ and revealing themselves as active and communicating citizens and connects this reading explicitly and positively to a theory of political action. Arendt’s point of reference was the Greek polis in the classic period of the Athenian democracy (albeit in a heavily idealised version), as a space not of reproduction and necessity, but of freedom and self-realisation.

The interpretation of the public sphere of the polis, and the agora as its physical location, as a space of appearance invites references to theatrical performances. It should come as no surprise if these references play a significant role in much of the discourse on the democracy, society and culture after 1945, and on architecture as the production of public spaces. As we have seen, theatrical performances occupied a central position within the Action Culturelle of André Malraux in

References

5 Ibid., p. 18.
8 The text ‘Nine points on monumentality’ was written in 1945, but remained unpublished. Giedion published it in German in 1956, Sigfried Giedion, Architektur und Gemeinschaft – Tagebuch einer Entwicklung, (Hamburg: Rowohl) 1956, p. 40-42. Sert was also one of the editors of the Hoddesdon document.
France. In the 1960s the idea that buildings in which people could learn how to ‘act’ as citizens entered the discourses on the architecture of public buildings, particularly those devoted to cultural expression. Architecture, theatrical expression and public discourse became directly connected. In an issue of the French magazine L'architecture d'aujourd'hui from 1958, titled ‘Les lieux du spectacle’, incidentally included the announcement of the competition for a new building on the plateau Beaubourg, the later Centre Pompidou) references to Greek theatres, procession routes during the French Revolution, theatre activities in psychiatric hospitals, fairs and the Woodstock festival are all presented as part of a history of public performance and social intercourse. Theatre, le spectacle, is invested with the particular capacity of providing formal expression to the public exchange of ideas and emotions, and architecture is to provide a temporary or permanent framework for the dramatisation of the experience of community.

In the 1960s this role of forging collective experiences and public debate was assigned a central role in debates about initiatives for cultural buildings. The cultural dialogue preceding and accompanying the development of the Kulturhus in Stockholm is an illustrative example of the concept of a physical concentration of cultural activities and debates in one building and its immediate surroundings. The proposal for a building that was to accommodate professional cultural events and informal activities, political debate and communal action, under one roof could be seen to entail a reworked version of the classical agora, transformed for a urban mass society. The explicit reference to a large part of the building as torgel, the square, which occupies an prominent position in the discourse on the institution and its architectural undertones underlines the expectation that the new building would operate as an extension, and possibly as a substitute for what in the ideal circumstances of classical Athens might have had a place in the agora.

The concept of the building as was literally realised in the new cultural centres designed by the architect Frank van Kligeren for Dronten and Lelystad, two of the new towns in the newly reclaimed Dutch IJsselmeerpolders. Van Kligeren’s proposals for these buildings entailed a shift of terminology from cultural centre to community centre and were explicitly conceived as permanent equivalents of urban spaces, streets and squares, in existing cities. In a description of the first and most influential of the two schemes, the Agora at Dronten (later renamed ‘de Meerpaal’, the architect presented his design as a kind of Kalverstraat (Amsterdam’s main shopping street) with a roof on top. Van Kligeren had proposed the design of the building, a shed with a large-span roof and glass façade as a solution for incorporating the informal life of a city, the argument being that in a northern climate a shelter was necessary to create conditions which would have existed naturally in Mediterranean cities. This argument, which was also put forward by Peter Celsing, the architect of the Stockholm Kulturhus, of course ignored the fact that the interiorisation of activities in the new buildings entailed a fundamental alteration of their character and that they invited irreconcilable contradictions between the ideal of the public space accessible to everyone and the realities of the day-to-day control of behaviour. In the architects’ accounts on both buildings, as well as countless others, this contradiction was not addressed. Instead, in the case of the Dronten Meerpaal the public character of the building was underpinned by the manipulation of the brief by the architect and the inclusion of a series of activities which had originally not been part of it. The Meerpaal, which had been commissioned as a multi-functional hall for theatre, cinema performances and the public library, thus also acquired the functions of a market hall and an public foyer with a so-called Eidophor, a device for public TV viewing. This extension of the brief, according to van Kligeren, was to establish the building as a place of encounter not only of citizen with each other, but also with the outside world: ‘… strange things are going to happen. Some news from Vietnam for instance on the large television screen just before the theatre performance is about to start, an aggressive bowling game if the piece has not been enjoyed, and an moment of relaxing and gossiping at the bar – which is why we made the bar so big.’

The fact that inside the Meerpaal the theatre space itself was not acoustically separated from the hall, suggested that there was to be a fluid boundary between the professional performances inside and the everyday spectacle outside the auditorium. The elliptical plan of the auditorium, which had been derived from Walter Gropius’s 1927 Totaltheater designed for the director Erwin Piscator established an overt lineage between dramatic experiments in Weimar Germany and contemporary 1960s experimental drama. The most poignant illustration of the idea that the Meerpaal provided a stage for the dramatisation of social intercourse and its mediatisation, however, was the use of the building as a television studio for popular quiz shows broadcast from here, which afforded the building a strikingly novel media presence across the country.

The equation of the interior of the Meerpaal with outdoor spaces points to a fundamental problem. In providing the functions of public institution (theatre and library), street and square, café and living room, the building absorbed a series of domains which are conventionally separate and are subject to different sets of rules in a liberal democracy. In the 1960s proposals for cultural centres the distinctions between the assumption of a generalised absence of violence as the definition of outdoor spaces, the much stricter rules for theatres or libraries, the private commercial space of the café and the domestic arrangements of the living room were explicitly ignored. The equation of different types of public, semi-public and private environments and their inclusion in one building points to the imprecision which characterised discourses on the public nature of spaces and of buildings in the 1960s (and has continued to do since). It is for this reason that an examination of the definition of the terms in which the role of the public sphere in a liberal democracy and of the public nature of spaces seems appropriate and necessary.

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14 Cf chapter 5, Kulturhus case study.
16 van den Bergen/Voillaard (2003), p. 78.
18 van den Bergen/Voillaard (2003), p. 80/81.
3.2 Culture and democracy

The concept of culture as an agent of modernisation in a democratic society was a recurrent theme in the debates on the reconstruction of the physical and social fabric in Europe after 1945. Reflecting the experience of the collective war effort in Britain or the construction of the Swedish folkhem, academics and politicians identified the need for a common culture. Explicitly or implicitly many of these considerations were also informed by the demise of civil society and the rise of the authoritarian regime in Germany in the 1930s. In the new post-war democracy culture appeared as a civilising force against any form of political extremism or authoritarianism. The sociologist Karl Mannheim, who had left Germany for Britain in 1933 and theorised the idea of a ‘Third Way’ of a planned democracy, summarised this concept of culture in general and the arts in particular as a ‘way of life, not a mere compartment’ which was to ‘convert otherwise destructive energies into constructive ones’. Within the framework of post-war planning culture was to channel creative energies into the ‘devotion to higher ideals’. This idea from the outset implied the accessibility of experiences of culture for a greatly enlarged public. As has been shown in the previous chapter, increased access became a central aspect of the cultural policies of the emerging post-war welfare states, in Britain and Sweden as well as most other countries in North Western Europe.

Indeed, it was specifically in realising greater access to education and culture that equality of opportunity could be demonstrated. This, one could argue, was of particular significance, since the basic idea of the welfare system did, after all, not imply the concrete realisation of a socialised economic system, but instead a reconciliation of capital and labour by introducing legislation for social security, housing and education. If anything, the realisation of social and economic equality was, to follow the sociologist T.H. Marshall, ‘checked, challenged and brought to a halt’ and eclipsed by an emphasis on increased productivity and consumption in the 1950s. While equality of education would have implied significant public investment, access to the common national heritage and culture was a relatively affordable form of demonstrating general objectives of equality. If, according to Marshall, citizenship, as defined within the welfare system, was effectively operating as ‘the architect of social inequality’, then culture was a means of remedying or disguising economic inequality, realising ‘equality of status’ rather than economic equality. It could be seen as symbolically anticipating the realities of the ‘Socialist Commonwealth’, which the British Labour party promised its voters in 1945, or the folkhem of the Swedish Social Democrats, while the concrete achievement of these ideals was deferred to an abstract future. The ideological function of culture as a unifying and civilising force relied, necessarily, on the explicit insistence on general access and the elimination of privilege. It also implied a concept of the audience defined as collectives of citizens engaged in the appreciation of art works or, in the late 1960s, in the examination of society through art. Culture in the post-war social democracy was no longer...
primarily a private experience enjoyed by privileged individuals, but a
collective and essentially public one.

In the context of the post-war reconstruction, culture played a
significant part in providing the ideological connections between ideals of
general citizenship and equality on the one hand, and the realities of
sustained material difficulties and social inequalities on the other. The
change in London theatre audiences from a privileged leisured élite to a
much wider section of the population, which Arts Council administra-
tors described three years after the creation of this body, highlighted
the essential importance of the appearance of inclusiveness and class-
lessness in the publicly sponsored cultural provision within the welfare
state.26 The mentioning of the disappearance of evening dress and their
replacement by more 'ordinary' sartorial styles could be described as the
everyday pendant of larger public cultural events, like the 1951 Festival
of Britain, with more their more concerted celebrations of collective
spirit.26 Both the temporary events, the concerts, theatre performances
and exhibitions, then, were aimed at forging an explicitly tangible and
visible common culture and providing experiences of commonality in
which the relationship between the state and its citizens would receive
a material expression. At the same time culture, and particularly in its
collective expressions, also demonstrated the re-building of civil society
as part of the post-war social democracy.

References to the objective of increased access are a recurrent theme
in the official documents on cultural policies in the immediate post-war
period, and returned in radicalised form in those of the 1960s. Then, the
role of culture in the creation of a democratic culture entailed firstly a
renewal of the claim to reach all citizens and secondly a fundamentally
altered relationship between cultural producers and audiences. These
statements were underpinned by others about the essential contribution
of what one might call a 'cultural proficiency' towards full citizenship.
The encounter with forms of culture, but also the active participation in
them, were to assist individual citizens in engaging with public debates
and help them to formulate and revise their views against the back-
ground of a society undergoing rapid economic changes. The explicit
mention in the Swedish Ny/Kulturpolitik of the capacity of culture as an
agent for the critical examination of society illustrates these high hopes
invested in it as part of a collective process of social change.27

The introduction of direct state support for culture, in the form of
grants from government departments or arms-length bodies such as the
Arts Council, implied a fundamental change also of the nature of the
institutions. Theaters or concert halls, which up to the 1940s had
often been private enterprises relying on the loyalty of their respective
audiences and private benefactors now effectively found themselves
absorbed into state policy and the systems of bureaucracy established to
administer the distribution of public funding. As culture, along with
social security, health and education, had become one field of action
in which the welfare state assumed responsibility, its character shifted
from the essentially private pursuit of a privileged minority to an explicit-
ly public concern. André Malraux’s emphasis on the need in modern

secularised society of spaces in which experiences of collectivity could be
lived and ritualised28 – and the re-instatement of the theatre as a moral
institute illustrate this concept of culture as establishing a collective
sense of meaning. The buildings devoted to this collective activity were
the site where both the ceremonial and the discursive practices of welfare
state culture would be accommodated and symbolically embodied.

Debates about notions of accessibility, equality and the public nature
of cultural institutions necessarily affected the thinking of architects
working on proposals for theatres, galleries and concert halls as well as
the cultural centres built in the 1960s. As the public nature of the institu-
tions had to be explicitly established and expressed it was probably no
coincidence that the definition of the ‘public’ should become central to
architectural discourses in post-war Europe, as Forty notes.29 Like other
fields of cultural production, architecture was absorbed into the system
of state initiated planning that affected all domains of life and to archi-
teets the idea of a social reform was largely embraced by the professions
of architecture and planning. That this reorganisation did not amount to
a fundamental redistribution of economic control or income, effectively
enhanced the role of architecture. Architecture’s capacity to create places
in which equality could be experienced, furthermore, provided a valuable
instrument to demonstrate the good intentions of the welfare state.
Although the provision of housing and schools for the working masses
was essential for stabilising the social balance that was needed for the
reconstruction effort, fulfilling these private needs alone would not be
enough to express the move towards the proposed egalitarian society.
A revision of the experience of those places defined as public was necessary
to find symbolic expressions of the public sphere in the post-war
democracy. The discussion at the 1951 CIAM conference at Hoddesdon
provides ample illustration for this need.

In this chapter I intend to examine the way in which ideas and
experiences of citizenship and cultural production as part of a public
discourse have been formulated historically and found their concrete
expression. Departing from a discussion of the definition and the histori-
cal development of the notion of a public sphere I will examine how the
definition of the relationship between civil society and state action
underwent significant changes during the twentieth century and formed
a foil for the concepts of cultural action or policy after 1945. The
establishment of a bourgeois public sphere and the process of extending
the audience of those participating in it forms one of the threads of
this account, which is closely based on Jürgen Habermas’s 1962 study
Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit (translated into English as The structural
transformation of the public sphere).

The approach of Habermas prioritised the perspective of the public
sphere as a world of words (and men), while the discussion of the spaces
in which it received its concrete form remained sketchy and somewhat
superficial. However, the historical moment described by Habermas
as the period of the formation of the bourgeois public sphere coincided
with the development of the buildings types that go along with the
practices which are part of this sphere: squares, cafés or parks, and public
buildings like theatres or museums. I will make an attempt at examining how audiences, or publics, were being ‘made’ by particular spaces, and how the layout or the material treatment of spaces was instrumental in forging particular types of experiences of the public sphere. Both the idea of a general public sphere, and the various smaller publics or audiences within it, only exist by virtue of their being named and imagined. In order to illustrate the question of how this imagination is constructed I will examine how different definitions of the public sphere and the role of cultural production within it have been reflected in actual buildings or in ideas about the representation by means of architecture.

The role of venues for sociability and cultural expression occupies a central place in the arguments of Habermas and from there it has more or less been assimilated into the historiography of the modern metropolis in the period of the industrial revolution. However sketchy in its treatment of social history, Habermas’s proposition of cafés, salons, clubs or academies as the locus of experimentation with free speech and a breeding ground of civil society offers itself as a point of reference for analysing spaces or urban interiors. As such it may well be used as a framework for an examination of the architectural forms, both typological and stylistic, which were developed as venues for sociability and culture, in the post-war period.

**Rebuilding the public sphere**

Karl Mannheim’s invocation of culture as a means of channelling potentially destructive energies towards a civilised society may have survived the war more or less intact, it is much less clear how they are recruited: no public schools, no grands écoles, no clerical preferment.’ Perry Anderson, ‘A New Germany’, *New Left Review*, no. 57, May/June 2009, p. 22.

31 After 1945, as Perry Anderson has observed, and because of the loss of the Eastern hinterland of the Prussian aristocracy, ‘West Germany, bourgeois enough by any measure, felt relatively classless … Even today, if one compares its elites to those of Britain, France or Italy, which survived the war more or less intact, it is much less clear how they are recruited: no public schools, no grands écoles, no clerical preferment.’ Perry Anderson, ‘A New Germany’, *New Left Review*, no. 57, May/June 2009, p. 22.

32 The notion of civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft) is formulated in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s *Grundzüge der Philosophie des Rechts*, published in 1820/1821.


34 Adolf Arndt’s lecture was subsequently published by the institution and, as the editors of the 1974 compare its elites to those of Britain, France or Italy, which survived the war more or less intact, it is much less clear how they are recruited: no public schools, no grands écoles, no clerical preferment.’ Perry Anderson, ‘A New Germany’, *New Left Review*, no. 57, May/June 2009, p. 22.

organised.\textsuperscript{196} For Arndt it was only through a rebuilding of the institutional structures of public life that democracy could be accomplished as an association of individual people. Architecture held a key in the formation of the balanced, rational subject on which this new society needed to rely.

Referring to the architectural monumentalism of the authoritarian regime, Arndt stated:

‘… that the geometric architecture of the authoritarian state is associated with the manipulable human being, that allows itself to be fixed as a Utertian (the subject as opposed to the citizen) in the hierarchy of super- and subordination and merely performs as private audience in history, and that the architecture of totalitarian power is connected to the malleable man who is not his own, but is so organised by a state, that no private public can confront the absorbing state; society itself is devoured by the state and becomes identical to it and imprisoned in it. I feel that democracy as a political way of life has to rely from the outset on the independent man and that everything in it, including building, has to aim towards supporting man in gaining this independence and consciousness in this world, that he is a political man, who carries his share of historical responsibility – even if that contribution is modest.\textsuperscript{197}

In a direct reference to Bauen Wohnen Denken, Martin Heidegger’s contribution to the Darmstädter Gespräche in 1931,\textsuperscript{36} and discussing the architecture of buildings for education, Arndt extends the concept of dwelling to the space of the social that needs to be inhabited and inhabitable. ‘If building is dwelling, and if building is to be the foundation and organisation of spiritual spaces, does in a democracy not the accessible school-time-space have to become a space to inhabit and in which to be educated? Does it not have to be a space that structures leisure and movement in such fashion, that it escorts the pupil to a consciousness as political man and to find balance in that?’\textsuperscript{39}

What becomes clear from Arndt’s exposition is that in the German context notions of publicity and public sphere as the domain of rational and critical debate could not be separated from a discussion of the formation of the individual subject. Arndt here re-iterated one of the central themes in the investigations of democracy and authoritarianism by political thinkers such as Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and, from a different perspective, Hannah Arendt in the 1940s and 1950s. After their definitive return from America in 1948 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno re-established the Institut für Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, which had been founded as an independent institute in 1923 and had ceased to exist when its members were forced into exile in 1933. In the Dialektik der Aufklärung, written in American exile but first published in 1947, Horkheimer and Adorno formulated a critique of the tendencies of the intellectual traditions rooted in the Enlightenment to allow their rationalising impulses to be instrumentalised in efficient mechanisms of technocratic control.\textsuperscript{40}

The post-war Institute defined its role as one of critically following and analysing the process of the rebuilding of the post-war Federal Republic, although neither Horkheimer nor Adorno seemed to have much faith in the future of a German democracy. The fundamental critical position of the Institute implied maintaining a clear distance from practical politics and emphasising the inherent contradictions of the attempt to build democratic institutions within the economic framework of a developed Capitalist economy and its concentrations of power in financial and industrial corporations. It is against this background that the investigation of the functioning of liberal democracy by members of the so-called second generation of the Frankfurt School has to be seen.\textsuperscript{41}

This second generation, typically young academics born in the early 1930s and formed by the experience of growing up during the Nazi years, accepted a more active role. Their experience of childhood and the rupture of 1945 – ‘the society and the regime of a normally lived everyday was revealed over night, as it were, as pathological and anti-democratic. So organised by a state, that no private public can confront the all-power is connected to the malleable man who is not his own, but is imprisoned in it. I feel that democracy as a political way of life has to rely from the outset on the independent man and that everything in it, including building, has to aim towards supporting man in gaining this independence and consciousness in this world, that he is a political man, who carries his share of historical responsibility – even if that contribution is modest.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} ‘Rückblickend enthüllt sich die Tragik der Weimarer Republik aus dem Zweispalt zwischen einem demokratisch organisierten Staat und einer, von den Gewerkschaften abgegrenzt, anti-demokratisch strukturierten Gesellschaft a-politischer Menschen. So kann es kaum mehr verwundern, daß damals außer von jenen zuerst erwähnten Ansatzen das neue Bauen im Staatsbereich ausblieb, nicht, weil Demokratie zum bauabgelehnten, sondern weil es seinerzeit an der demokratischen Struktur der Gesellschaft und am politischen Bewußtsein der Menschen fehle.’ ibid., p.18

\textsuperscript{37} ‘Trotzdem hoffe ich, daß es aufschlußreich ist, daß nur die geometrische Architektur des Obrigkeitsstaates der feststellbare Mensch gehört, der sich im Ordnungskreis der Über- und Unterordnung als Untertan fixieren läßt und im Geschehen bloß privates Publikum darstellt, so daß zur Architektur totalitärer Mächte, bei der das unbewußt und enthemmt Emotionale dominiert und den Menschen schockt, der machbare Mensch gehört, der nicht seinen eigenen Gott ist, sondern der so organisiert wird von einem Staat, daß diesem alles aufgetragen, an einem aufgehaltenen Staat nicht einmal mehr ein privates Publikum gegenübersteht, die Gesellschaft vielmehr vom Staat aufgezehrt und mit ihm identisch in ihm eingefangen wird. Ich meine, daß Demokratie als politische Lebensweise von ihrem Ansatz her auf den mündlichen Menschen angewiesen und darum alles in ihm, auch das Bauen darauf angelegt sein muß, dem Menschen zu seiner Mündlichkeit zu verhelfen und sich in dieser Welt bewußt werden zu lassen, daß er politischer Mensch ist, der zu seinem Teil, wenn auch oft beschämte Versuche, geistliche Mitverantwortung trägt.’ ibid., p.16/17


\textsuperscript{39} ‘Wenn Bauen Wohnen und wenn Bauen ein Stehen und Fügen geistiger Räume sein soll, muß dann nicht in einer Demokratie der begebare Schul-Zeit-Raum zur Schulwohnung werden, die sich in Ruhe und Bewegung so aufgliedert, daß sie den Schüler dazu gelehrt, seiner selbst als politischer Mensch bewußt zu werden und mit sich ins Gleichgewicht zu kommen?’ Arndt (1961) p.20

\textsuperscript{40} Max Horkheimer/Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung, original publication (Amsterdam: Querido) 1947; (Frankfurt: S. Fischer) 1969

\textsuperscript{41} The generational nomenclature, though problematic in its implication of a parent-child relationship, is very generally applied for the Frankfurters.

\textsuperscript{196} Jürgen Habermas describes the experience of 1945 as an abrupt change. 'Die Gesellschaft und das Regime eines als halbwegs normal durchlebten Alters waren gleichsam über Nacht als pathologisch und verbericherischem entlarvt worden. ‘The interest in the workings of this authoritarianism and liberal democracy, in his account, has been a sustained reaction to this experience, which he describes as ‘gleichsam kostenlos erworbene moralisch-politische Einsichten’. ‘Dadurch ist die Konfrontation mit dem Erbe der NS-Vergangenheit zu einem Grundthema meines erwachsenen politischen Lebens geworden:’ Jürgen Habermas, ‘Offentlicher Raum und politische Öffentlichkeit’, Neuer Zürcher Zeitung, 11 December 2004

\textsuperscript{197} Jürgen Habermas, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit – Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der öffentlichen Geschäft, (Darmstadt: Luchterhand) 1962. The extremely extensive discussion on Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit becomes apparent in the sheer quantity of publications on this book, which received renewed international attention after the (interestingly delayed) publication of its English translation, which was short-listed for the Cundill History Prize and the American Historical Association award. Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society, (Cambridge: Polity) 1979
democratising power of critical reasoning became itself the target of the radicalised generation of students of 1968.44

The trajectories of the public sphere

Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit has been described as ‘an ideal-type representation of the early modern “public sphere” – a bourgeois milieu of coffee-houses, salons, debating clubs, Grub Street publishing and learned correspondence which formed the communicative infrastructure of the Enlightenment in France and England’. The combination of a historiography of bourgeois institutions with a history of ideas allowed its author to combine the examination of political practice with a theoretical prognosis.45 Habermas departs from a historical analysis of the nature of the public sphere as the place in which ‘publicness, Öffentlichkeit, has been experienced and enacted, and gradually connected to political reasoning. The book provides a background for the discussion of the concept of the public in abstract terms and in concrete, i.e. spatial terms. It is also a critique of its erosion, in Habermas’s diagnosis, which occurred in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The analysis of the trajectory of the notion of the bourgeois public sphere as it emerged in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, via the fully developed capitalist society of the nineteenth century and the political struggles which resulted in the system of state interventions since the 1870s and in the twentieth century affords the book its status as a point of reference of an investigation of the nature of the public sphere.

It is attractive to read Habermas’s account against the discussion of English culture and society as Raymond Williams had offered just four years before.46 Both books cover roughly the same period and both also seem to use very similar references for their analysis of the societal development in the eighteenth, nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Habermas explicitly refers to Williams’s observation of the definitions of art and culture as spheres separated out from the sphere of ‘economic reproduction of social life’.47 This remains, however, the only direct reference. Otherwise the perspective, and the tone, of the two books make for very different reading. Whereas Williams’s account is a history of ideas, and his book is essentially a series of highly connected essays, ‘an elusive text’, loosely and fluently written.48 Habermas, by contrast, had set out in an attempt at providing the definition of an abstract category, and this is tangible in the terse prose of his account and a tendency towards abstraction.49

The emergence of ‘the public’ as court society

Habermas’s account of the emergence of the concept of the public sphere begins with an examination of the history of the use of the words ‘public’ and ‘öffentlich’ in English, French and German. In all these three languages he notices a multiplicity of concurrent and competing meanings as late as the eighteenth century; an ambiguity that is also reflected in the changes in the reference to the public as abstract notion. As an example he quotes the absence of the noun Öffentlichkeit in German in the late eighteenth century at a time when the use of the adjective had long been established.50 This ‘delayed’ use of the term, to follow Habermas, reveals the absence of a reality of experience. In other words the specific social sphere that is denoted by the term is directly linked to the emergence of civil bourgeois society. Habermas also mentions that in the Middle Ages the term publique was in fact related to the power of the lord – ‘publicare meant to claim for the lord.51 This contrasts with the reference to the Hellenic model of the public sphere that acquired normative power in the 17th century, however, as the author notes, not on the base of the reality of the organisation of the commonwealth, but as ‘ideological template’ at the level of intellectual history.52 What exists is a type of ‘representative publicness’ (representative Öffentlichkeit); the lord not merely embodies the public; he (or she) is the public.

Ultimately this understanding of the public would take its extreme form in the daily rituals at the court of Louis XIV, which celebrate the body of the monarch as centre and unifying representation of the state. The court is at the same time the audience that is present at the exceptional enactment of the glory of the king that follows the concentration of power at the Versailles court.53 With aristocratic society no longer primarily attached to the land, but to the monarch, the court establishes a demarcated and exclusive sphere of ‘good society’. In this form ‘the final form of representative publicness, reduced to the monarch’s court and at the same time receiving greater emphasis, was already an enclave within a society separating itself from the state’.54

This ‘privatisation of courts life’ and the retreat of the court from the city as Habermas describes it anticipated the separation of a public sphere from the official sphere of court society linked to the monarch and the state. The shift becomes all the more visible when one compares the grandes fêtes in the gardens of Versailles with the urban pageants of culture’. Williams himself read Marcuse’s book with a sentiment of strong recognition, as a mirror of his own work. Mulhern (2009), p. 33/34
50 Habermas (1962), p. 14
51 ibid., p. 19
52 Dieses Modell der hellenischen Öffentlichkeit, wie es uns mit der Selbstbestimmung der Griechen stilisiert überliefert ist, teilt seit der Renaissance, mit allem sogenannten Klassischen die eigentümlich normative Kraft – bis in unsere Tage. Nicht die gesellschaftliche Formation, die ihm zugrunde liegt, sondern das ideologische Muster selbst hat seine Kontinuität, eben eine geistiggeschichtliche, über die Jahrhunderte bewahrht. Ibid., p. 18
53 In his study of civility and sociability in seventeenth and eighteenth France Daniel Gordon also shows how this shift in court society also affected the self-image of the courtiers. ‘Décency and hierarch by then became the supreme norms of courtliness’ (after the Fronde revolt of 1648-1553) … For courtliness now had reference to a hierarchy that was flat, that had no Christian or Platonic behind’. The ideal courtier was expected to defer to the scale of precedence within the court and not to appeal to transcendental standards.” Daniel Gordon, Citizens without sovereignty, Princeton University Press, Princeton (New Jersey), 1994, p. 119

44 In Germany Habermas has occupied a prominent position not only as a philosopher, but also as public intellectual. On the occasion of his eighteenth birthday the liberal weekly Die Zeit celebrated him as Germany’s ‘most influential intellectual’, in an issue titled ‘Der Vorwärtsverteidiger’, in issue no. 19, January/February 1962.51
45 Gopal Balakrishnan, ‘Overcoming Emancipaton’ (review of M. Beck Matušk, Jürgen Habermas: A Philosophical-Political Profile), New Left Review, no. 19, January/February 2003, p. 117/118
47 Habermas (1962, 1989), p. 37
49 The differences in tone seem nearly to reflect the differences between English and German intellectual cultures, setting the empiricist Wil- liams against the abstract thinker Habermas. This, however, would mean to ignore the fundamental difference in perspective resulting also from the discipline both represented. Williams’s back- ground was that of a scholar of English literature and he also wrote novels. Habermas education was essentially that of a philoso- pher. Interestingly Williams’s Culture and Society in its 1972 German translation became Gesellschaftwahrnehmungen als Begriffs- geschichte (Social theory as history of ideas, with a sub- title continuing ‘studies in the historical semantics of culture’). Frances Mulhern points out: ‘This is an impres- sive miniature essay in critical specification, a contribution in itself—and it may be that we owe it in part to the circum- stance that a literal translation had recently been pre-empted by another publication. Kultur und Gesellschaft was the title under which, in 1964, Herbert Marcuse reissued his writings from the 1930s, including a classic work of Frankfurt Critical Theory, On the Affirmative Character of the publicare meant to claim for the lord.51 This contrasts with the reference to the Hellenic model of the public sphere that acquired normative power in the 17th century, however, as the author notes, not on the base of the reality of the organisation of the commonwealth, but as ‘ideological template’ at the level of intellectual history.52 What exists is a type of ‘representative publicness’ (representative Öffentlichkeit); the lord not merely embodies the public; he (or she) is the public.

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and processions which accompanied the display of power in the middle ages and which continued to exist in the ritual at the Habsburg courts. Whereas in the earlier collective rituals an explicit contribution of the entire population was seen as usual and desirable, the absolutist display of power is specifically addressing an exclusive sphere, the court, and in turn reflected in the appearance of the park of the royal palace which, like the baroque palace itself permitted the enactment of a courtly life cordoned off from the cities and emerging civil society.

The function of the court as a world complete in itself is reflected in the architectural typologies developed for the palace garden and the court theatre. The latter could be seen as an appropriation and re-interpretation of the spatial types developed by humanist academies in Northern Italy in the fifteenth century; Palladio’s theatre for the Accademia degli Olimpi and the Teatro Farnese in Parma being obvious predecessors. For their representational apparatus the theatres of the Italian late Renaissance employed self-conscious references to a largely imagined Antiquity. This reference to antiquity, I would argue, proved to be one of the most productive impulses for the invention of a new spatial type, eventually developed into the horseshoe auditorium, in which the ideal image of the amphitheatre was squeezed into the available spaces of longitudinal halls as known from urban buildings for religious institutions or aristocratic palaces. In the court theatres of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the horseshoe type originally emulating the experience of an ideal outdoor space (this most visibly in Palladio’s theatre), came to represent the concept of the precisely marked, exclusive public of the court itself.

The palace garden with its direct borrowings from spatial types derived from the theatre could be seen to act as the outdoor equivalent of this arrangement. In fact, as Arie Graafland argues, ‘the entire garden has become part of a theatrical experience’, complete with vegetal amphitheatres and coulisses. The park is a stage for the representations of the organisation of the public as circumscribed by its exterior walls or fences, excluding not only the urban poor, but also wealthy bourgeois, merchants and manufacturers. The ballets staged in the park, with both king and queen appearing as main performers, confirm the status of each member of the court and ‘explicitly reveal the workings of power’. In the confined space of the palace and its garden, court and public are identical, and the physical spaces provide the stage for rituals designed to recognise the existing hierarchies.

55 Lionello Pappi, Andrea Palladio, (London: Phaidon) 1975, p. 16
57 ibid., p. 52
58 Richard Sennett illustrates this with the example of the ritual of greeting another person at court. This involved an elaborate monologue of pandering the other by referring to his social positions and history, mentioning the great achievements of the superior warrior and prince, alluding to moral virtues with inferiors. Richard Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977)
3.3 Spaces of enlightened debate of a bourgeois public

The account of the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth century of new institutions and urban venues for socialising is directly connected to the changes in the physical environment occurring in this period. Noting the influence of Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society*, Habermas provided the theoretical framework for a social history of the modern metropolis, which in turn was influential for studies of Richard Sennett and Donald Olsen focusing on the transformation of Paris and London between 1650 and 1906. His own account, too, is essentially a tale of these two cities, set against the realities of provincial Germany, with London providing the example of a gradually evolving pattern of inventing forms of public life whereas Paris illustrates the gradual emergence of the type of rational-critical debate as a prelude to political change around which the thesis of the book was developed.

In both these cases the city became established as a centre of an emerging civil society that was complementary to the court, both economically and in cultural-political terms, and nurtured an early public sphere in the world of letters. In England, the definitive shift of power from the court to the urban elites after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 coincided with the sudden appearance of the coffee houses as urban institutions. The phenomenal proliferation of this new phenomenon in the period around 1700 illustrates a phase of experimenting with new forms of socialising. Habermas presents both the coffee house and the salon, its Paris pendant, as centres of criticism – literary at first, then also political – in which a certain parity of the educated began to emerge between aristocratic society and bourgeois intellectuals engaging in a public discourse on literary novelties, business and political affairs as well as straightforward gossip.

Habermas notes that the nobility joining the upper bourgeois stratum using the coffee houses in London had retained the social functions that its French counterpart had lost in the aftermath of the Fronde and the subsequent forced concentration at the court of the Louis XIV. In contrast to the French nobility, the English aristocracy represented landed and moneyminded interests. Therefore the critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was necessarily extended to include economic and political disputes. The conversations in the publicly accessible coffee houses inevitably developed a specific character where what was said could have far-reaching consequences for the speaker and his audience. This connection of the urban venue with business and political interests may have been the reason for the male-dominated character of the coffee house. That the conversations in the coffee houses were at times regarded with suspicion by the authorities is reflected by the fact that they were occasionally suspended as ‘the great resort of idle and disaffected persons, ... tradesmen and others’.

The Paris salons were hosted by cosmopolitan women and formed a particular social enclave between aristocratic court society and the politically powerless yet economically active urban bourgeoisie. ‘While the bourgeoisie, which was more or less excluded from leadership in state and Church, gradually took over all key positions in the economy, and while the aristocracy compensated for its material inferiority with royal privileges and an ever more rigorous stress on hierarchy in social intercourse, in the salons the nobility and that part of the bourgeoisie which sought to become assimilated with the nobility met with the “intelligenzia” on equal footing’. Situated outside of the centre of power concentrated in the royal court, the salons developed into spaces for educated sociability and literary conversation of independent spirits. The status of the salon as an enclave may have contributed to the relative openness of this essentially exclusive type of institution, which unlike the coffee-room operated in private houses. Habermas gives the example of the “plebeian d’Alembert” who made his appearance in the fashionable salons of Paris and who apparently was not an exception. ‘In the salon the mind was no longer at the service of a patron; “opinion” emancipated itself from the bonds of economic dependency.’

The conversation in the salon was clearly differentiated both from the domestic sphere and from the sphere of business, law and politics, and treated the professional and political domains as irrelevant to cultivated pursuits. Hosts like Madame Scudéry would take pride in the distinctively apolitical but egalitarian flavour of polite conversation allowing her house to acquire the role as a venue for the publication of literary and other works.

Although Germany had no “town” comparable with Paris that could have replaced the court’s public sphere, similar institutions emerged in the form of the Tischgesellschaften (table societies), which were, however, even more removed from practical politics than the French salons. Generally dominated by middle-class academics the members of these clubs met with prestigious but politically un-influential nobles. ‘The decisive element was not so much the political equality of the members but their exclusiveness set against the political domain of absolutism as such; social equality was possible at first only as an equality outside the state.’

Despite the obvious differences between the Tischgesellschaften in provincial German towns, the semi-aristocratic salons of Paris and the modern metropolitan coffee houses of early Georgian London, these institutions had in common that they preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.

Essentially private and situated either within the confines of an aristocratic house or the commercial facility, the salons and table societies anticipated a form of social practice which only later became identified as ‘public’ and which allowed private individuals to engage with each other on the basis of an assumption of equality, even if this equality was not to have direct political consequence (or if these consequences were even explicitly excluded from the discourse).

‘Les hommes, private gentlemen, or Privatleute made up the public not just in the sense that power and prestige of official status were held in suspense; economic dependencies also in principle had no influence. Laws of the market were suspended, as were laws of the state. Not that this idea of the public was actually realised in earnest in the coffee

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59 Habermas (1962), p. 17
60 All coffee houses were closed in 1675. Christopher Hill, *The century of Revolution, London 2002 (1981)*, p. 247
62 ibid., p. 49
64 ‘Nicht sowohl die politische Gleichheit der Mitglieder als vielmehr ihre Exklusivität gegenüber dem politischen Bereich des Absolutismus überhaupt ist das Entscheidende: die soziale Gleichheit war zunächst nur als eine Gleichheit ausserhalb des Staates möglich’, Habermas (1962), p.50
houses, the salons and the Tischgesellschaften; but as an idea it had become institutionalised and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realised, it was at least consequential.66

At the same time these institutions allowed their users to participate in an exchange of information and as such functioned as a market place for ideas as well as cultural products. Philosophical and literary works and works of art, even demonstrations of popular science, were produced for this market and distributed through it. Similarly, the same process that allowed cultural manifestations to be treated as commodities also meant that the public itself was fundamentally unlimited. ’However exclusive the public might have been, it could ever close itself off completely and develop into a clique, since it had already been understood as being part of a larger public of all the private people who could access the discussion via a market as readers, listeners and viewers, insofar as they were educated and propertied.66’ Or, as one of the founders of the Hamburg Patriotische Gesellschaft exclaimed in 1724: ’I am a human being, … who sees the whole world as his fatherland, as one city, and himself as a family member or fellow citizen of all other human beings.’67

**Houses for an enlightened public**

The physical construction of the spaces of the newly emerging public sphere was largely a matter of improvisation and the intuitive decisions of their owners. The scarcity of evidence seems to be directly related to the anonymity of the designers of many of the early coffee houses. The academies and table societies, too, largely gathered in existing private spaces. There is however a few surviving examples of buildings constructed for the associations of academics and merchants, which formed a focus for the cultural emancipation of the upper echelons of the urban bourgeoisie.

65 ’Les hommes, private gentle- men, die Privatleute, das Publikum nicht nur in dem Sinne, daß Macht und Ansehen der öffentlichen Ämter außer Kraft gesetzt sind; auch wirtschaftliche Abhängigkeiten dürfen im Sinne, daß Macht und Einfluß der Privatleute, die als Gesetze des Marktes sind, ebenso suspendiert wie die Abhängigkeiten vom Markt der Konkurrenz für den Individualismus, für den Rechtsstaat, für die Demokratie, für die Freiheit der Personen und der Meinungen, für die Entwicklung der Gesellschaft.’

66 ’So exklusiv jeweils ein Pub- likum sein mochte, es konnte sich niemals ganz abriegeln, der Ort nicht in vollständiger Isolation verstreichen, denn stets schon verständig und befand es sich inmitten eines größeren Publikums all der Privatleute, die als Leser, Höerer und Zuschauer, Besucher und Bildung voraus- gesetzt, über den Markt der Diskussionsgegenstände sich bemächtigen konnten.’, ibid., P. 53.


70 Remieg Aerts/ Piet de Rooy, Gezindheid van Amsterdam 1813-1900 – Hoofdstad in aanzien, (Amsterdam: SUN, 2006), p. 171.


The identification of the London coffee house of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century as the origin of the public sphere in the modern sense is probably the one aspect of Habermas’s which is most often highlighted, and has generated an extensive discourse of its own.73 The reality of forms of sociability in specifically designated spaces provides the breeding ground for the literary and political debates in which the ideas of eighteenth century thinkers on public opinion
as a place of critical reasoning were anticipated. Habermas refers to the development of the coffee house into a place associated with the emergence of newspapers and critical journals like the Tatler and the Spectator, which more or less originated there. In contrast to the academies of the Renaissance which had introduced Humanist thought to the aristocratic courts of the 15th and 16th centuries, the coffee houses and the journals emerging in Post-Restoration London were essentially urban phenomena operating independently from court and state authorities. Here the public sphere emerges as explicitly distinct from the sphere of public authority. The coffee-house operates both alongside and in opposition to civic state authority, and is crucially located in privately owned, generally commercially-run urban spaces, thus establishing the city as a market of cultural products. In this public sphere the urban middle classes appear as ‘the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public’.74

Accounts of life in late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century London give us a picture of the remarkably vivid and rich everyday culture in the English capital after a period of civil war and political turmoil. The re-establishment of the monarchy and the subsequent relatively peaceful transition to the post-1688 constitutional arrangements created the conditions not only for the emergence of England as Europe’s major commercial power, but also for the evolution of a type of urban life the variety and openness of which was unparalleled in contemporary Europe. The effects of political stability and economic dynamic change were reflected not only in the emergence of the coffee houses that provided a physical backdrop for many of the commercial activities of the time, but also in broader changes in London’s cultural life. At the end of the civil war England’s population was largely illiterate and had been used to a regime of public censorship which allowed very limited space for speculations of a philosophical and religious nature. Against this background the speed with which an infinitely more open culture of intellectual exchange established itself at the end of the seventeenth century is striking. These limitations to publications may have disappeared gradually, with the ending of censorship and the lifting of the Stationer’s monopoly of printing in 1695, but the time span of these fundamental changes which allowed the emergence of an open public debate, almost in a modern, sense, was remarkably short.75 Within fewer than two generations the population of the country and its capital turned itself from a relatively uneducated people with superstitious tendencies to a socially and economically ambitious society enjoying a range of cultural opportunities unprecedented in local history and without parallels elsewhere in Europe.

Evidence for this change can be found in the large number of journals and magazines founded in the first decades of the eighteenth century. They included Defoe’s Review, Tutchin’s Observer and Swift’s Examiner which occupied different positions in the ongoing rivalry between Whigs and Tories; positions which left a mark even on the micro-geography of the city since the various parties became to be associated with the localities, the particular coffee-houses and clubs, where their main protagonists gathered. The proliferation of books and journals in the early years of the eighteenth century is one aspect of the intimate intermingling of what may be called a public lifestyle, a daily routine enacted in the commercial public spaces of the city, and the emergence of a concept of public opinion. The formidable variety in the forms of published opinion and the public way in which a culture of public debate emerged in London – at this time still a relatively small city – provides ample evidence for Habermas’ studies of the formation of a bourgeois public sphere. By contrast, the essentially urban, or perhaps urbanic, quality of this concept of the public and its direct associations with forms of sociability attract less attention in his account.

If one were to draw a map of the public life in London at the turn of the seventeenth century, two phenomena would become visible. On the one hand we could to see the patterns of concentration of literary and journalistic activities in particular areas of the city. The most well known example for this type of concentration was that of Grub Street, which started out as an actual location of pubs and printers and acquired the status of an image representing journalism in its earliest form.76 The other aspect of the patterns of public life was its interior character. London’s public opinion was emphatically not located in the street. It was found in the smoky, smelly rooms of public houses and the socially more exclusive clubs that started to emerge in the 1730s. It was these private venues that acted as both a stage and an auditorium for the literary and political debates of the day. The written word, in the form of open letters or periodical essays, was a new form for the dialogue bringing, as Addison stated, ‘philosophy down from the heavens to make it dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at ’Tee’-Tables and in Coffee-Houses’.77 Indeed it was in the coffeehouse that the journals were read and made an immediate appearance in the conversation. Just how much the published word was related to the spaces from which they had emerged may be illustrated by an anecdote mentioned by Habermas. When the Spectator was first published on 3 March 1711 the editors Addison and Steele had a letterbox in the form of a lion’s head installed on the west side of Burton’s Coffee House into whose jaws readers were invited to insert their reactions to the contributors in the new journal.

At the same time the journals and the largely increased number of publications allowed people who had no access to the coffee houses in the capital to engage with popularised philosophical ideas and literary criticism. The journal reached an extended reading public that included the culturally aspiring middle classes in the country. In doing so, the writers sought to end ‘the long divorce of wit from virtue’ and, to quote the historian Christopher Hill, intended ‘to civilise the nonconformist bourgeoisie, to pietise the backwoods gentry – and their wives and daughters’.78 Ideas were meant to be spread, and to that end Addison and Steele looked forward to the day ‘when Knowledge, instead of being bound up in Books, and kept in Libraries and retirement, is thus exposed upon every Table.’79

The publications thus contributed to the formation of a public that...
was no longer confined to the spaces in which the earlier forms of public debate had originated, nor to the limited circle of men who had the opportunity of using them. Instead, this public came to see itself as in principle inclusive and extending to everybody who had access to the publications, which in turn became a commodity in a market of cultural products. The emergence of printed literary criticism, philosophical thought and novels led to a partial re-location of the public discourse into the intimate territory of the family. The tables upon which knowledge was exposed could be found in the private homes of the gentry and middle classes in the country, or in the circulating libraries, of which the first was started in 1740 and which were to become fashionable in health resorts such as Bath, Tunbridge Wells or Buxton.80

As the middle classes across the whole of England found they had both leisure and were inclined to read, this hugely enlarged public consumed new types of criticism and, above all, fiction. The widening of the audience addressed as readers was reflected in the emergence of a new and immediately successful type of writing: the novel. This new genre marked a significantly different conception of the community of readers: its public, as well as, increasingly, its producers, were no longer hommes de lettres – in fact no hommes at all – but came from a wide social range and both sexes. The demand for the novel may also be taken as one of the earliest signs for the effect of a developing cultural industry on artistic production. The same could, certainly to some degree, be said about the musical and theatre life in the capital and across Britain which displayed a large variety of new genres of performance art developed and produced by theatre directors and impresarios. From the 1670s there was a large enough public in London for musical performances to be organised along commercial lines.81 In any case, the literary as well as the musical production established the city as a market of cultural products. The consumption of cultural products permeating down through the social strata contributed to the self-image of enlightened individualism, which supported the emergence of England’s free market economy. Habermas’s discussion of the extension of the bourgeois reading public shows significant overlaps with Raymond Williams’s study of the same phenomenon in The Long Revolution. Yet there is also a significant difference. In his description Habermas shows a distinct tendency to prioritise those aspects of the cultural production, which fit into the idea of an English enlightenment. Williams, by contrast, is much more aware of the diversity of the English reading public: ‘There is not only Steele’s Tatler, but Mrs de la Riviere Manley’s Female Tatler … The fact is that when a culture expands it does so at all its levels of interest and seriousness, and often with some of these levels exploited rather than served.’82

In Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit Habermas depicts eighteenth century England as a laboratory for an emerging market of cultural products addressing an enlarged middle class public. The political changes of the previous century had established a liberalised regime that allowed the cultural and economic transformations that occurred in the course of the 18th century to take shape without major social disturbances. It could also be argued that this state of affairs prevented a
more radical examination of the political status quo that was to develop in France towards the second half of the century. This discrepancy is reflected in Habermas’s discussion, which describes social and cultural phenomena in Britain in detail, while remaining rather more sketchy on contemporary developments on the continent. Britain, the country the most advanced capitalist economy, is presented as an exemplar of the emergence of the bourgeois Offentlichkeit as an everyday phenomenon, whereas France (and, much later, Germany) appear merely under the heading ‘continental variants’. At the same time, as Keith Michael Barker has pointed out, this presents a problem of linking the evidence of the emergence of the practice of a public sphere in one context (Britain) with the theoretical examinations of publicity and public opinion in another (France and Germany). This approach leaves no alternative but to combine the sociological and historical account of the practice of a developed public sphere in the metropolitan environment of London with philosophical investigations formulated in places, such as pre-revolutionary Paris or Königsberg, where such a public sphere was still only a theoretical possibility.

Habermas shows how the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere found its conceptual political framework in English constitutional reality and Continental European thought. In his view, the bourgeois public sphere institutionalised a practice of rational-critical discourse on political matters which required a terminology by which the processes of decision-making could be explained and legitimised. In this context the development of the notion of the public opinion (or in English eighteenth century usage the ‘public spirit’) is significant. Habermas traces the use of the expression through the second half of the century and shows in detail how the concept of the ‘will of the people’ entered the political discourse via its expression in public opinion.

In Germany with its larger number of small states ruled by absolute monarchs the constitutional reality was not reflected in the use of the term public opinion. Yet, it was here that the idea of the bourgeois sphere first acquired its theoretically developed form with Immanuel Kant’s formulation of the Offentlichkeitsprinzip, long before the term ‘public opinion’ was assumed into the language as a standard phrase. In his introduction to the essay ‘What is enlightenment?’ Kant defines the relation between the development of the critical independent, minidige, individual and the enlightenment mediated through public debate. ‘Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without directions from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage ….’ Enlightenment can only exist if individuals have liberated themselves from tutelage, be it self-incurred or imposed. Only those who have learned to think for themselves can engage in the critical debate where rational thought originates.

‘Tutelage is man’s inability to make use of his understanding without directions from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage ….’


83 That the English example figures prominently in Habermas’s account of the emergence of a public sphere is defensible since it was in England that the most advanced forms of early capitalist developments coincided with a developed public debate and a relatively open market of cultural products. As Keith Michael Barker has argued, Habermas’s discussion of eighteenth century developments in, for example, France (and Germany) remains rather sketchy and produced the problem ‘that the bourgeoisie and the social and political institutions sustaining the new public sphere are presented as more fully developed in England, while the theories of publicity and public opinion providing the rationale for the bourgeois public sphere (as a defence of civil society against the absolute state) are seen to emerge most explicitly in France (with the physiocrats) and Germany (with Kant).’ Keith Michael Barker, ‘Defining the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century France: Variations on a Theme by Habermas’, in: C. Calhoun, Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992, p. 109

Kant’s ‘world’, in other words, is nothing else but the community of the critically debating reading public that he saw developing within the educated bourgeoisie of the late eighteenth century. It is in principle an inclusive and universal community, a république des lettres. However, this proposition of a public constituted of rationally acting and literate citizens relied on the presumption of the economic independence of the participants in the rational debate. Those who were dependent on others or who relied on selling their labour, lacked the independence that was the precondition for participation in the critical discourse.

Kant’s idea of the universal and inclusive nature of the public relied on the assumption that the citizen was at the same time a (male) property-owning individual, even if this property consisted of knowledge or skill rather than material commodities. This conflation of self-interested, but economically independent bourgeois, intellectually autonomous homme and citizen allowed him to be confident about the possibility of rational debate transforming the totality of private interests into progress for the commonwealth on the way.

The equation of the property-owning individual with the citizen engaging in the debate about the organisation of civil society necessarily has implications for the nature of the public. While the bourgeoisie public understands itself as fundamentally inclusive, access was in reality limited to those who met the criteria of education and economic autonomy. This contradiction between universal claim and the rather more exclusive reality, according to Habermas, could not be resolved within the basic premise that the public sphere was detached from authority and therefore from the influence sphere of the state. Describing the political developments in Britain, France and Germany he shows that the exclusion of the large majority of the population, those without property, resulted in a gradual extension of the public – a process reflected in the gradual extension of suffrage – and the simultaneous erosion of the public sphere as a domain separate from the state.

The erosion of the public sphere

In 1881 an imperial message from the German emperor Wilhelm I announced a series of new laws, which introduced comprehensive schemes for the material protection of industrial workers across the country. The Versicherungsgesetze (insurance laws) absorbed into legislation between 1883 and 1891 constitute the first large-scale initiative in a major industrialised European country to establish a system of social security for the working masses, ranging from the introduction of compulsory health insurance in 1883, insurance against invalidity in 1884; and the pension insurance introduced between 1889 and 1891 that forms the basis of the German pension system to this day. The impulse for these measures did not initially stem from a desire to achieve a more equal social development in the emerging industrial society of the Reich. Rather Otto von Bismarck, Germany’s first Kanzler after the unification of 1871 and a representative of the conservative Prussian aristocracy, sought to neutralise the attraction of socialist worker’s organisations. The social insurance laws matched the Sozialistengesetze, the banning of socialist organisations and worker’s associations in 1878. Designed as laws to pacify the working population and to stop the increasing support for the outlawed social democratic party, the Versicherungsgesetze had been designed in close collaboration with the Centralverband der Deutschen Industriellen, the central organisation of German industrialists.

Measures like Bismarck’s insurance laws altered the relation between state and society in a fundamental way. The policies protecting the citizen from economic hardship implied a significantly increased influence of the nation state in areas previously identified as the domain of private people gathering as a public. In this gradual blurring of the boundary between the spheres of influence of state authority and of civil society, Habermas identifies the initial signs for the structural transformation of the public sphere that has continued into the twentieth century. As the state accepted an active role in warranting the welfare of larger sectors of the population, and as an increasing number of its citizens came to rely on collective care, an increasing part of daily life came to be affected by regulations and initiatives concerning housing, education and health. At the same time the concentration of economic decisions undermined the basic assumptions of the liberal model of economically independent people engaging in public debate, as becomes apparent in the quasi-political character of larger private economic corporations. Habermas writes that the ‘… process of the extension of public authority over areas of the private realm was linked to the substitution of state authority by societal powers. Only this dialectic of a progressive ‘societalisation’ (Vergesellschaftlichung) of the state occurring simultaneously with an increasing ‘state-fication’ (Verstaatlichung) of society destroyed the basis of the bourgeois public sphere – the separation of state and society.’

The concept of a public constituted of autonomous, free citizens who engaged with matters of common concern on the basis of equality and
disinterest had to fail against the background of increasing differences of economic power, even among those property-owning middle classes where it had emerged. The fact that only a few influential members of the public had direct control of the new mass media of the Victorian period or in the German Reich of 1871 also had a defining effect on the nature of the public sphere. The idea that each member of the public had the right or, as Kant had demanded, the duty to participate in the public debate, became an abstraction. The liberal model (in truth one of an economy based on petty commodity exchange) had envisaged only horizontal exchange relationships among individual commodity owners. As economic units grew and power became concentrated in fewer hands, new dependencies emerged and the state was increasingly forced to intervene in order to maintain social balance and political stability. Universal suffrage and the political organisation of industrial workers resulted in an increased interventionist impulse in the attempt to reconcile the social antagonisms created by a developed capitalist economy.

These changes had a critical effect also on the role of the family. The bourgeois family of the eighteenth century had been closely associated with economic activities. In the lower ranks of the bourgeoisie family members, including women and children, were often directly or indirectly involved in the economic activities sustaining the family, and in the absence of collective systems of care, relied on its economic well-being. When more and more of these essential economic functions were taken over by state or collective institutions the family lost its double role as economic unit and a social institution. In the welfare state, which was to evolve out of the interventionist nation state of the late nineteenth century, Habermas writes, ‘family members are now to a larger extent socialised by authorities outside the family, directly by society.’ The occupational activities of the breadwinner were now located firmly outside the domain of the family and became regarded as more or less public, whereas the intimate life lost all connection with the productive sphere and hence became completely interiorised and privatised.

The tendency towards a hugely increased role of the state in redistributing money and services implied a fundamental change of the nature of the public debate. Represented by pressure groups such as trade unions, associations of industrialists and political parties, the citizen was no longer conceived as an economically independent participant in a public debate, but became a recipient of financial support or benefits of protective regulations. The public debate informing the process of legislation acquired the function of an arena in which representatives of various social and economic groups fought for the interests of their constituencies. The public sphere, as it had emerged in its specific form in the early period of the Industrial Revolution and as it had been theorised by Kant, eroded in the area between the political process of negotiating economic interests and what Habermas identifies as ‘the pseudo-public or pseudo-private world of the consumption of culture.’

Conversely, the privatisation of family life holds another key for the gradual development of a concept of leisure that became completely dissociated from economic necessity and the social or political debates reflecting economic processes. This concept of leisure tends also to absorb the cultural domain and affects the status of products of culture as commodities to be consumed, detached as they are from a political debate dominated by economic vested interests. Habermas identifies four main problems associated with the transformation of leisure and culture that he seems to regard as a by-product of the political and economic development in the first half of the twentieth century. Firstly, the discussion itself has assumed the form of an item of consumption. Habermas does not illustrate this analysis with examples, but from a text he wrote in 1995 it becomes clear that he probably had the presentation of public debates on modern mass media in mind. Secondly, he states that the conversation is subjected to increasing control and is administered via the screens and podia from which it is presented to a mass audience. Thirdly, arguments are refashioned to reach large groups of readers or viewers. To conclude, the independence of judgement concerning the quality of the cultural product is in danger of being eroded by the processes of the market, even if the market of cultural products retains a certain resistance to complete commercialisation.

In Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit Habermas is deeply pessimistic about the effects of these popularising tendencies. Referring to the emergence of the mass newspapers and popular illustrated magazines since the mid nineteenth century, he writes: ‘As culture acquired the status of commodity, both in form and content, it was emptied of elements the appreciation of which demanded a certain amount of training – and where the "accomplished" appropriation in turn intensified the ability to appreciate. … Involvement with culture sharpens, whereas consuming mass culture leaves no trace; it produces a kind of experience that is not cumulative, but regressive. The popularisation of the public debates in general and of cultural debates in particular has not resulted in increasing the participation of previously excluded groups of the population, but in the dissolution of the debate itself in favour of a depoliticised cultural production addressing individual consumers rather than a reasoning public.

The consumers of mass media and culture are deprived of the oppor-
tunity to develop resistance to manipulation through advertising and public relations activities. As Habermas admitted later, this analysis was informed by the emergence of new publicity methods in the German election campaigns of the late 1950s and early 1960s, which he criticises as the background of the experience of the propaganda machine of the National Socialists which he claims to have been particularly shocking. In any case the author saw these new developments as evidence of the commercialisation of culture. In its most extreme consequence, the commercialisation of culture, and with it the rational critical debate that had characterised the public sphere when it
emerged, must render this debate harmless and insignificant and would mean the demise of the public sphere as a place of discourse.

The public sphere as normative model and the realities of consumer culture – reactions to Habermas

The cultural pessimism informing Habermas’ thesis of an erosion of the public sphere is the most contentious aspect of Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Habermas intends to show how the existence of a public sphere operating outside and in opposition to a sphere of state authority facilitates the emergence of civil society based on open communication and rational critical debate. By constructing a lineage from the realities of an emerging liberal cultural practice in eighteenth century England to the theorisation of civil society on the continent towards the second half of that century he situates the abstract concept of a public sphere in actual social reality. This interpretation, compelling as it was against the background of the complete collapse of civil society in Germany that is tangible throughout the book, also accounts for a restricted view of exactly these realities. His diagnosis of a decay of the public sphere is based on a prejudiced, or at least partial registering of the forms of culture and communication which developed in eighteenth century Europe and by idealising them into a type of cultural discourse which can usefully be linked to enlightened thought. This interpretation, however, implies ignoring much of the extremely rich and complex realities that characterised this culture, particularly where it emerged as gradually as it did in England after 1688, a process Raymond Williams had described in The Long Revolution.

Habermas defines the public sphere as the realm of a critical reasoning discourse, which was facilitated by the emergence of new social formations. Harvey Chisick regards this analysis of the public sphere as the result of the emergence of a capitalist economy in the modern sense as the most influential contribution of Habermas’ argument.85 The abstract level, however, at which Habermas addresses the very concrete changes in urban and private life and relates them to the notion of the public sphere and public opinion has also a limiting effect on the argument. Chisick writes: ‘As a normative model it (the notion of public opinion) works well enough. But once introduced to the everyday world of Machiavellian or Hobbesian realities of conflicting interests, personal jealousies and unending manipulation and violence, the explanatory power of this model is weakened.’86 Habermas’s reliance on secondary sources is seen to privilege a certain type of discourse, namely that between educated writers and intellectuals. It is the question in how far the author is to blame, since the attention of social historians and sociologists for the forms of cultural production such as popular newspapers and penny novels was only emerging in the late 1950s.

In his 1992 Further Reflections on the Public Sphere, Jürgen Habermas acknowledges this problem and refers to ‘the thinness of the literature available at the time’.87 The knowledge about what the literate but not intellectual population thought and wrote is infinitely more extensive after three decades of research in this field. Still one may ask with Chisick ‘whether the public sphere of the eighteenth century was quite so comprehensive and consistent as Habermas, and even more the neo-revisionists seem to have believed’.88 Conversely, it is only by ignoring the commercial nature of much of cultural production in, for example, eighteenth century London, that the diagnosis of an erosion of the public sphere and its connection to very specific forms of bourgeois culture in the nineteenth century can be constructed. Raymond Williams, for example, noted not only the existence of a Female Tatler alongside the male one quoted by Habermas but also the continuous co-existence of different forms of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural expression between from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century: ‘The difference had always been there; the ‘prognosticating Almanac’ had sold ten times more widely than [Milton’s] Paradise Lost, just as the News of the World now sold ten times more widely than [George Eliot’s] Adam Bede.’89

The relevance of this argument for the debate on the role of culture in the twentieth century becomes evident when one sets the critique of Habermas’ concept of the public sphere and public opinion against the questioning of established bourgeois culture in the post-war period, and increasingly since the 1960s. First, one could make the point that the genealogy of the types of spaces which formed the background of bourgeois culture suggests that forms of public reasoning (and culture) went through a period of fundamental transformation in eighteenth century London or Paris, but that these transformations often continued earlier medieval and Renaissance traditions. Examples can be found in municipal theatres, learned institutions, universities and meeting rooms, as they evolved from churches or institutions of charity, particularly in North Western Europe.90

Secondly, the general nature of Habermas’ argument entails an emphasis on the philosophical-political discourse of the eighteenth century and relies heavily on the argument about the value of public opinion as the place of rational debate formulated by Immanuel Kant. In doing so Habermas finds evidence for the erosion of this rational debate in the media addressing the enlarged public as these emerged in the course of the nineteenth century: the yellow press and the tabloid newspapers. These productions of popular journalism catering for the less educated may have entered a new phase as new technologies allowed greater circulation, as a phenomenon they were hardly new. As Chisick puts it: ‘In their focus on the vivifying power of the word and the structuring functions of ideology, neo-revisionist historians (following Habermas) have tended to emphasise symbolic representation and to privilege the roles of intellectuals, artists and political elites to the virtual exclusion of the lower classes’.91 Given the bias towards a limited part of the political and cultural discourse in the period that he identifies as formative, Habermas cannot but regard the effusions of popular culture in the media in the last one-and-a-half centuries as deformations of the original form of the public sphere. One may not only have doubts if this interpretation is an apt description of the historical development of the public sphere in the eighteenth century. The other and possibly more

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86 Chisick (2002), p. 76

87 Habermas (1992), p. 457

88 Chisick (2002), p. 77

89 Williams (1961/65), p. 189

90 These continuities can be found, for example, in the case of the public institutions in the Netherlands or the Northern German city states.

91 Chisick, p. 76
difficult problem is that having set such ‘high’ standards for what he accepts as forms of public sphere and public opinion, i.e. as a place of rational debate, Habermas cannot avoid being critical and disappointed about the banal nature of mass culture publications.

In this cultural pessimism Habermas also reveals himself as a student of Adorno and Horkheimer. His analysis of the effect of the consumerist tendencies in twentieth century mass culture echoes the pessimistic view that the Frankfurters had formulated in the 1940s. Adorno, particularly, in his chapter on the cultural industries in which he contributed to the *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, had established the link between phenomena of cultural decay and the commercialisation of culture which he had experienced in the American exile.

In his introductory essay to *Habermas and the Public Sphere* Craig Calhoun has speculated that Horkheimer and Adorno regarded *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* as both insufficiently critical of the illusions and dangerous tendencies of an Enlightenment conception of democratic public life and too naïve in its politically motivated appeal for an attempt to go beyond liberal constitutional protections in pursuit of true democracy.102 To these criticisms others were soon added when in the late 1960s younger writers operating within the student movement in the late 1960s attacked the work for its exclusive focus on the public sphere as a bourgeois phenomenon, its privileging of high culture developments over those in everyday life and for exaggerating the emancipatory potential of an idealised public sphere. Although the appearance of *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* had an electrifying effect on the emerging student movement in the early 1960s and the book briefly acquired the status of a key reference for the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS), the main organisation of non-parliamentary opposition after its expulsion from the ranks of the SPD, Habermas explicitly distanced himself from the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* and denounced an appeal by Rudi Dutschke for campus action as ‘left fascism’.

The criticism that Habermas had privileged those forms of communication and speech developed by limited circles of the educated American translation which, as Gopal Balakrishnan suggested, may have been held back by the author himself and appeared only in 1989.105 Oscar Negt/ Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972). 106 Negt/ Kluge (1972), p. 17 107 Ibid., p. 119/20 108 The use of the singular form – working class rather than working classes – is my translation of ‘die Arbeiter’ by Negt and Kluge. This use is in itself a point of argument as E. p. Thompson notes in the preface to *The Making of the English Working Class*, origi- nal version (London: Victor Gollancz) (1966) (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1968, p. 9. ‘Working classes’, Thompson writes, ‘is a descriptive term, which evades as much as it explains.’ The use of the singular denotes class as a historical, non-‘unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events’. I would argue that it is in this sense that Negt and Kluge use the term ‘die Arbeiter’, hence the translation. 109 Negt/ Kluge (1972), p. 51 110 Ibid., p. 26 111 Ibid., p. 26 112 As the subtitle with its refer- ence to ‘proletarian public spheres’ illustrates, Negt and Kluge thought of the informal and institutionalised forms of working class culture: football matches, strike actions, working men’s clubs etc.

bourgeoisie was also clearly expressed in the 1968 publication *Die Linke antwortet Jürgen Habermas* by Oscar Negt and provides the background for the extensive study *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* published by Negt and Alexander Kluge in 1972.106 This book, written while the critique of bourgeois ideology and its institutions reached its culmination, Habermas’s definition of the public sphere is extended and explicitly includes the ‘analysis of the organisational forms’ as found in the ‘prole- tarian public sphere’. Negt and Kluge’s main point of attack is that the concept of the bourgeois public sphere appears as an undifferentiated, ‘invariant’ phenomenon, which disguises the particular socio-economic circumstances of its emergence and its institutions, or ‘the structure of the production of society’ as they call it.108 Habermas’s project of, as it were, rescuing the basic principles of a rational discourse by means of the reference to an ideal-typical in the early modern period, Negt and Kluge argue, will not be successful: ‘The eroding forms of the bourgeois public sphere can not be saved or interpreted by emphatically referring to a notion of public sphere of the emerging bourgeoisie.’ Instead, they state, ‘the history of the ideal of the public sphere and its erosion have to be analysed for their identical mechanisms.’107 In other words (and perhaps to summarise), the specific experiences of the working class108 of economic dependency and exploitation cannot be adequately expressed within the forms of representation in a public sphere which, with Kant, is defined as a sphere of disinterested discourse. With reference to Kant (and by implication Habermas), Negt and Kluge write: ‘The inner principle of effect of these principles, including those of the public sphere, is based on the premise that the main struggle has to be directed at all particularities. All that is opposed to the universalising tenden- cies of the production of commodities has to be sacrificed to the general cause and the principle.’ This, effectively, means that ‘Kant excludes all those layers of the population from politics and the public sphere, who can not participate in bourgeois politics, because they cannot afford to be part of it.’109

Consequently, the interests of the working class appears as ‘merely a gigantic, accumulated “private interest”, and not as a collective form of producing qualitatively new forms of a public sphere and public consciousness’.110 The predominant form, in which representatives of the working class can enter the existing public sphere through assimilation and, Negt and Kluge argue, by abandoning an essentially oppositional stance: ‘By using the mechanisms of the public sphere for their cause, they (the representatives of the working class) objectively turn themselves into traitors of the causes they set out to represent’.111 Against Habermas’s concept of an apparently unified, but in reality exclusive public sphere, Negt and Kluge propose a range of spheres existing simulta- neously and formed by different constituencies, and often operating in contexts that are not usually recognised as legitimately public.112

Many of the limitations that have been criticised in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* may be explained by the particular context of post-war Germany and a preoccupation with identifying the constitutive characteristics of civil society. In his *Further Reflections* the author shows
himself to be aware of the influence of this context. As Habermas acknowledges, the discussion of the erosive effect of modern mass media on the public sphere as an arena for rational debate, for example, was based as much on speculation as it was on concrete experience. In the early 1960s television had only just made an appearance in the Federal Republic and the effect of televised debates was more of an unknown territory. At the same time early attempts were made to introduce transatlantic forms of campaigning involving public relations techniques based on opinion polls and sociology of behaviour which seemed to support the pessimistic view of Horkheimer and Adorno that the development of the cultural industries in a developed capitalist society would eventually eliminate any significant form of resistance. Finally, the emphasis of the destructive effect of the de-politicised and banalising tendencies in popular mass media as well as the ‘re-feudalisation’ of the public sphere for a rational-critical debate implies a lack of faith in the capacity of individuals to maintain positions of intellectual independence in a complex mass culture.

Habermas explains this pessimistic view by referring to the ‘depressing results’ of the empirical investigation of political attitudes among students to which he had contributed and which were published as Student und Politik while he was working on Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. In retrospect, he writes in 1992, his analysis may have been ‘an underestimation of the positive influence of formal schooling, …, on cultural mobilization and the promotion of critical attitudes.’ He also suggests that the effect of the ‘educational revolution’ brought about by a significantly increased access to higher education beginning in the late 1960s could not have been predicted when Strukturwandel was written. In view of these profound cultural and social changes, Habermas assessment of the capacity for retaining some of the critical independence that had characterised the public debate in its early bourgeois form was significantly more optimistic than it had been in the late 1950s and early 60s. He writes: ‘… my diagnosis of a unilinear development from a politically active public to one withdrawn into bad privacy, from a “culture-debating to a culture consuming public”, is too simplistic. At the time, I was too pessimistic about the resisting power of and above all the critical potential of a pluralistic, internally much differentiated mass public, whose cultural usages have begun to shake off the constraints of class. In conjunction with the ambivalent relaxation of the distinction between high and low culture, and the no less ambiguous “new intimacy between culture and politics”, which is more complex than a mere assimilation of information to entertainment, the standards of evaluation themselves have also changed.’

Habermas’ judgement of the effect of the educational reforms of the late 1960s and the 1970s is supported by Stuart Hall’s study of Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, in the sense that a distinction between formalised processes of decision-making and an autonomous, independent public discourse is to be re-established. While he seems aware of the problems and complexities that are implied in such a claim for a open democracy operating both inside and outside formalised institutions, Habermas’ reassessment of the argument made in Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit is mildly optimistic: ‘Thus if today I made another attempt to analyse the structural transformation of the public sphere, I am not sure what
its outcome would be for a theory of democracy – maybe one that could
give cause for a less pessimistic assessment and for an outlook going
beyond the formulation of merely defiant postulates." On the other
hand, as Jim McGuigan points out, the overwhelming ‘celebrity’ cult,
which one could regard as a corollary of the erosion of the exclusive
character of the public sphere and the république des lettres of the eight-
eenth century, also reveals the paradox of egalitarianism, both in politics
and the cultural field.

Despite these shortcomings (many of which have been acknowl-
edged by Habermas himself) the discussion of the public sphere and
its emergence in the eighteenth century retains its significance against
the background of the debate on the role and social function of culture,
which took place in post war Europe. Cultural policies were explicit-
ly aimed at providing the conditions for participating in cultural and
political debates for an enlarged public. They are part of a larger set of
interventionist policies by which post-war European states interfered
directly with the private and the public sphere and which included
large-scale programmes for housing and education. The argument is
also related to the discussion of the diffusion of culture as such in that
it addresses the effect of the enlargement of the audience (as a specific
form of the public) on the character of cultural production as such.

Habermas’ critique is clearly derived from an interpretation of those
sectors of cultural production using the written word as a means to
conduct a critical reasoning debate. It would be a subject for discussion
as to how far this argument can also be applied when discussing the
effect of greater popular access in other fields such as the performing
and visual arts, and the buildings which were erected to facilitate these
activities. As the discussion of the two cultural centres in London and
Stockholm will show, these buildings were surrounded by extensive
debates about the possibility and nature of interaction between audience
and user, which were related to a larger discourse on political and
cultural participation as a means to give shape to a ‘democratic’ society.
The question then is, in how far these debates were connected to or
influenced the actual building initiatives and what if any effect they had
on the institutional concepts and architectural design.

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119 ibid., p. 457
120 Jim McGuigan, ‘Die kulturelle Öffentlichkeit, Gerald
Raunig/ Ulf Wuggenig,
Publicum – Theorien der
Öffentlichkeit, (Vienna: Turia
and Kant) 2005, p. 149
London, South Bank, Royal Festival Hall, bird’s eye view (1950) and north elevation (1951)
A modern acropolis for the welfare state

London’s South Bank

Royal Festival Hall (1951)
A modern acropolis for the welfare state

London’s South Bank

Royal Festival Hall, foyer and auditorium (1951)
Chapter 4

London’s South Bank
A modern acropolis for the welfare state
The view of the monuments along the Thames affords one of the more spectacular panoramas of London. There is the Palace of Westminster, from which an Empire was once ruled and administered, and large commercial metropolitan buildings like the Savoy Hotel or the Unilever building. Further downstream are the corporate buildings of the City’s financial institutions, dwarfing the dome of St Paul’s Cathedral and, looming from the background as remote representatives of corporate culture, the towers of Canary Wharf. The northern bank of the river, in short, presents the history of London and its growth into a modern metropolis, embodied in a string of architectural incidents visible against the background of the anonymous building mass of the city.

Opposite, on the southern bank, the image of the continuous string is more fragmented. Social and ‘luxury’ housing, remnants of industrial buildings, a community garden, a mediaeval cathedral (heavily interfered with in the nineteenth century), a replica of a sixteenth century theatre, a giant wheel and the odd freestanding public house stranded atop the retaining wall; all of these line the river as singular events. The mixture of buildings facing the Thames seems to be a result of an absence of planning, mitigated in the summer by the foliage of the plane trees along the water. Yet it is this side of the river, the South Bank, that was the object of one of the largest, if not the largest, planning and building operations in London after 1945. The thousands of visitors who amble along the promenade, gather around street performance artists or take pleasure in the spectacle of watching their fellow citizens, are presumably unaware of the fact that the area which today presents itself as a prime destination for informal leisure is, in fact, the outcome of a sustained effort of urban reconstruction.

The most visible physical reminders of this reconstruction are concentrated in the most central stretch of land, directly opposite the West End and marked by two bridges crossing the river. Here the generally fragmented appearance of the the bank is interrupted by a series of large buildings, all of them immediately recognisable as products of the period after World War II. Even the uninformed visitor cannot fail to understand the ensemble, constituted by a large stone-clad building with a copper barrel roof, a group of dark concrete volumes surrounded by elevated footbridges of the same material and, separated by one of the bridges, a composition of brighter concrete terraces, as a concentration of public buildings. The effect of the ensemble prompted the architectural historian Reyner Banham, in a radio talk in 1967, to present it to the listeners as examples of ‘four monuments to the highest aspirations of the English architectural profession in four highly characteristic periods of the present century’.1

The terrace structure with its ‘daring skyline’2 of fly-towers and smaller turrets hiding open staircases on the east side of the bridge — known as Waterloo Bridge to those acquainted with the area — houses the three auditoria of the National Theatre, the name revealing its status as a national institution. The two buildings between Waterloo Bridge

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The older, the ‘Royal Festival Hall’, was built in 1948–51 as a concert hall with a large public foyer, while the newer, somewhat mysteriously covered in concrete, was constructed between 1963 and 1968 to a design made a year earlier and houses another, smaller concert hall, the ‘Queen Elizabeth Hall’ along with a recital room, the ‘Purcell Room’, and an art gallery, the ‘Hayward Gallery’. Together these buildings were planned as a ‘Metropolitan Arts Centre’ and today they are presented as ‘South Bank Centre’ – without the article, presumably as prescribed by consultants in cultural marketing.

The initial presentation of buildings on the South Bank as part of one arts centre and their re-branding in the early twenty-first century seems to point to a certain difficulty. Despite their origins as parts of one municipal programme of urban reconstruction and cultural provision, and although they were both planned and built in the relatively short span of twenty years, the appearance of the buildings is utterly diverse. While the Royal Festival Hall addresses the river symmetrically with a panoramic glass curtain revealing the structural geometry of the building, the neighbouring Arts Centre presents itself as a range of solid boxes seemingly accidentally laid out on the site.

What unites these buildings, besides their location and municipal origin, is their function. Both the Royal Festival Hall and the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall house a variety of cultural institutions. As such they are results of policies that implied an active patronage of agencies of the state, in this case a local authority, in the fields of the arts. In the British context this was a novelty, and it coincided directly with the ‘tremendous overhaul’ of the country, which was announced in the 1945 election manifesto of the Labour Party, in the aftermath of World War II. As we have seen, the development of an infrastructure for cultural provision and public patronage of the arts was specifically mentioned in the manifesto, where it was stated that Labour desired ‘to ensure to our people full access to the great heritage of the culture in this nation’. In order to achieve this aim, ‘concert halls, modern libraries, theatres and suitable civic centres’ would have to be built.

The initiative for the South Bank coincides with the emergence of one of the most ambitious welfare systems in post-war Europe, which was established in 1945 – having been prepared during the war – and which operated as the dominant concept for the development of British society for the subsequent three-and-a-half decades. The claim formulated in the 1945 Labour manifesto about a connection between access to culture and the well-being of the citizens informs the central question addressed in this case study: How did the general impulse to make the arts and culture accessible materialise in the construction of the ensemble of buildings on the South Bank, and how were the arguments for planning and realising them constructed over a period of two decades?

The long history of this development and the fact that it materialised in two consecutive, but separate building campaigns is reflected in the on the east and Hungerford Bridge on the west side were planned, paid for and built by a local authority that no longer exists, the London County Council or LCC. The London County Council was established in 1889 and covered the area generally known as Inner London. In 1965 it was replaced by the Greater London Council which included the outer boroughs. This larger body was abolished by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher in 1986.
organisation of this case study in two chapters. In this chapter I will examine the historical background and the ideas informing the earlier of the two building campaigns and their result, the Royal Festival Hall. Chapter 5 focuses on the longer and more complicated genesis of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall.

The South Bank Arts Centre: a product of various building campaigns of municipal building

The two construction periods of the South Bank (1948-1951 and 1959-1968) represent particular moments in British history after 1945. The first campaign coincides with the consolidation of the welfare system and the institutions responsible for state patronage of the arts. As has been shown in chapter 2 the early 1950s were a period in which the Arts Council, the main agency created for cultural provision in the aftermath of the war, went through a process of readjustment, prioritising excellence rather than participation. This priority, summarised as ‘few but roses’ relied on a clear hierarchy of cultural forms, and the judgement of independent arbiters recruited from the upper and upper middle class who were assisted by established artists, writers or performers. The second building campaign coincides with the cultural debates in the early 1960s which were reflected in a shift in the objectives of state-sponsored cultural provision as set out in the 1965 white paper _A Policy for the Arts_.

In order to contextualise these two moments in the development of the South Bank, it may be useful to view them against the broader periodisations offered by political and cultural historians. In his history of Britain 1945–1989, _The People’s Peace_, Kenneth Morgan suggests a periodisation for the first three decades after the war, which is constructed around the major parliamentary periods dominated by one of the two major parties (Labour or the Conservatives).8 In Morgan’s periodical nomenclature the first building campaign was planned during the ‘Collectivist Retreat’ (1948–1951) that followed ‘Labour’s High Noon’ (1945–1947) whereas the second campaign coincided with the ‘The Zenith of One-Nation Toryism’ (1957–1961), and was largely realised against the background of ‘The Stagnant Society’ (1961–1964) to be completed while, in the mid 1960s, another Labour government was ‘blown off course’ in 1967. Brian Appleyard’s _The Pleasures of Peace_, a survey of ‘art and imagination in post-war Britain’ and an attempt at mapping and cataloguing different types of cultural expression and their reception, is divided into longer, but at least partly corresponding periods: the immediate post-war years 1945–51; the decade 1952–63 described as oscillating between on the one hand celebrations of Englishness and the progress of information technology on the other; and finally the ‘acid dances’, ‘weapons systems’ and ‘cool gadgets’ of 1964–73.7

Based on the life span of various and successive national British governments in the case of Morgan and an intuitive categorisation of cultural events by Appleyard, these periodisations are no more than indicators for the shifts and social, political and cultural developments in the 1950s and 1960s. For the purpose of a first approach towards understanding the context of the two building campaigns, however, they seem to offer a rudimentary framework for particular episodes in the history of the South Bank. Both Morgan and Appleyard identify one period (1945–51), which is more generally understood as one during which the welfare state received its shape against the background of serious economic difficulties (referred to as the ‘years of austerity’ in a variety of publications), and a subsequent one showing a profound improvement of the material circumstances of the majority of the British population.9 As Tony Judt has observed in _Postwar_, his epic history of Europe since 1945, this broad-brush distinction between the immediate post-war years dominated by a generation, characterised as ‘cautious, unassertive, grateful for small mercies and modest in our ambitions’10, and a period of relative political stability, economic prosperity ushering in educational reforms and cultural changes, was not a uniquely British phenomenon. The spectacular emergence of pop music and particular youth cultures was, however, more tangible in early 1960s Britain than in any other Western European society at the time.

This very general approach allows one observation that may provide a key towards formulating a set of more precise questions for examining the buildings on the South Bank. When one looks at the two planning and construction periods, it is striking that the first is relatively short, whereas the second spans almost a decade. The three years between the inception and the realisation of the Royal Festival Hall, fall neatly into one historical period proposed by Morgan and Appleyard. By contrast, the history of planning and building the gallery and concert hall ensemble, spans almost ten years. This period includes a years of economic boom, the ‘post-war golden age’ of the early 1960s the emergence of an ‘affluent society’, the development of the ‘permissive’ society of the mid 1960s, the beginning of Britain’s de-industrialisation and the first stirrings of protest against the Vietnam War.

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7. London’s South Bank

8. A modern acropolis for the welfare state

Let us face the future – Decolonisation and Labour policy for the consideration of the nation, published by the Labour Party, April 1945, p. 4. For a discussion of the development of British cultural policies in the aftermath of World War II see chapter 2.

Let us face the future (1945), p. 9


Brian Appleyard, _The Pleasures of Peace_, (London: Faber) 1989, p. xiv-xv

According to Arthur Marwick, the term ‘welfare state’ had been coined in order to describe an alternative to the Nazi ‘warfare state’ in the 1930s by Alfred Zimmerm (1879–1957), a historian and political scientist writing on international relations, in the 1930s. Arthur Marwick, _British Society since 1945_, (London: Penguin) 2005

The novelist David Lodge quoted by Judt (2005), p. 163


The origin of the identification of the 1960s as a ‘permissive society’ may be unknown. In 1975 the British film director Mike Leigh produced a television play under this title, but by this time it may well have been established. The most famous reference to the 1960s as permissive, however, is probably Margaret Thatcher’s 1981 statement that Britain was ‘reaping what was sown in the Sixties … fashionable theories and permissive clap-trap which set the scene for a society in which the old virtues of discipline and restraint were denigrated’, quoted from Arthur Marwick, _British Society since 1945_, fourth edition, (London: Penguin) 2003, p. x

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9. Christopher Grafe

10. People’s Palaces
The history of the South Bank and its buildings provides the basis for an examination of the ways in which public architecture, buildings commissioned by agencies of the state, were conceived and planned within the general framework of British post-war planning. How was the general idea of state-sponsored cultural provision in a social democracy, as it had been formulated in 1945 and re-formed during the late 1950s and early 60s, addressed in the two subsequent building campaigns and the actual buildings? In the case of the South Bank this means looking at the economic, political and cultural situations of, first, the late 1940s and early 50s and, secondly, the early 1960s, and then again at that of 1967–8, the period of the inauguration of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall.

In this and the following chapter I shall examine how the various buildings on the South Bank were initiated and realised, and how their brief and formal language reflected a series of influences. These influences from autonomous, conflicting, yet interconnected fields of force, were threefold. They included firstly debates on the provision of culture in the post-war welfare state, secondly political assumptions and thirdly the architectural cultures from which the buildings emerged. In order to understand why these buildings were built at all, their programmatic concept is discussed against the background of the establishment of the British welfare state after the war, and the prevalent ideas about access to the ‘cultural heritage’.

The structure of this case study largely follows the chronological order of events, including periods of heightened activity and those in which the progress of the development of the South Bank was stalled. It starts with the first initiatives in the 1940s, when the area attracted the interest of, initially at least, urban planners and became identified as a site onto which ideas about a new centre for London were projected. The episode of the 1951 Festival of Britain provides the context and a prelude for examining the first of the two major building campaigns on the South Bank, and the Royal Festival Hall as its tangible and enduring result. It also exemplifies the particular assumptions about institutional and architectural concepts in this early stage of state sponsored cultural patronage after the war, and the prevalent ideas about access to the ‘cultural heritage’ that informed the cultural policies of the immediate post-war years.

4.2 Building on the South Bank – the site of a new British culture

In 1945 the South Bank of the Thames, an area positioned directly opposite London’s established central commercial and entertainment district of the West End, was occupied by a range of sheds and dilapidated industrial and commercial buildings. Despite its position in the centre of London and its easy accessibility from all the major political, financial and commercial institutions, the area had a distinctly marginal quality and was perceived as remote by the majority of Londoners living north of the river. Its post-war development into one of the central locations for cultural institutions, to the extent that by the end of the twentieth century it had become one of the prime location for the leisure industries, is the result of the largest inner city planning operation in London after the Second World War.

The site itself provided a major opportunity for demonstrating the implications of the programme of modern planning for an overhaul of the social and physical fabric of the city. Its history marked by vestiges of nineteenth century industrial development and surrounded by railway viaducts, and situated on the plebeian side of the river, the South Bank carried with it associations with rebuilding Britain out of the ruins of pre-war class society. The choice of this particular site, therefore, was instrumental; it suggested that a broad, enlarged audience was invited to enjoy the offerings of the Welfare State in an environment that was entirely new and modern.

The development of the South Bank into a compound of cultural buildings was a response to two separate, but interconnected aspects of the agenda of the first post-war British government and the London County Council, the capital’s powerful local authority. On the one hand the initiative represented the largest project implying a complete overhaul of an inner city area. On the other hand the South Bank was important as a project that was invested with the highest prestige and with which a variety of interests and claims could be associated, ranging from the desire for a democratic egalitarian culture to lofty imperial fantasies of an ‘Athens of the West’. Both these agendas, the urbanistic and the cultural, situate the project in related but distinct programmes of renewal. In the following section these will be examined, describing both their separate dynamics and the ways in which cultural debates influenced ideas on town planning and architecture, and vice versa.

The people’s peace

The beginnings of building on the South Bank coincided with one of the more extraordinary periods in modern British history. In May 1945 a new Labour government under prime minister Clement Atlee was voted into office, with an overwhelming support of the ‘gallant men and women in the Fighting Services, in the Merchant Navy, Home Guard and Civil Defence, in the factories and in the bombed areas’
who, as the party’s election manifesto stated, had won the war for the country against Nazi aggression and tyranny. The main party’s election campaign summarised by the slogan ‘Victory in war must followed by a prosperous peace’ and the pledge that the soldiers and workers who had contributed to victory deserved ‘a happier future than faced so many after the last war’ – a reference to the restoration of class divisions and inequality in the wake of the First World War. This time, Labour had demanded, ‘the peace must be won’, and the electorate had broadly voted in favour of the programme of modernisation which set out to realise a ‘people’s peace’.

Relying on a large parliamentary majority – the result of ‘the greatest British political earthquake since 1906’ and invested with an extraordinary degree of public support, the new government pressed ahead with the far-reaching initiatives which had been included in the election manifesto. Mostly implemented in the relatively short period between 1945 and 1947, these measures included the introduction of the National Health Service in 1946, schemes for educational reforms and a comprehensive programme for nationalising large sectors of the economy such as transport, mining and other vital industries. At the same time large building programmes for the inner cities destroyed during the war and new towns were devised and, also in 1946, the founding of the Arts Council of Great Britain marked the beginning of active involvement and sponsorship of the arts in a country where, as we have seen, there was hardly a tradition of state patronage for the arts.

Both the initiative and implementation of these programmes were carried through in a fashion unprecedented in any period of peace, continuing the pattern established during the war and allowing a centralisation of control in the hands of the state and its agencies. In fact, and despite the claim that the Labour government was making a fresh start after the war, many of the measures taken after 1945 had in fact been prepared by the wartime national coalition, which included both Labour and Conservative ministers – and had their origins as much in older traditions of liberal reformism as in radical socialist visions for a new commonwealth.

The most notable and far-reaching of these wartime preparations of the 1945 policies were prepared in the 1942 white paper Social Insurance and Allied Services, which became known as the Beveridge Report. The report formulated the vision of ‘cradle to the grave’ welfare for all citizens and its conclusions concerning planning, housing and educations provided the ‘moral basis’ and the blueprint for many of the policies adopted by the new Labour government after 1945. The arrangement of the war economy had relied on an ‘implied contract between Government and the people’, the British accepted the sacrifices as part of the war effort and expected the government to ‘show imagination and seriousness in preparing for the restoration and improvement of the nation’s well-being’. Before the war support for state intervention had been exclusively a cause of the left. The requirements of total war had been reflected in the development of a planning machinery which directed virtually all sections of the economy, including manpower, prices,
production and investment'.29 Under the influence of these experiences even Conservatives who traditionally rejected direct state planning of the economy and in society were becoming more inclined to accept a need for such measures.28 Those who might have felt reservations about the drift of the social reforms discussed in the Beveridge report probably also realised that some of the measures proposed in it were unavoidable given the popular public acclaim that the document received.26

The situation of the war and its economic arrangements of centralised planning and rationing were reflected in the carefully constructed collective image of national unity beyond class boundaries, which had not existed in the 1930s or before. Slogans like ‘We won the war together, now let’s work together in peacetime’ had a profound effect on the attitudes of large sections of the population.28 Behind this image each political faction retained its own ideological interpretation, which was to colour the view of the war period after 1945. For the Conservatives the war was a heroic period of national strength and determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with ‘social determination whereas for the centre-left, including parts of the Labour movement and the liberal middle classes, it was associated with (London: Lawrence and Wishart) and the Economy

High Noon – The Government in Jim Fyrth (ed.), The Labour Governments ‘From the Ground Up’?

196 Morgan (1990), p. 16

32 Morgan (1990), p. 16

33 ibid., p. 16

34 ibid., p. 15


36 Morgan (1990), p. 16

37 Victor Kiernan, in Fyrth (1992), p. XIX

the world. The extraordinarily characteristic class differences begin to disappear, while this process is not intended to eliminate the ceremonial traditional customs. The people [of Britain] accepts the constraints affecting the most essential areas of life with admirable tolerance. … The people subjects itself, out of free will and without complaining, to the social programme because it is a voluntarily chosen and that its realisation is desirable – a programme that will produce a humanist socialism, which is possible in this country of origin of democracy, which detests the unworthy force of authoritarian power.30 This optimistic and celebratory characterisation was, of course, coloured by the comparison of the British situation with the circumstances in Germany five years after the war. It illustrated the extraordinary position of post-war Labour Britain as a beacon of progressive social development across the continent. In the introduction to his anthology of contemporary English architecture in the mid 1960s the architect and writer Robert Maxwell somewhat qualified this view, writing, not without a sense of ironic hindsight: ‘The English played at being Social Democrats’.31 As we shall see, there was in fact a fair amount of complaining, and whether the wholesale acceptance of the vision of a humanistically framed socialist country was ever embraced by the large majority of the British population, as Wimmenauer suggested, remains doubtful.

The image of the war years as an extraordinary period during which an experience of commonality was forged by exceptional circumstances may be somewhat exaggerated.29 It provided, however, the ideological and emotional ground for the agenda of the Attlee government and its acceptance by large parts of the British population. Against substantial financial difficulties, the programme of nationalisations, of introducing social security, economic and environmental planning made Labour Britain into a ‘laboratory of social engineering and reconstruction’35, supported by a large degree of consensus. The success of this project relied on the comprehensive support of large sections of the middle classes, who shared in the ethic of planning ‘widespread throughout the profession and the mandarin class of administrators’24. The civil servants, labelled ‘evangelistic bureaucrats’ in a study of post-war planning in the North East of England36, who dominated the administrative agencies of the welfare state derived their authority from this ethic and the support of the middle-class intelligentsia, who had developed a new sense of self-confidence during the war years.36 On the other hand, the war had not only afforded the working classes an acute sense of self-assurance, but also brought the lower end of the middle classes into agreement with reform.37

Planning a new city centre

The degree to which the new welfare state intended to leave its imprint on post-war society was visibly expressed in the systems of state-led regional and town planning firmly established in the 1940s. Rather than returning to the patterns of ad-hoc development which had been at work in most parts of Britain during the nineteenth century and in the first
half of the twentieth, the opportunity created by the centralised system of control inherited from the war years was seized by the new administration to achieve a comprehensive reconstruction.38 The thorough belief in planning was, as similar developments in other West European societies illustrate, hardly a British peculiarity. According to ‘Tony Judt, the appeal of the idea of ‘planning’ as a remedy of society faults was felt across the professions and political camps: ‘The disasters of the inter-war decades … all seemed to be connected by the utter failure to organize society better. If democracy was to work, if it was to recover its appeal, it would have to be planned.’39

In Britain the planning initiatives had commenced during the war, and were accompanied by a wide range of publications addressing the general audience. As early as 1941 and 1942 the magazine Picture Post published articles titled ‘Readers Work on a Plan for Britain’ or ‘Plan for Britain’,40 and the art critic Herbert Read invited BBC listeners to speculate about London’s future reconstruction, referring to Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin.41 The Picture Post also published a special issue on planning the country that included articles on the economy, social security, housing, health and education. The writer J. B. Priestley contributed an article setting out his vision of a ‘New Britain’ and the architect Maxwell Fry covered the development of town planning.42 In 1942 Lord Reith, former director-general of the BBC, was appointed minister in a newly formed Ministry of Works that was to be responsible for the reconstruction after the war, and in 1943 a Ministry of Town and Country Planning was established.43 All of this could be seen as part of creating the ground for the structures and the legislation for planning the reconstruction of Britain’s cities and the surrounding countryside. This planning system was widely seen as ‘the first thoroughgoing attempt to improve the social and economic condition of the people of Britain as a whole, by means of the geographical distribution of employment and population, the planning of land uses and development, the provision of better housing and physical environments …’44, investing planners and, to a lesser degree, architects with unprecedented power and self-confidence.

At the regional level this materialised in plans for a series of new towns relieving existing cities of over-population; for London it meant that for the first time a comprehensive plan for the agglomeration, which had been attempted by progressive architects as a private pursuit in the 1930s, could be formulated with a prospect being implemented. The Greater London Plan by J. H. Forshaw and Patrick Abercrombie45 of 1944 envisaged a controlled development of the larger metropolitan region, encapsulating assumptions widely shared among planners and architects about the necessity of urban containment, the dispersal of the population, the construction of new towns and the reconstruction of inner city areas.46

As elsewhere in post-war Europe the possibility of rebuilding large areas of the existing city was taken as a pretext for a large-scale approach according to modern planning principles. In the preambule of to the County of London Plan, written by Forshaw and Abercrombie in 1943, the authors make it clear that for them it is fortunately a fact that much of (the damage) has removed property that cried aloud for redevelopment, or has opened up hidden beauties which we hope will not needlessly be obliterated, providing ‘a unique stimulus to better planning’.47 The objectives of the plan given in the document were the decentralisation and decrease of densities in congested working-class areas, the conservation of communities and neighbourhoods and revealing the river as ‘London’s most beautiful and most neglected open space’.48

Whereas most of the County of London plan envisaged the reconstruction of the inner city as modern residential and commercial neighbourhoods the southern bank of the River Thames was introduced as an area of particular concern. Situated in the middle of London, the South Bank offered the opportunity to realise a new centre, free of the constraints of the existing ones on the northern bank of the river, a new town in the middle of the existing city, a ceremonial compound of national significance, a ‘Stadtkrone’ or Acropolis that was to represent the achievements of modern democratic society and the Welfare State. Nowhere else in central London (with the possible exception of the Barbican Centre in the City) could these high-flying ambitions be realised, and it is hardly surprising that over the next two or three decades the South Bank developed into a focus of official planning and utopian proposals.

The South Bank as a site for the people’s culture

The realities of the South Bank site were far from promising. Since the late eighteenth century the southern bank of the Thames had attracted a variety of better housing and small industrial uses. Railway viaducts connecting the main stations of Waterloo, Charing Cross, Blackfriars and London Bridge with the suburban hinterland of South London and the ports on the South Coast imposed a complicated, not to say chaotic,
geometry and divided the area into small sections, turning it into a densely developed inner city periphery and almost the opposite of orderly civic planning. The aspect of the Victorian infrastructure, the high brick-vaulted viaducts above a mélange of terraces, sheds, warehouses and the odd industrial building may well have delivered the motifs for the scenes of the London urban landscape depicted by Gustave Doré in the late nineteenth century. In its dilapidated state the South Bank seemed to epitomise the devastating effect of nineteenth century industrialisation on the fabric of the city and the worst aspects of laissez-faire capitalism.

The plan's chapter on the 'River Front and the South Bank Area' starts with a plea for exploiting the Thames, which 'by virtue of its great width, its sweeping and varied curve, its tidal ebb and flow and its shipping activities, is one of the finest rivers in the world'. Offering a panorama of the 'Empire capital' and its grandeur, the river is described as presenting 'unequalled opportunities for public enjoyment, civic splendour and residential amenity'. The survey which had been conducted for the plan showed, however, that little of this wealth was used to the full, or even accessible. Only nine percent of the total river frontage was given over to public open space and twelve percent to public, business and residential buildings, whereas 73 percent were occupied by industry, wharves, warehouses and railways. The County of London Plan proposes to open up the river front to the public, partly by rationalising the use of the land, partly by relocating those industries which did not require to be near the water to less central sites. Parks and promenades along the river should be 'located, where possible, at points giving the best views of the river', serving large residential areas where no such open spaces existed. All in all industrial use of the riverbank should be reduced from 73 to 49 percent.

On the South Bank, the most central section of the riverbank, most of the small industries had been abandoned before the Second World War and air raids had cleared the rest, leaving the site 'a derelict slum, low-lying, marshy, and heavily blitzed, bisected by the arches carrying the busy main line out of Charing Cross'. The only exception was County Hall, the seat of the London Council itself, which had been built in the interwar years and which directly faced the river. Everywhere else the river was inaccessible. In the County of London Plan the sorry state of the area is vividly described, as a prelude to the argument for a radical redevelopment:

'It is one of the great anomalies of the capital that while the river, from Westminster eastwards, is lined on the north side with magnificent buildings and possesses a spacious and attractive embankment road, the corresponding south bank, excepting St. Thomas's Hospital and the County Hall, should present itself a depressing, semi-derelict appearance, lacking any sense of that dignity and order appropriate to its location at the centre of London … This gloomy aspect is intensified to-day by war damage. The two frontages, as they exist, cannot be reconciled. … Extending over a long period, a variety of schemes have been put forward with a view to remodelling the South

49 Forshaw/Abercrombie (1943), p. 128
50 ibid., p. 130
51 Frayn, in Sissons/French (1963), p. 329
Bank and bringing it to accord with the north, so that the two, in association, might be worthy of their superb position. We believe that the time has arrived for a comprehensive scheme to be put into operation.”

Forshaw and Abercrombie underpinned their argument by selecting photographs of unused and derelict industrial structures, which illustrated the state of the area. These were contrasted by examples of what the Thames could be if the planners’ ideas were realised. Images of the Seine and the Moscow River show the riverbanks as public urban environments attracting a wide range of usages and activities. A photograph depicting young Moscovites enjoying a swim in an improvised pool in the river along Gorky Park, next to a replica of historic boat, evokes the democratic pleasure of a natural beach in middle of the metropolis. The ‘magnificent treatment’ of the tree-lined quays of the Seine provides another example for a river as an attractive and defining feature of the urban landscape, bridges situated at short intervals offering intimacy between both banks in the centre of Paris. References to the theatres and pleasure gardens, which made the riverbank one of the popular urban destinations of Elizabethan London, establish a local historic precedent: ‘In earlier times the south bank, with its Globe Theatre, Paris Gardens, and its other centres of attraction, was a vital and popular district of London. There is little reason why it should not recapture some of its former lively spirit.”

Forshaw and Abercrombie proposed a gradual redevelopment, including an overhaul of the existing infrastructure, the removal of the viaducts and the construction of a promenade along the river lined by a series of buildings of varying character. ‘Cleared of its encumbrances (…) this area (…) might well include a great cultural centre, embracing amongst other features, a modern theatre, a large concert hall and the headquarters of various organisations.” The existing promenade in front of County Hall was to be continued downstream for a stretch of approximately three kilometres (roughly two miles) varying in width from 50 to 80 metres (150 feet to 250 feet), with a double line of trees along the quay and equipped with cafés, bandstands and shelters. Following the example of Moscow, a swimming pool was planned as part of, or adjacent to, a youth centre west of Charing Cross Bridge. While the buildings in the central section of the site between County Hall to the west and Waterloo Bridge to the east would be of a public nature, government and other prestigious offices would face the promenade further eastward and tall flat buildings would eventually replace the warehouses and market buildings in Southwark, leaving the mediæval cathedral as a free-standing monument in a park next to London Bridge.

Although the economic value of the buildings along the river was low, the plan was very ambitious because of the necessity to integrate the infrastructure. In order to ease traffic between the riverbanks the plan proposed two new bridges for cars, one replacing the existing Hungerford railway bridge, the other connecting the Temple district to the south. The entire road system on the South Bank was to be reordered, affecting not only the immediate neighbourhood, but also a large area further away from the river. In contrast to the central site on the river, neither the national government nor the London County Council owned much of the land implied in this redevelopment, and proceeding with the plans would require extensive negotiations and large funds.

Given the complexity and the size of the plan it is not surprising that the planners attached an extensive time-scale to realising the entire scheme. ‘This South Bank scheme, envisaged as a means of reviving a great sector of London to the benefit of the community generally, would be a long-term one, spread out over the next fifty years.” The initial phase, however, seemed more immediately realisable. Most of the land in this area was already owned by County Council, the remainder being largely abandoned by the former owners. The proposed use as a ‘great cultural centre’ implied that either the council or the national government would step in as clients for the important public buildings for the two theatres and the Youth Centre. Plans for public buildings had indeed been prepared even before the County of London Plan was published. Already in 1942 a committee for establishing a National Theatre had made claims for a site of about one acre on the South Bank. Forshaw and Abercrombie adopted the idea but extended the scope of the proposal to a much larger compound of buildings devoted to culture.

The drawings published as part of the proposal show the buildings as a monumental composition facing the river axially and enclosing large open spaces.” In plan the project appears as a rationalised exercise of Beauch-Arts town planning, reminiscent of Charles Holden’s plan for the University of London in Bloomsbury (partly) realised in the 1930s. The buildings would be organised in two strings parallel to the river divided by an access road (Belvedere Road). The entire area facing the river would be pedestrianised, stairs connecting the lower level of the riverbank to the upper lever of bridgeheads. The two approaches from the bridges were to end in axial compositions marked by large commercial and office buildings.

The desire to define the new South Bank as a precinct of monumental buildings facing the river is particularly visible in two sketches showing the panorama as viewed from two points on the northern bank, Adelphi Terrace and from the top floor of Shell House. The sketches do not entirely correspond with the axonometric drawings and the plans published alongside. The trees on the Promenade seem to have disappeared and the open space appears somewhat compressed into a paved quay. The buildings on the riverbank are of an overpowering monumentality. Whereas in the plans they are shown as somewhat recessed from the river, here they appear as an almost uninterrupted wall of massive volumes forming a dense wall along the water. The National Theatre, in particular, a large pavilion with a colonnaded raised foyer and two lower wings on either side, occupies almost the entire stretch between the projected Charing Cross Bridge and Waterloo Bridge. The architectural treatment of the buildings and their rendering in loosely...
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County of London Plan, the four stages of the development of the central area of the South Bank

County of London Plan, detailed scheme for the ‘west section’ between County Hall and Waterloo Bridge

County of London Plan, axonometric drawing of the entire South Bank development

County of London Plan, axonometric drawing of a the west section
applied pencil and wash, seems indebted to the monumental urbanism of the immediate pre-war years; in fact some of the motives bear some – probably most unintended – similarities with the architectural set pieces realised on the occasion of the 1937 Exposition universelle in Paris, where the riverfront had been dominated by the pavilions of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

The distinction between the visualisations for the plan for the South Bank might be evidence for equally different architectural ideas held within the group of architects and planners who had helped Forshaw and Abercrombie assemble the data for the County of London Plan and who had prepared the illustrations. In the mid 1940s the architect’s department of the London County Council was dominated by various strands of Beaux-Arts-inflected planning. This might explain both the general drift towards monumentality and axially and the differences between the elaborated images in the axonometric drawings and the hand sketches. What images and text have in common is a vision of the South Bank as a compound of official buildings for culture for which there was no precedent in London or anywhere else in Britain. The ‘great cultural centre’ was in fact something of a ceremonial precinct of the sort that had been realised in administrative centres in the British Empire, in Canberra, Pretoria or New Delhi; its architectural treatment could be seen as an attempt at realising a new notional cultural focus for the Imperial capital as well as establishing an urban centre for a modern London.

The proposal for the South Bank opened the debate about the future of a site onto which various and very different ideas about the development of London, and the post-war city in general, could be projected. These projections were by no means a privilege of the architects working within the LCC. In 1946, and having made a grand design for redeveloping the site of the former Crystal Palace in South London before, Clive Entwistle, an autodidact-architect and self-confessed disciple of Le Corbusier, presented an ‘alternative’ design for the South Bank and the buildings for a festival commemorating the Great Exhibition of 1851, proposals for which were by this time discussed. Like the designs coming out of the office of the architect of the LCC, Entwistle envisaged the South Bank as a focus of a modern metropolis, ‘a national memorial to the British people’s triumph over totalitarianism’. Compared to the plans in the County of London Plan, Entwistle’s project was infinitely grander, its proposals including a ‘pyramidal museum of the plastic arts’ reminiscent of design for the Mundaneum which Le Corbusier had proposed in 1929. Entwistle had developed his design as a private project, operating independently from the bureaucratic concerns of the official planners and with almost no concern for the realities of the day. The effect of his publication of the plan in the Architectural Review was, therefore, limited; the initiative remains noteworthy, however, as evidence for the intense interest that the redevelopment of the South Bank attracted in the years immediately after the war.

63 Boyd White (2000), p. 31
A precedent for using the South Bank: The Festival of Britain

Against the background of the material hardship of the post-war years – shortages in food, consumer goods and housing continuing well into the 1950s – it is remarkable that the projected comprehensive re-development of the South Bank received such heightened attention. Launched in the period of ‘High Noon’ of the Labour Government, the plans reflected the ambitious policies of the new government and the London County Council, even if it was evident that this was a long-term project. The LCC, eager to press ahead with preparations for the scheme, was already engaged in clearing the areas near Waterloo Bridge and Hungerford Bridge and working towards appointing Charles Holden as master planner for the area.

For the London County Council, which through the 1930s had developed into a political body with greatly increased ambition, administrative clout and a budget equaling that of entire countries – Austria is often given as the reference – the scheme had become a key project. Combining the roles of planning authority, owner of the site and client, the LCC seemed well-placed to realise the core part of the plans for the South Bank. In 1947, however, the Ministry of Works demanded the site for offices and halted the council’s plans, a move which effectively would have aborted the entire proposal for the public buildings on the South Bank. The project’s great ambition may have appeared increasingly out of tune with the financial and political realities. After the initial enthusiasm of the period following VE-day and the change of power at Westminster, the following year saw a marked downturn in the prospects for the British economy. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. Newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’. There were already increasing complaints from the middle classes about the tight system of rationing, newspaper and periodicals were full of the complaints of middle class consumers, ‘deprived of choice, hemmed in by controls, alienated by a New’.

In the early months of 1947 a series of natural disasters hit Britain (and mainland Europe), shattering the foundations of the Labour government. In April 1946 the government had reduced the size of the Standard British loaf of bread, and three months later bread rationing was introduced. As the Conservatives reminded the public, such a drastic measure had never been necessary, not even during the war. On 23 January 1947 the conservative Daily Telegraph summed up the situation in its headline: ‘Bread Ration May Be Cut; Less Bacon and Home Meat; Beer Supplies to be Halved Immediately’. On the same page the paper also noted that snow had started to fall in London. ‘The change of the London weather was the earliest sign of the ‘freak winter’, which was to bring British public life and the economy to an almost complete standstill in the early months of 1947. Extreme cold – London reported up to minus sixteen degrees – brought electricity cuts and made large parts of the country inaccessible. In early February two million men were out of work, and electricity supply was suspended for industry in large parts of England. Domestic power consumption became severely restricted: no household was allowed to ignite electric fires during the day, except for cooking. Television was suspended and the Third (Cultural) Programme of the BBC, which had only been introduced in 1946, went off the air again. When the snow and frost retreated the early spring brought floods and storms, which soaked 600,000 acres of agricultural land, destroying the harvest of potatoes and wheat and killing sheep and cattle. To add to this, the summer of 1947 continued to be extreme with water shortages in large parts of England. Britain found itself facing an alarming dollar deficit and the government, already involved in difficult negotiations with the United States about repaying the loans incurred during the war, had to introduce even more drastic controls on private consumption. The import of American films was all but stopped, as a prohibitive import duty was imposed; foreign travels were suspended and newspapers reduced to four pages to save paper.

The crisis, though evidently the result of adversities for which it could not be blamed, posed a serious threat on the authority of the Attlee government. The Conservative opposition was becoming increasingly self-confident and the press (then, as now, predominantly Conservative) attacked ministers for their alleged failure to control the situation. In order to save its reform project and to survive electorally, the Labour government needed a period of consolidation. The ‘prophet’, as Kenneth Morgan put it, of the phase of ‘collectivist retreat’ and the cultural change that was its result was Herbert Morrison, deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the House of Commons, and the former leader of the LCC. Morrison had formulated his cautious – or pragmatic – view of the state of affairs at the Labour Party conference as early as 1946, when he stated: ‘The Government has gone as far Left as is consistent with sound reason and the national interest.’ Now, his intuition told him, Labour had to bring about a change in the mood of the general public.

In the same year Morrison adopted the idea of the Centenary festival commemorating the 1851 Great Exhibition. This initiative had been in the air since 1943, when the Royal Society of Arts suggested the idea to the wartime coalition government, and it was taken up in an open letter by Gerald Barry, editor of the liberal News Chronicle, addressed to Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade (Minister for Industrial and Commercial Affairs), in September 1945. Barry also tried to find supporters in industrial and commercial circles for his idea. The festival had initially been intended as an international event, but was reduced for financial reasons to become a British presentation. Morrison, who was a cabinet member without portfolio, presented the project to parliament in this form in December 1947. As the writer Michael Frayn observed in a 1964 essay on the history of the Festival of Britain, ‘the idea had now been fed into the official Government processing machinery, from which ideas habitually emerge squeezed to the pips by the intermeshing teeth of incompatible political expediences… .’

Morrison himself was enthusiastic about the idea. Using his influence in cabinet he secured a budget for the initiative and appointed a Festival council that included ‘reliably apolitical British establishment names’, such as the art historian Kenneth Clark, the actor John Gielgud, the musical director Malcolm Sargent and the writer-politician Alan Patrick.
Herbert, as well as two leading Conservative politicians, Richard Austen (Rab) Butler and Walter Elliot. 78

Meanwhile, accident or, as Frayn puts it, ‘expedience’ ruled the process of decision-making about the Festival. Several sites were discussed, including Hyde Park and Earl’s Court, but all proved unacceptable. In the summer of 1948 it appeared that no suitable site could be found. To break the deadlock Morrison approached Isaac Hayward, the recently appointed leader of the LCC, to seek his support. 79 The LCC’s plan to build a ‘great cultural centre’ turned out to be a godsend, and the council was only too willing to comply with the minister’s request. Frayn mentions that ‘afterwards it was widely supposed that it had been Morrison who swung the South Bank on the Festival as a way of getting the area developed – a project in which as an old LCC man he had long been interested.’

Morrison is said to have described the festival as ‘the people giving themselves a pat on the back’, but as Michael Frayn observed the event was designed as a display of learning, technological and cultural achievements, not as the ‘gigantic national booze-up, …, with hostesses giving away free washing machines, and gigantic, gas-filled facsimiles of chorus-girls’ legs floating over all the major cities’ … which, he alleges, it would have been at any other time in British post-war history. 81 Gerald Barry, who had been appointed director-general of the festival in March 1948, presented the plans to the press in the summer of the same year, stating: ‘We envisage this as the people’s show, not organised arbitrarily for them to enjoy, but put on largely by them, by us all, as an expression of a way of life in which we believe’. 82 In reality, the ‘people’ were hardly involved. The committee included a former newspaper editor, two senior civil servants, an architect, a theatre manager, a film director, a palaeontologist and a public relations officer. With the exception of Herbert Morrison, who was responsible to the Cabinet for the Festival and who had very little to do with the actual form it took, there was hardly involvement. The committee formed the upper- and middle-

classes who believe that if God had not wished them to prey on all smaller and weaker creatures without scruple he would not have made them as they are.”84

Frayn’s mentioning of Evelyn Waugh, the author of Brideshead Revisited, refers to the writer’s public disdain for the ‘monstrous constructions’ that appeared on the festival site and the alleged effect the event had on the holiday plans of American tourists who, he stated, ‘curtailed their visits and sped to the countries of the Continent where, however precarious their condition, they ordered things better.’ 86 The musical director Thomas Beecham was equally indignant, calling the festival ‘a monumental piece of imbecility and iniquity’. 88 On the other side of the political spectrum, some representatives of the Left were also suspicious of Morrison and the festival, regarding, not without justification, the whole thing as an attempt by a Social Democratic government to pacify the working classes waiting for more radical social changes than the politicians were prepared to consider. 87

The ‘monstrous constructions’ that sent shivers down Evelyn Waugh’s back were the festival buildings which were erected on the festival site on either side of Hungerford Bridge and towards Waterloo Bridge on the east side. The design team was led by Hugh Casson, who had worked as a teacher at the Cambridge School of Architecture and spent the war years in the Camouflage Service of the Air Ministry. In a sketch of the scheme published in August 1946 the site on the South Bank, which by that time was only tentatively suggested, is occupied by a large glass ‘hill’ topped by a thin mast, encompassing the entire programme. 88 Eventually Casson and his team proposed an informal layout of neighbourhoods of different characters and pavilions dotted about the site.

The tallest of the structures was the so-called Skylon, a thin metal tower designed by the architects Powell and Moya, providing the festival with a widely visible landmark. Next to it there was Ralph Tubbs’ Dome of Discovery, with a diameter of approximately 100 metres and 30 metres high. Both buildings were made of aluminium, which until the 1940s had hardly been used for the construction of buildings. Other, smaller building included the Thames-side Restaurant by Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, founders of the MARS group and prominent pre-war advocates of modern architecture in Britain, which exploited nautical imagery and technology. The Lion and Unicorn Pavilion by Russell and Gooden resembled a barn with an arched lamella oak roof and covered a display of historic artefacts, which served ‘to symbolise two main characters of national character: realism and strength on the one hand, and, on the other, independence and imagination’. 89 Across the site specially designed furniture, particularly Ernest Race’s ‘Antelope’ Chairs, and cheerful graphics contributed to the image of the festival as a colourful island in the grey post-war city.

The large structures of the Dome and the Skylon figure prominently in the exhibition guide and other publications issued on the occasion of the festival. The London Illustrated News, for example, presented the site as a bird’s eye perspective view, one of the conventional representa-
Pavilions of the Festival of Britain as presented in the festival guide: Sea and Ships exhibition (p. 212, top), Transport exhibition (p. 212, bottom) and Seaside exhibition (p. 213, top). The layout of the festival site, as published in the *Architectural Review* (p. 213, bottom)
tions of universal exhibitions since the 1870s, and showed the Dome of Discovery almost exactly like the grand Panorama building in the Prater park had appeared on images of the 1871 Vienna Weltausstellung. As far as the design of the major buildings was concerned, the Festival of Britain followed the tradition of designing large public events established in the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth. It was the handling of the site as a series of continuous routes that distinguished the Festival of Britain from the layout of most pre-war exhibitions. In its special festival issue, published in August 1951, the Architectural Review presents its criticism in the form of a visit to the site. The author – or authors, since the review of the exhibition design is not signed – invites the reader for a perambulation around the show and its buildings and develops this as a series of experiences of strolling along squares and courtyards emulating urban scenes, of vistas and enclosed or framed spaces.

In the description of the Architectural Review the entrance courtyard thus becomes ‘a small town piazza’, establishing ‘a different world from London, but not in one of those formal layouts that generally accompany the architecture of display’. ‘Changes of scale and texture, unexpected contrasts between the hard geometry of buildings and the natural greenery, movement and mystery’ embrace the visitor and support the narratives of the various displays, as part of a larger one that gradually unfolds itself. The walk around the site is presented as an uninterrupted sequence, photographs illustrating the visual and architectural effects and a series of diagrammatic sketches highlighting the interplay between movement and buildings. Emphasising the scenographic nature of the layout, these sketches show the pavilion as set pieces in a stage design, footbridges, decks, staircases and ramps providing vantage points from which to view the surrounding landscape, the buildings and objects populating the site, or to observe others as they shuffle along the displays or look at their fellow visitors.

The language of the article stresses moments of surprise and contrast: the Land of Britain pavilion, for example, is described as breaking ‘into the piazza in the form of rough stone walls’; on another occasion the author turns around a corner and with a shock of surprise finds himself ‘on the brink of a vast territory’, elsewhere ‘to be released [from a cave] into … a brightly lit space … dramatically rising in height and filled with the cries and whistles of birds’. The picturesque planning of the site effectively creates an ambiguity in the mind of the visitors about the size of the exhibition site and plays with their sense of the surrounding city. ‘Climbing upwards and downwards an impression of liveliness and flexibility of plan from the sight of other visitors crossing your path below and above you, as you and they circulate among the ramps and staircases.’ All of this is offset against the ‘unexpected but well-composed pictures of the outside world’.

The article in the Architectural Review is clearly intended as an endorsement of the planning principles guiding the design. The festival, its landscape and the general layout, is described in almost exclusively positive terms – much more positive than those employed by J. M. Richards in his review of the individual buildings in the same issue. The magazine evidently wished to present the Festival as an exemplary architectural achievement, not only as an isolated event but also as a model leading the way forward for modern town planning in general. On the page title readers are informed that the Review hails the South Bank as ‘the first modern townscape’ and the present issue has been designed primarily to illustrate this aspect of it. The editorial foreword expands this line; the South Bank is presented as a ‘nursery of new ideas’ and the problems faced here ‘reflected many of the problems that constantly confront architects and planners in this overcrowded island; how to achieve a compact urban character while avoiding congestion – visual and actual; how to weld the ideas of many architects into a whole without stifling originality or imposing uniformity …’ The design of the Festival appeared, in this view, as a successful exercise in the British Picturesque Tradition, which was strongly advocated by the editorial board of the Architectural Review.

‘That is the great contribution of the exhibition to contemporary architecture; it demonstrates how successfully the informal principles of town planning, so well-rooted in the English countryside, can be transplanted to the English urban landscape. It shows what rewards we may expect if we apply the same principles to the tasks with which our own town builders are confronted today, especially the construction of new towns and the reconstruction of obsolete city centres’.

From this description, and from the photographs and the television footage of the festival and its buildings one can establish a picture of the site as landscaped environment, employing narrative and theatrical effects with the intention of creating an all-encompassing experience. How this was reworked into a three-dimensional reality is visible in the photographs of the model of the festival site, published by the Architectural Review. Here, the intricate changes of level and an the system of footbridges connecting the bridges and the river terraces with the main concourses, which play an important role in the picturesque routing, are discernable in their entirety. Seen from above, the layout resembles a contracted landscape park, or perhaps a nineteenth century entertainment park like Tivoli in Copenhagen and the Swedish folk
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parks of the early twentieth century. Another comparison seems not to have occurred to the reviewers: the highly prescribed routes (with only the occasional exit) via terraces and bridges, along displays and scenographic situations, had been widely employed in the design of the romantic, yet highly rational landscapes for municipal zoos in the early 1900s. The example of the entertainment park was, perhaps naturally, even more influential in the temporary fun fair that was constructed simultaneously and as part of the larger festival, at Battersea, near the site of the former Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens.100

The media and officials celebrated the event as an ‘an affirmation of faith, not only in British resourcefulness, but also in the British way of life’101 and, as the Archbishop of Canterbury stated at the official opening, as a display of the ‘sober and humble trust that by holding fast to which is good … we may continue to be a nation at unity in itself and of service to the world …’102. Critics of the festival, by contrast, emphasised what they regarded as populist tendencies, both in the displays and the architectural style of the pavilions. Partly this criticism may have been affected by the nature of the festival itself, the celebratory and at times slightly parochial103 message, but also by the inclusion of popular entertainment in the otherwise serious programme. The presence of advertisements and the construction of an entertainment park, even if this was not situated on the South Bank but further upstream at Battersea, allowed the festival to be viewed as ‘an uneasy amalgam of museum and trade fair’.104 Noel Coward rubbished the optimistic tone of the Festival in a song in the Lyric Review:

‘Although servants of the state
We may have been coerced,
As we’ve been told to celebrate
We’ll celebrate or burst

…
We all get terribly heated
If it’s treated
As a joke, so:
Don’t make fun of the Festival.’

Coward also suggests that the festival catered to fairly straightforward economic interests: ‘That gay display/ Means money in the bank.’105

The long-term effects of the Festival of Britain on design, architecture and town planning have caused some controversy. The editors of the Architectural Review, as we have seen, had invested high hopes in the role of the festival as an example for town planners and Reyner Banham acknowledged this effect in 1976, stating: ‘Municipal gardening has not been the same since the Festival’.106 Misha Black, who had been co-ordinating the architectural designs in one section of the South Bank Exhibition, judged that the festival ‘suddenly proved that Modern architecture with a capital M was in fact acceptable …’.107

This view of the festival as a harbinger of modern planning in Britain, somehow making up for the absence of the country in the heroic period
before the war, was shared by the *Architectural Review*. The reviewer for the German journal *Die Neue Stadt* admired the combination of the popular and witty with the application of modern planning principles, the ‘elegance’ of the Lion and Unicorn pavilion and the attention to detail in the outdoor planning.108 Other continental commentators showed themselves less impressed and pointed to the fact that many of the design ideas had, indeed, been employed before.109 In 1959 cartoonist and art critic Osbert Lancaster gave a different turn to the reception of the Festival as modern experiment, appropriating the design as evidence for a specifically English response to Continental modernism. At the Festival, Lancaster wrote, ‘Teutonic preponderance, which had weighed down so many examples of the modern movement was modified and banished’ and English inventiveness had triumphed in the ‘employment of such materials as chicken wire and asbestos sheeting for purposes for which they had never been intended’.110

For the younger generation – those architects starting their professional careers in the late 1940s and early 50s – the festival and its stylistic proposal seemed less innovative, or even, as Banham remembers, an ‘anathema’, the achievement of an ‘officer-and-gentleman establishment’ – this probably an allusion to the formation of many of the festival designers during the war – which was old-fashioned in its quest for popular appeal and well-meaning decorative features. Architects like Alison and Peter Smithson or James Stirling and those whom Reyner Banham identifies as their ‘spokesmen’ regarded the architectural idiom of the pavilions as a gratuitous exercise, and ‘influence-wise the Festival died a-borning’.111 This view of the Festival became an accepted one for many of the critics, despite the fact that the pavilions did show quite different stylistic approaches. The Lion and Unicorn pavilion, with its emphasis on the articulation of a fairly simple tectonic proposal, for example, could hardly be described as frivolous.

As late as 1980 Kenneth Frampton was scathing in his criticism, describing the architectural designs as parodies of the heroic iconography of Soviet Constructivists, the Skyton and the Dome of Discovery representing ‘nothing more consequent through their structural rhetoric than the ‘circus’ of life for which presumably the ‘bread’ was soon to be provided’.112 Yet, as Reyner Banham points out, the maligned Festival style also gave the architects who publicly distanced themselves from it, the opportunity to react against something solid, and leading them to develop different formal interests. And for ‘the next generation after the next generation’, Archigram and its contemporaries, bursting onto the scene in the early 1960s, the festival may well have been a – mostly unacknowledged – point of reference:

‘... when the British became self-confident enough again to rejoice without having to be ordered by Herbert Morrison, sophisticated enough to enjoy themselves without needing instruction from kindly ex-officers and gentlemen, and affluent enough to do it without threatening national bankruptcy, then there was a generation at hand – from Archigram to the Beatles to almost anyone else you like to name in the late Swinging Sixties – to whom the Festival had shown the way if not the style.’113

Meanwhile, the impact of the festival on the political developments was definitely limited.114 Barely a month after the closure on 30 September 1951 Labour was voted out of office, the election starting a long period of successive Conservative governments under Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. The Festival came too late to help the Labour government out of the electoral crisis that it had been in since 1947. The effect of the festival on the development of state support for the arts, however, was more substantial. As the focus of much artistic activity, offering work to architects, composers, painters and sculptors, the festival demonstrated the belief, especially within some sections of the Labour party, ‘that the arts in Britain both deserved and needed official support in peacetime as much as in wartime’115. In this light the Festival of Britain reflected the belief that the state bore, or at least shared, responsibility for the arts.

The physical fabric of the Festival of Britain did not survive long. One of the first decisions of the Conservative government voted into office in October 1951 was to clear the site and demolition work was swiftly carried out. Although the buildings, including Ralph Tubbs’ Dome of Discovery, had always been intended as temporary constructions, the zeal with which the new administration eliminated every trace of the festival remained noteworthy. Michael Frayn remembers that ‘a series of forlorn auctions began to clear the way for the Shell Centre’116, and the newscasts reporting on the demolition works almost triumphantly mention the value of the remainder for the national treasure of scrap metal – a convenient windfall at a time that the Korea crisis led to increased scarcity of construction material. In the final passage of his essay on the Festival of Britain Frayn describes the bleak scene of the cleared site:

‘... the whole 27 acres was efficiently stripped down to ground level. And there, with what one would have thought was intolerable symbolism, it remained for a decade; 27 acres, in the very heart of one of the world’s great capitals, totally derelict and unused. Until at last the ground was ready to put forth a second crop, and where the Festival had once stood grew one of the largest and ugliest commercial office blocks in Western Europe. And a car park of 700 cars.’117
The disappearance, almost overnight, of all traces of the Festival of Britain – or all but one, as we will see in the next paragraph – could be seen to reflect the slightly ephemeral or even unreal nature of the whole affair. In one of the most difficult periods in twentieth century British history, the austerity years after the war, the festival promised a happier future. How this promise might be fulfilled, the visitors may have inferred from the experiences of collectivity offered at the South Bank, when strolling along the Thames or sitting in ‘Continental-style’ cafés or joining in with thousands in the remarkably ordered yet apparently improvised choreography of the final sing-along on the last evening. It was an experience of being together and of being equal. This may have been the most durable effect of this event six years after the war: the representation of a new, egalitarian society, even if the image was, as Adrian Forty has suggested, mostly a chimera. And for many of the eight-and-a-half million people from all parts of Britain who visited the central exhibition of the festival between May and September 1951, the South Bank was not a marginal area in the middle of London, but had become the site of a cherished summer memory.

There was one building that survived the fervour of eliminating the traces of the Festival of Britain. A large concert hall occupying almost a quarter of the section between Hungerford and Waterloo Bridge had been the contribution of the London County Council to the festival and, unlike all the other structures, it had been conceived as a permanent building. Almost twenty metres high and with a footprint of roughly seventy by seventy metres, its central section reaching 35 metres, the hall dominated the entire eastern part of the exhibition and commanded the river front, and still does.

In contrast to the remainder of the festival site, where pavilions and landscaping produced a densely occupied and designed surface, the immediate surroundings of the concert hall had largely been left as open spaces. The south and east elevations faced squares, allowing the visitors to appreciate the volume in its entirety, while on the north side a raised deck provided the hall with a terrace overlooking the Thames. Period photographs show the Royal Festival Hall, as the building was called, as a solid stone-clad, free-standing building, facing the river with three-storey-high panoramic window set into the surface. This façade was symmetrical, while those facing east and west were not and on the south a blank surface of asbestos panels waited for a final solution. From a distance the copper roof of the auditorium hall could be seen as a shallow barrelled hood chopped off at front and back, the blank surfaces at either end reminders of an arched pediment.

The building stood out among the pavilions surrounding it, both through its sheer scale and because it so clearly expressed a claim to permanence. Its façades in Portland stone, the established London material for buildings of importance since the late early seventeenth century, the copper roof and the symmetry of the river façade appeared as a considered response to the call for a ‘new’ monumentality as it had been formulated by Sigfried Giedion, Josep Luis Sert and Fernand Léger in their ‘Nine Points on Monumentality’ in 1943. While the other buildings built for the festival were for the most part characterised by a loose, at times slightly naughty display of architectural gestures, even visitors not familiar with theories of composition must have understood intuitively that this edifice was a serious affair intended to outlast the life span of the exhibition.

That an attempt at monumentality was not the only effect the designers of the Royal Festival Hall had in mind would have appeared from the entrance arrangements and the routing inside the building. Rather than relying on the axial approach that was known from most precedents and which guided the positioning and composition of the volume and main elevation, the architects had planned for a series of entrances at two different levels, one on the east side at ground floor level and three accessed from the terrace deck running along the river front on the north side and along the western perimeter of the building. There was hardly a discernable hierarchy between these entrances. The

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118 Michael Frayn mentions eight-and-a-half million visitors of the central festival site on the South Bank, and eight million for the second site at Battersea, which had been designed as a fun fair.

119 Miles Glendinning suggests the name was an accident, a ‘bizarre administrative error’. The architect had proposed to name the building ‘Royal Belvedere’ in order to express the broader social and functional programme of the building. The council favoured ‘Queen Elizabeth Hall’, in commemoration of the first English queen of that name. By mistake this name was omitted in a letter to King George IV, who in turn suggested ‘Royal Festival Hall’, leaving the LCC no option but to accept. Glendinning (2003), p. 307
two doors on the north side might have seemed an obvious choice, but gave access to a restaurant, rather than the main public spaces inside the building. The entrance on the west side required a promenade along the raised deck and seemed to address the pedestrians walking along the railway bridge. If there was a main entrance, this would have been the set of six double doors at ground level on the east side, where there was also the opportunity for important guests arriving by car to be dropped off. Yet this position, in the manuals of Beaux-Arts planning, was one of the most unlikely places for the entrance of a public building.

Entering via the main entrance, visitors had the choice either to proceed to an exhibition space at ground level or to descend to the box office and cloakroom. From this underworld a wide flight of steps and a single staircase showed the way to a wide landing or intermediate platform. Only at this point revealed the interior its full size and it did so with some aplomb. Turning round and ascending further via one of two flights of steps, the visitors would reach a foyer, and the experience of contained spaces in the lower entrance section gave way to the overwhelming effect of a grand panorama of the interior and the world outside. This foyer did not only span the width of the building, but also allowed sweeping views in three directions, directly to the east and west, mediated via the restaurant towards the north.

The experience might be described as one of reaching the centre of a stage or a viewing platform, and this effect was further enhanced by the fact that the middle section of the ceiling rose up towards the north, leaving space for a mezzanine overlooking the foyer, like a loge or balcony overlooking the stalls and stage of an auditorium. Stairs, one pair leading up in two flights, another cantilevered couple winding their way up the voids on the west and east side, left no doubt that another important function was located above the foyer. In all other ways this space had to be understood as a large public interior with indeterminate functions, or a public concourse, a destination in itself, not the anteroom to something else. If anything this was a theatre, where all who entered were immediately actors and spectators, settling in lounge chairs.

overlooking the trains on the adjacent railway bridge, eating in the (inexpensive) restaurant, taking in an exhibition or merely strolling. Whereas outside, in the exhibition pavilions, visitors had to follow a prescribed parcours, in this interior there was a multitude of promenades, possibly yet not inevitably ending in the auditorium floating above and resting on spindly pilotis.

The foyer of the Festival Hall was impressive in its generosity, and has retained this quality. It was extraordinarily spacious, its details displaying a level of craftsmanship seldom found in a modern interior, and it presented the visitor with views of London no other building in the city did. The main contribution of the hall to the festival and to the South Bank, however, was a concept of a public building and a public interior which was open to all, which could be entered without precondition and which offered the privileges of its use to anyone, without distinction. The analogy between this foyer and a stage is a recurrent theme in articles analysing the design and its qualities. In the entry for the South Bank in The Buildings of England, his monumental survey of English architecture, the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner also offers the comparison with the theatrical spaces of Baroque churches. ‘Aesthetically the greatest achievement, and one which is without doubt internationally remarkable, is the management of inner space. Here, chiefly in the staircases, promenades, superimposed restaurants, etc. are a freedom and intricacy of flow, in their own way as thrilling as what we see in the Baroque churches of Germany and Austria.’

Adrian Forty, in an article published in 2001 and titled ‘The Royal Festival Hall – a ‘democratic space’?, identified the foyer as a ‘theatre for the welfare state’, offering its users ‘the opportunity to experience the altered perception of social relations that life in a social democracy promised’.

Robert Matthew and the plan for a London Acropolis

As we have seen, the initiative for the hall had its origin in the County of London Plan, although Abercrombie and Forshaw had given priority to a National Theatre that was to command the river from the bank. In March 1947 the London County Council commissioned the architect Charles Holden to work on a more precise plan based on the outlines given by the County of London plan. The plan to organise a large festival on the South Bank provided a supreme opportunity to push forward these ideas for a cultural centre.

Robert Matthew, an Edinburgh-born architect with almost no previous record in London, had been appointed chief architect a year earlier. Matthew was eager to establish the architect’s office of the council as something more than an agency involved in advising about permits and planning building output and to ‘convert the LCC’s vast apparatus of municipal building regulation into a powerhouse of modern architecture and planning, while safeguarding the politicians’ concern with quantity of production’. Matthew was therefore keen to use the momentum created by the festival and was supported in this by the council, and particularly its leader Isaac Hayward. Before the summer the architect was engaged
in discussions with the Arts Council about that agency’s support for a concert hall, which according to the instructions given by the council was to contain a concert hall for up to 5000 visitors, a chamber music hall for about a thousand and restaurants and other facilities.124 Matthew’s ambitions for the Festival hall were much broader than building a concert hall. For the South Bank he appears to have favoured a multi-purpose building and urged his staff member to make suggestions for the cultural centre. The list resulting from this process of enforced consultation included ‘swimming baths, gymnasium, arenas and stadia, a youth centre, a fun-fair, and even a planetarium’125, much of which had also been part of the Forshaw and Abercrombie proposals.

The new building was to be ‘a centre for musical activities of all kinds … with ample space round the Hall for walking and talking, eating and drinking, and sitting about quietly.’126 The ideas of the council were far more concrete and limited, and focussed on the concert hall itself. Presented with the opportunity of designing a large building on the site, Matthew must have made the pragmatic decision that this programme offered ample scope for realising at least a part of his ambitions, which nevertheless are clearly tangible in the interpretation of the brief.

It does not seem too far-fetched to relate Matthew’s concept of the South Bank as a new centre for London to the ideas of the Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes, particularly his vision of a ‘Valley section’ for a city, a well-planned urban region – ‘Attica’ – with a spiritual focus – the ‘Acropolis’ – at its centre.127 In Edinburgh Geddes had undertaken a large-scale renewal programme with the intention to transform the Old Town of the city into a symbolic and representational centre around an ‘outlook tower’ – an Acropolis for a modern city. In Cities in Evolution (a book published in 1915, and re-published in 1949 edited by Jacqueline Tyrwhitt who was also in charge of preparing the 1951 CIAM meeting at Hoddesdon) Geddes explicitly included the figure of the Acropolis in his vision of a spiritually balanced city. Such a city needed a ‘a true Acropolis’, a physical focus for the intellectual and cultural ambitions and expressions.128 In the 1940s Geddes’ demand, that ‘in our day we have again to develop the equivalents’ of the ‘supreme organs of the city’,129 was widely taken up. Tyrwhitt’s characterisation of the ‘core’ of the city as an ‘expression of the collective mind and spirit of the community’, and J. M. Richards’ definition of the city centre as ‘as the repository of the community’s collective memory’ illustrate the profound effect of the ideas of Geddes in post-war modern British town-planning.130 In Matthew’s case the connection with Geddes was direct and personal. He had been trained at the Edinburgh College of Art and his tutor had been Frank Mears, Geddes’s son-in-law. The concepts and methods of Geddes provided the framework for Matthew’s projects for Scottish towns and particularly his work as Patrick Abercrombie’s assistant for the Clyde Valley Plan in Glasgow of 1943-46.131 In London, Matthew found himself in charge of a building that had the potential of a spiritual and cultural centre as envisaged by Geddes, an ‘outlook tower over the reshaped London’, as Miles Glendinning has characterised the idea.132

124 ibid., p. 290
125 ibid., p. 289
126 quoted from ibid., p. 289
127 Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) was a biologist, zoologist and botanist by training. His plans for Edinburgh from the 1890s established Geddes’ reputation as a town planner and in the 1920s he was commissioned by the British mandate with projects for Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, of which the latter was executed.
128 Patrick Geddes, Cities in Evolution (edited and introduced by Jacqueline Tyrwhitt), (London: Williams and Norgate) 1949, p. 80
129 Ibid., p. 71
131 Glendinning (2003), p. 288
132 ibid., p. 289
London’s South Bank

A modern acropolis for the welfare state

Royal Festival Hall, foyer (2006/2008)
A modern acropolis for the welfare state

London’s South Bank

Royal Festival Hall
(2008)
South Bank, Thames promenade (2008)
Matthew used the summer break of 1947 to travel around Northern Europe and visit a series of concert halls. These included the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, Salle Pleyel in Paris, the Radiohus in Copenhagen and the Konserthuset in Gothenburg, which particularly impressed him. Its architect, Niels Einar Eriksson, gave Matthew a publication on this building that included a long section drawing of his building, which had been constructed in 1935. Matthew had been to Sweden before, in the spring of 1945, and had then seen Sven Markelius’ project for Stockholms Folkets Hus and, confirming his already established interest in Scandinavian modern architecture, was probably very interested in the particular solutions for handling the section with a concert hall on top of a public foyer which both Swedish projects presented.

Having secured the job for his department Matthew was in need to make sure his staff were actually capable of producing the building, not only in time, but also of formulating an artistically appropriate response to this opportunity. The LCC department at this stage was not capable of responding to the opportunity. The architects inherited by Matthew when he had joined the department in 1946 were mostly trained in the Beaux-Arts tradition and believed in the ‘pre-Modernist hierarchy of decorum’, which had informed the detailed designs in the County of London Plan. In July 1948 Matthew appointed Leslie Martin as his deputy architect, who put together a team of young architects, some barely out of school, to work on the scheme, who were given a remarkable amount of freedom.

One member of the new Concert Hall Section within the architect was Peter Moro, a German émigré and former member of Tecton and MARS who quickly became responsible for a large range of detailed design decisions, and is therefore generally listed as co-designer of the building.

The building had to fit into the master plan by Charles Holden, which meant that its footprint was fixed and limited. The plans for the surrounding festival site, which by the autumn of 1948 were taking shape, also relied on the outlines given by Holden. Ignoring these constraints, probably in the assumption that the Holden plan was not going to be strictly enforced, Matthew’s sketches were for a fan-shaped auditorium for up to 3,500 people, the smaller hall situated next to it and a restaurant pointing like a finger towards the river. As it turned out, this layout was much too space-consuming and the architects had to redesign the scheme radically.

There are different versions of what happened at this point. John McKean’s monograph firmly establishes Leslie Martin as the originator of the definitive solution, the auditorium lifted above the foyer or ‘egg-in-the-box’, as it is often called. Other accounts suggests that it was Matthew’s knowledge of the examples from Gothenburg and Stockholm, which led to this design solution. He is cautious in his attribution, writing that the ‘key design questions … were taken jointly by Matthew and the newly appointed Martin’.

In the monograph published on the occasion of the completion of the Festival Hall, Clough Williams-Ellis, an English architect who had been Matthew’s mentor in his first months in the capital, lists both men, the experienced

133 ibid., p. 291
134 ibid., p. 291
135 ibid., p. 286
136 ibid., p. 299
137 see the plan of ‘scheme 1’, dated 30 August 1948, in Glendinning (2003), p. 324
138 Glendinning (2003), p. 298
Festival Hall, section and foyer level plans

Festival Hall, stalls entrance level plan
London's South Bank
A modern acropolis for the welfare state

Festival Hall, axonometric drawing

Festival Hall, restaurant level (top) and auditorium balcony level (bottom) plans
senior architect Edwin Williams as co-ordinator of the works and Peter Moro as Associate Architect, stating also that Matthew operated "as the alert, imperturbable conductor ..." 139 Whoever was responsible for the decision, lifting the auditorium allowed for realising the foyer in its eventual central position and opening this public interior to all sides. It was in this form that it assumed its realised form as the 'social foyer' 140, which so admired by Pevsner and Forty.

The comparison with Gothenburg, an example that was also singled out in the 1951 Festival Hall monograph, 141, is particularly revealing. Here the auditorium, a box internally clad in wood and situated on the first floor of the building, sits on top of a foyer envisaged as a 'interior avenue', one continuous space extending from the square into the building. 142 This arrangement as such was not new; the auditorium of the Neues Gewandhaus in Leipzig – one of the buildings with which Eriksen was intimately familiar – had been elevated to provide space for foyer space underneath. In Gothenburg, however, the proposal of the raised concert hall allowed two concepts of the music hall as a space of social organisation to be combined. Einarsson's interior avenue, beginning with the steps outside the entrance and carried through a narrowed passage between ticket offices marking the transition from the square to the interior towards a wall at the back hiding a room for chamber concerts, establishes a sense of continuity between the interior and the surrounding city. In doing so, it reflects the architect's intention to provide a concert hall, which according to a local newspaper was 'truly democratic' and gave expression to the idea of an open society held by large sections of the middle classes in Sweden. 143 At the same time the auditorium on the first floor retains its role as an 'inner sanctum', a space offering the reward of the musical experience introduced by the strain of having to move upwards on the stairs bent around the back of the hall. The entire sequence of spaces leading into the delicate wood-panelled auditorium allows the building to be understood as a space inhabited by an association of equals united by their desire to improve themselves through the experience of the performance. With its modern planning and beautifully crafted architectural detailing, and in consequently rejecting the socially differentiated foyer and access arrangements of nineteenth century models, the concert hall in Gothenburg represented the ideal of a society of equal and independent individuals.

Elements of these ideas are echoed in the arrangement of the Royal Festival Hall in London. Here, like in Gothenburg, the auditorium is raised and its access involves an upward movement towards the auditorium high above the crowd ambling around the foyer. Its raised position lends the concert hall an exclusive character and the openness of the foyer space, balconies and stairs enhances the detachment of the space inside the volume from the large and highly transparent space underneath. The contrast between the foyer and the hall might be seen to reveal the specific conception of a sequence of spaces for a variety of audiences, ranging from the curious passer-by and flâneur entering the building while strolling around the South Bank to the concert audience in search for a more specific and concentrated experience. While the foyer with its entrances on all sides and glass boundaries seems to be informed by a concept of a thoroughly accessible public space, the concert hall asserts the presence of another, more demanding, idea of a high culture which needs to be discovered and requires commitment. With this arrangement, the Festival Hall, despite the emphasis on transparency and perceptivity, could be seen to exemplify the prevailing set of ideas about the role of state-administered culture: allowing an enlarged public access to forms of fine arts and (predominantly classical) music defined as worthy the support of the state and its agencies.

Material wealth for a Palace for the People

The solution of the raised auditorium offered the architects the opportunity to rework the concept of a room for performances of classical music into a totally different proposal. The large public interior resulting from this operation allowed a free use by the visitors to the Festival, and the South Bank in general, as well as the potentially more exclusive audience of the hall itself. The emphasis on the public character of the new building informed the internal organisation and the extensive circulation system of the Festival Hall, but also its detailing and use of materials. Delicate white fins covering the light fittings define the slope of the auditorium, creating a serial pattern on the soffit above the foyer. Most other surfaces are of white plaster, offset by the patterned grey-green carpet laid out on stairs and landing.

Against the blank surfaces, the three-dimensional elements, almost without exception serving as circulation devices, appear as abstract, yet recognisable shapes. Balustrades are identically treated throughout the building and detailed in plate glass held in position by thin bronze uprights. As if to counterbalance the abstract treatment of the stairs and studied 'immaterial' detailing of the balustrades, the railings appear as thin wooden lines bending their way up along the stairs and adding graphic detail on the landings or platforms. They emphasise the effect of the overpowering of the space apparently entirely devoted to walking about, of promenading for the sake of changing views or position, rather than reaching a specific destination. On the other hand the gradual change from the picturesque arrangements on the lower levels to the symmetry of the access to the auditorium might imply a certain hierarchy: as one approaches the most functionally defined space of the building, the organisation of the visitors' movement changes to a formal pattern, designed to serve the equally symmetrical concert hall. The playful routing, addressing the visitor as an individual entering the building and enjoying its limitless opportunities, makes way for the experience of a formal, yet essentially egalitarian collectivity, designed to offer equal access and acoustic pleasure to every member of the audience, overruling the individualistic concerns operating in the lower parts of the building.

The Festival Hall had been designed as a steel structure, its cladding disguising the delicate nature of the main construction. As the design progressed it became clear, however, that the large amounts of steel...
The main foyer. The dominating form is always the auditorium itself.

Gordon Cullen, scene in the Festival Hall foyer
required for a building of this size were not available, particularly as the
impending British involvement in the Korean war meant that metal,
once again and only four years after the world war, would be used for
military purposes. The building had therefore to be re-designed to be
executed in in-situ concrete. With the special assistance of Morrison a
delivery of Portland Stone could be secured for the north, east and west
façades. Elsewhere use of materials remained a matter of concern, too.
Peter Moro noted that decisions were often unexpected consequences of
the scarcity of the post-war period, noting that ‘rationing meant that it
was easier to get cherry veneer than steel joists’.

The circumstances under which the team had to operate and the
need for constant improvisation were visible in the craftsmanship of
the material solutions. Since standard solutions were not available the archi-
tects needed to design the entire building in detail and to ask interior
and furniture designers to draw everything from music stands to chairs
and tables for the restaurant, mock-ups of which could be provided by a
craftsmen working within the LCC. It is this extraordinary level of
attention to detail that allows another comparison with the Gothenburg
Konsert. In both buildings the use of wooden panelling inside
the auditorium was justified as an appropriate choice stemming from
acoustic requirements. Yet the material also introduces an element of
decoration in the otherwise abstract architectural treatment, and
provides a softly variable, warm-coloured background for the few orna-
mental features. In the London auditorium the wooden surfaces frame a
series of balcony boxes arranged in four alternating rows on top of each other – Le Corbusier is quoted as calling them ‘a good joke’ – and the single royal box, apparently the only place in the hall where acoustic
qualities were compromised.

In its application of material and spare ornament the Festival Hall
showed itself indebted to the sensibilities of Scandinavian modern
architecture, or Swedish ‘Empiricism’ as it was dubbed by contem-
porary, rather than emphasising the qualities of the abstract spaces,
surfaces and details are allowed to be specific and soften what might
otherwise be perceived as too austere by the audience. Pevsner expressed
his reservations about some of the details and decorative features of the
Festival Hall, particularly in the auditorium where, he writes, ‘the variety of
motifs is perhaps carried a little too far.’ Williams-Ellis, however, praised this approach and the fact that the Festival Hall had ‘shunned
the extremes’. In his judgement, which anticipates the argument for an
‘Englishness of English Art’ that Pevsner himself was to propose a
few years later, the building achieved a compromise between the cold
‘French’ rationalism of the Salle Pleyel in Paris and the unmitigated
‘Italian’ exuberance of the Teatro all Scala in Milan, showing instead ‘its
own unaffected English self, as frankly innocent of conscious and austere
superiority as of too opulent display – an unaffected, friendly, courteous
gentleman.

The reception of the Festival Hall

As a project invested with great status the Festival Hall was opened with
the usual pomp and circumstance, the inaugural concert on 3 May 1951
taking the form of a celebration of ‘music of and for England’, and offici-
ated over by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The musical programme
featuring ‘Land of Hope and Glory’, ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Rule, Britannia’
could hardly be seen as an expression of humanist egalitarian values, but
rather as a celebration of British Empire.

The public reception of the Festival Hall was generally positive,
even enthusiastic. Among the few dissident voices criticising the
building were the architect Albert Richardson, a proponent of monu-
mental classicism, and the conductor Thomas Beecham who wondered
‘whether in 350 years there has ever been erected on the soil of this
grand old country a more repellent, a more ugly and a more monstrous
structure.’

Otherwise the design received the highest acclaim. The politicians
who had been involved in its creation were duly, and unashamedly,
proud of the achievement. In his foreword to the official monograph
Isaac Hayward notes the uniqueness of the hall, ‘the only building of
such magnitude and importance to have been completed in London
since war began in 1919’, and praises the quality of its design as ‘worthy
of the unique occasion of its inception as well as the longer-term use
for which it is mainly intended.’ In a special publication in the Times
Herbert Morrison extends this and presents the achievement as great
effort that ‘will give us new kind of prestige, such as France and
certain other countries have held for many generations’.
The paper itself echoed the self-congratulating tone of the two politicians
and expected the building to ‘serve the highest spiritual purposes of music
in our national life’.

The celebratory tone extended to the architectural criticism in the
official monograph. The main article by Williams-Ellis introduces the
Royal Festival with a notable sense of drama: ‘In a world darkened
by doubt and danger a great work dedicated to the arts of peace has
valiantly arisen.’

Other critics, however, echoed the self-congratulating tone of the two politicians and expected the building to ‘serve the highest spiritual purposes of music in our national life’. The celebratory tone extended to the architectural criticism in the official monograph. The main article by Williams-Ellis introduces the Royal Festival with a notable sense of drama: ‘In a world darkened by doubt and danger a great work dedicated to the arts of peace has valiantly arisen.’ Other critics, however, echoed the self-congratulating tone of the two politicians and expected the building to ‘serve the highest spiritual purposes of music in our national life’.

The difference between the bright, well-made and modern interior
and the gresyness which characterised much of London in the early 1950s
was intended to create a sense of optimism and, at least for many of the
visitors of the building, it seems to have succeeded in this. The critic
Bernard Levin observed that concert audiences were reluctant, after
the end of a performance, to leave the building and its ‘lavish use of space in
its interior, the beauty of shining new wood, metal, marble, the explosive
shock of the brand-new auditorium’, and face the outside world with
The revolutionary character of ideas in modern architecture has long been acknowledged. Summerson wrote:

"The Festival Hall shares the two-way character of its less substantial and now vanished contemporaries at South Bank. It is void of hackneyed mannerisms, yet it could have been designed in 1938. Its original and splendid conception – the insulated auditorium within a partly diaphanous outer shell – produced a building of high distinction, even though it never quite arrived at the decisive, integral result which such a conception seemed to promise. What the Festival Hall achieved, however, is of inestimable importance. It was the first major building in Britain to be designed within the orbit of modern architectural ideas. It has proved to not only an overwhelming functional success, but has demonstrated in its open planning and continuity of spatial effect the deep significance of the revolution in architectural ideas of the past forty years."

Summerson’s observations may explain why, despite the general expression of admiration for the achievement and in spite of the fact that it was greeted with consensual applause, the Festival Hall had no followers of significance. Reyner Banham analysed this contrast between the acclaim for the building among architects and the fact that the building invested with such praise was hardly instrumental for the architectural production of the following decades, a discontinuity that is most notable in the designs for the projects on the South Bank itself. In his 1967 radio broadcast, delivered when the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery were about to be opened, Banham, looking at the whole ensemble of buildings on the South Bank, gave expression to the general admiration for the Festival Hall describing it as ‘…one of the most deeply felt, not to say overwrought, buildings in recent British history."

While pointing to the specific role of the building in popularising modern architecture in Britain, he observes that the architects of the Festival Hall had achieved ‘in the fifties the kind of building they would have liked to design in the thirties …’, suggesting the 1951 project had in some way made up for all the time lost in the previous two decades. Banham describes the design as ‘restrainedly academic in its planning, ingenious its sectional organization, technically complex, and unmistakably continental in its choice of style’ and identifies the architecture of the Festival Hall as a late British triumph of pre-war Modernism, emphasising its debt to the interwar work of Le Corbusier but not mentioning the Scandinavian influences. In his final analysis, in the Festival Hall “… thanks to sympathetic scholarship, the most derivative phase of English modernism was laid to rest with a flourish of erudition as apt as a Latin epigram."

Banham’s assessment seems correct. Despite its positive reception the building remained a one-off. Neither the architectural approach, nor the programmatic concept found much following. This is obviously explained by the exceptional nature of the circumstances of the initiative for the hall and its origins in a concentrated effort of the national British government and a powerful local authority, at a time when allocating large amounts of money to a building for culture constituted a major assault on the already strained public finances of the country. In any case, it was to take almost a decade before new building initiatives for culture were seriously considered in Britain, leaving the Festival Hall as a unique example of public architecture among the housing schemes and office buildings that were the priority of the day.

The hall retained its particular status as a symbol of the welfare state consensus, even when the results of modern town planning and design were facing violent criticism. Indeed, as Miles Glendinning has observed, the building was one of ‘was one of the few large Modern Movement buildings to escape the public vilifications of the 1970s and 1980s and right up to today [the early twenty-first century] a high collective rhetoric of praise is still applied to it by non-architects such as journalists and politicians’. As a building that had not attracted significant controversy and that was invested with ‘consensual prestige’, the Royal Festival Hall was beyond criticism, an achievement that no subsequent development seemed to be able to match in the eyes of the general public, but that also appeared to offer few points from which any subsequent project could easily continue.
Cultural uplifting for connoisseurs of good living

Two aspects in the presentation of the Festival Hall in the monograph published on behalf of the LCC on the occasion of the opening deserve particular attention, as they reveal a significant ambiguity about what type of audience was to be addressed by the building. The book is illustrated by a series of drawings by Gordon Cullen showing the use of the foyers and restaurants. The drawings accompany Williams-Ellis’s text presenting the hall not merely as a concert hall, but as a multi-purpose building addressing a broad range of users and with a large degree of flexibility. In the foreword Isaac Hayward mentions that ‘the building is much more than a concert hall’, and Williams-Ellis maintains that ‘its several parts can function perfectly as independent organs, fully serviced as it were by the heart and lungs of the main body – yet isolated from each other as regards right and sound.’ It is through this flexibility that the Festival Hall becomes a ‘cultural centre’, offering an extensive variety of attractions to the citizens of the city, treating ‘rich and poor with the same good manners’. Under its roof ‘a gala concert, play or ballet, a dance, meeting of a learned society, a picture exhibition and a banquet’ can be accommodated. With a body so adaptable, with such a range of cultural and social activities so agreeably provided for, in short, with so many direct points of contact with the life of London – the vigorous life of the Royal Festival Hall itself would seem to be very thoroughly assured. Williams-Ellis’s description of the building’s flexibility is underpinned by diagrams illustrating the combinations of independent use of the foyers, the restaurants, the auditorium and a string of meeting rooms surrounding the concert hall on the third floor.

Williams-Ellis also emphasizes the temporary nature of the arrangements, and especially the planning for a small theatre or concert hall – 750, which was projected for the unfinished south end of the building. This space, he asserts, would be at the ‘disposal of amateurs’ dramatic societies, experimental groups, cinema clubs’, a direct reference to the ideal of an open cultural centre that Matthew had envisaged in the early stage of the planning process. It was through the realisation of the smaller hall and a separate exhibition gallery, taking the form of a suite of rooms with 7200 feet of floor space, that the Festival Hall would become a ‘real centre of the arts, a new meeting place for intelligent citizens interested not only in music but in other things as well’. Williams-Ellis, who in this passage may have acted as an interpreter of the concerns of the design team – and particularly

177 William-Ellis (1951), p. 7
178 Ibid., p. 27
179 Norman Englebach, interviewed by Louise Brodie, 3 August/19 September 2001, British Library National Sound Archive, BL, NWA, C 467/63/02
179 T. S. Eliot, Notes towards the definition of culture, (London: Faber) 1926 (original publication) 1948, p. 31
180 Matthew – that the second phase of the Festival Hall would drop off the politicians’ agenda, is adamant that ‘without these later additions, the programme originally laid down is incomplete...’

The multi-purpose concept of the programme and the inclusion of amateurs and experimental groups suggest that the designers of the Festival Hall took the ideal of a building addressing a large audience in ways unknown in conventional cultural institutions seriously. There is, however, some ambiguity as to who might have been envisaged as the ‘intelligent citizens’ mentioned in the monograph. Were they ordinary Londoners, including members of the working classes, who were to improve themselves through the offerings of state-provisioned culture, much as the Third (Radio) Programme of the BBC was intended as part of a cultural and educational campaign? In the case of the radio programme this intention was clearly and explicitly stated by the corporation’s director general who presented the structure of three levels of provision, guiding the listener towards a desired state of cultural sophistication; the declared ambition ‘was to lend listeners from the Light Programme to the Home [programme], and from the Home to the Third until eventually the Home and the Light should withdraw away leaving the Third over all’. In the case of the Festival Hall, Williams-Ellis suggests, something similar might happen. When describing the restaurants, he expresses the hope that these may reach ‘culinary excellence’, attracting ‘connoisseurs of good living’ through the building’s architectural distinction and fine cooking in the restaurants, ‘being seduced into paying serious attention to the fine music so temptingly offered them under the same roof’. The passage reveals that the intended audience was certainly not limited to the worthy, deprived, members of the working class. In fact, with the exception of the statement about the ‘good manners’ of the hall, no passage in the description suggests an explicit intention that the hall’s audience should realise an experience of classlessness. The reference to the culinary offerings – which at any rate were fairly unrealistically presented under the same roof – suggests that the broad audience addressed by the hall would in fact be dominated by the middle classes on whose support the Labour government and its programme of cultural and social change had to rely. Cullen’s illustrations are even more revealing: they show the foyer populated by middle-aged couples clearly belonging to the upper echelons of the middle classes, the women wearing evening dress and the men suits or dinner jacket. The patrons of the restaurant, whom Williams wishes to lure into engaging with culture by offering them ‘culinary excellence’, are shown parading in the dining room in fur coats and black suits, and the women depicted as enjoying the terraces and gardens outside wear the latest Dior fashion from Paris – at this time that clothing was still rationed. Despite the egalitarian rhetoric, the Festival Hall seemed to have retained at least a hint of the culture of ‘Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final,... beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar’, which had defined English culture for T.S. Eliot.
On the other hand contemporary commentators consistently emphasised the classlessness of the new hall, noting that on the opening night one of the workers invited to attend the concert was spotted wearing his working clothes. This observation seems, however, to have been induced by a fair amount of idealising; according to other accounts the workmen did not actually go to the event, exactly because they did not own the proper clothes. Generally the public was only admitted two hours before the start of a concert, and only if in possession of a ticket, ushers controlling all entrances to the foyer.\footnote{181}

In its 1945 manifesto the Labour party had stated that ‘the provision of concert halls, modern libraries, theatres and suitable civic centres’ would give to the British people ‘full access to the great heritage of culture of this nation’.\footnote{182} With its emphasis on openness and visual transparency the Royal Festival Hall was clearly informed by this idea of culture as a part of the egalitarian programme of the welfare state. Like other sectors of society, culture was to be organised and funded by the state, making the good things of life customarily enjoyed by the leisure classes available to everyone.\footnote{183} Both the terms in which the Festival Hall is described and the depiction of the imagined audience suggest, however, that the definition of culture as something traded down from an elite down to the ordinary citizen was firmly in place, and that the building was to be an instrument in this process, the direction of which was predicted and would in due course lead towards educating large audiences to appreciate the ‘fine’ arts.

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\footnote{181} Mullins (2007), p. 58/59

\footnote{182} Let us face the future – Declaration of Labour policy for the consideration of the nation, published by the Labour Party, April 1945, p. 9

\footnote{183} Sinfield in Fyrth (1995), p. 183
Christoph Grafe

People’s Palaces

Technocracy and cultural reform

A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

Queen Elizabeth Hall, foyer (1967)

Hayward Gallery (1968)
A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

p. 252
Hayward Gallery (top and bottom left, 1968); Queen Elizabeth Hall, auditorium (bottom left, 1967)
Technocracy and cultural reform

A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall exterior (1967)
Chapter 5

Technocracy and cultural reform
A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

Queen Elizabeth Hall exterior (1967)
5.1 Introduction

In the summer of 1968 readers of the *Architectural Review* were confronted with the photograph of a curious group portrait with ladies.¹ The men were wearing smart suits with narrow legs of the sixties and white shirts marking them as urban professionals exploring the delicate line between respectable convention and subdued self-expression, and the women dark two-pieces. The figurants are scattered across the large space with its bright, hard floor and concrete ceiling, occupying round dark leather benches that appear to float in the space, or walk about or stand in groups as if waiting for an event. Those sitting choose to perch on the edge of the seat as if to express that they, too, only mean to rest temporarily, meanwhile entertaining an uneasy conversation across the considerable distances between the seating elements.

The *tableau* has an air of improbability, reminiscent of a corporate lobby, of the sort depicted in Jacques Tati’s *Playtime* movie of 1967 where everyone is continuously engaged in some aimless motion or gathering in endless waiting rooms on plastic leather seats violently rejecting attempts at a comfortable body position.² On closer inspection the seats in the depicted space reveal considerable design effort: the leather cushions rest on transparent Perspex circles enhancing their appearance as dark soft saucepans floating in the lower regions of this space. Visually detached from the floor, the custom-made seats are shown as elements alien to the environment for which they are designed. With their shiny dark – and soft – surfaces they might well be filled with air, in the fashion of inflatable furniture. Against the visibly hard surfaces of floor, ceiling and walls, they form the sole evidence of physical comfort in the otherwise distinctly austere interior. With its concrete columns hitting the soffit like giant mushrooms and the triangular acoustic elements suspended from the ceiling, the architectural treatment of the foyer evokes associations with waiting lounges of airports or the interiors of spaces stations in Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001*, released in 1968.

The interior overlooks a river lined by festive garlands of light bulbs forming dotted strings of bright spots in the dark nightscape and, in the background, a grid of lit windows in the palatial buildings on the other bank. The panoramic windows offering this view are set into a curiously shaped frame, cast aluminium of monumental proportions. The corners where the thin mullions meet the frame are rounded off, as if to emphasise the nature of the whole element as one very large screen with openings, the view framed by soft lines reflecting the brightness of the interior on the rough dark metal surface. Despite the enormous size of the openings, the windows have an emphatic material presence that appears to contradict the gesture of eliminating the difference between inside and the exterior, as it is associated with glass in modern architecture. Rather they seem to make a statement about the character of the lobby as an *interior* – firmly inside the shell of the building – with the view of the city as filmic background, a sort of slowly moving wallpaper or perhaps a TV screen.

¹ The photograph was published in the *Architectural Review* no. 144, July 1968.
² Tati’s film, incidentally, was released in France in 1967.
The photograph depicts the foyer of the Queen Elizabeth Hall (and Purcell Room). Looking at it side by side with Gordon Cullen’s interior sketches of the Royal Festival Hall makes for an interesting, if slightly unsettling comparison. Cullen had shown the interior of the foyer and the restaurants as a stage for socialising and public display, a series of spaces populated by people enjoying themselves or engaged in polite and engaged conversations. The depiction of the scenes in the various public spaces in the Festival Hall may have contradicted the claim of a classless concert hall. Yet it certainly provided an illustration of a building that was successful in its social functioning. Compared with the apparently innocent pleasure that characterises these scenes and their rendering by Cullen, the photograph of the 1960s Queen Elizabeth Hall is remarkable. There is a distinct air of artificiality and strangeness that almost fills the room. Edgily holding onto the leather benches, their soles firmly on the white floor, their backs tensely bent forward, the sitters appear preoccupied with positioning themselves in their environment. It is as if they expressed some tacit resistance to their surroundings, by not accepting the proposal of a notionally informal seating arrangement and instead choosing a posture that would not be out of place in an eighteenth century ante-room.

The messages emitted from the photograph are conflicting. The architectural treatment of the interior suggests an atmosphere of transience. The exposed concrete of the columns and beams, by contrast, seem to contradict this reading, instead introducing a sense of roughness and monumentality that is somewhat at odds with the effect of the floor and the enormous acoustic elements. Neither the slick brightness of the floor surface, nor the nakedness of the concrete is part of the conventional repertoire for the foyer of a concert hall or, indeed, any other type of cultural institution. If anything, the image of this interior communicates an outright rejection of these conventions, in avoiding not only the material and light effects characteristic of older concert halls or theatres, but also their modernised version as it had been explored in the Festival Hall.

Externally the architectural appearance of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall provides equal reason for curiosity. To the uninformed onlooker the building must appear as distinctly odd. The arrangement of two explicitly public institutions in solid, concrete boxes was extreme, even in a period in which concrete was the preferred material for public buildings. These buildings are not just made of concrete – the material appears to be used in order to hide virtually every aspect of what is inside, as if completely to disguise the public and cultural nature of the building. What remains are large solid volumes, footbridges wrapped around them and spreading out towards the surroundings.

Why did the programme for a concert hall and a gallery acquire this particular form? How are we to understand their particular architectural appearance, which has nothing in common with the precedent of the Festival Hall? What were the calculations informing a design that in almost every respect violates expectations as to how a public building...
dedicated to musical performances and showing works of art? Which were the assumptions about the arrangements of society and the role of culture within these and which ideas developed within the architectural discipline materialised in this particular design?

These questions might be obvious ones in any examination of a building of significance. In the case of the Hayward Gallery they acquire a particular poignancy, given the nature of the design itself, but also when viewed in the context of the post-war debates on the development of the welfare state and the shift in the objectives of its cultural policies. In Chapter 2 we have seen that in the late 1950s and early 1960s the post-war emphasis of these policies on making the cultural heritage accessible to the population was fundamentally questioned. In Britain it took another half decade until the debates about the definitions of culture and its role within a developed consumer society were officially absorbed into policy, with the 1965 white paper *A Policy for the Arts.*

The question is whether or not elements of these debates had a bearing on the programmatic conception of the second phase of building on the South Bank, and if they did, how this might be identified in particular functional or formal decisions in the design of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall (with the Purcell Room).³

Although the planning of the new buildings, which at the time were collectively referred to as ‘South Bank Arts Centre’ had its origin in the Abercrombie and Forshaw plan, the main period of design activity can be identified as 1959-61. By this time more a decade had passed since the Festival Hall had been designed. The construction period – 1961-1968 – spanned the debates about the role of culture in mass society and the emergence of cultural studies, the development of the ‘permissive’ society of the mid 1960s, the beginning of Britain’s de-industrialisation and the first stirrings of protest against the Vietnam War towards the end of the decade. Planned in the last years of the government of Harold Macmillan, at a time that Britain was both enjoying a – deceptive, as it turned out – ‘economic miracle’⁴ and negotiating its new role as a post-colonial society, the building was inaugurated while the Paris student revolt filled the headlines; three days after the opening event at the Hayward Gallery Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the leaders of the French movement, was shipped to the country for twenty-four hours to record a broadcast for the BBC.⁵ The Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, in other words, were launched into a city and a society that had undergone very deep and significant changes since the design period. The question arising from this is how the time lag between the inception of the project in the mid 1950s, the design period in the early 1960s and the inauguration in towards the end of the decade affected the reception of the buildings and their design.

In order to understand how the argument was formulated for the new buildings, and eventually a ‘Metropolitan Arts Centre’ (as it was also called), I looked for evidence of the gestation of the idea within the LCC, and between the local authority and the Arts Council. In this process, which took several years, Isaac Hayward emerged as the main actor, not only as London’s most powerful politician, but also as the

³ The nomenclature remains difficult. Both buildings acquired their own names on completion, but were at the same time referred to as the ‘South Bank Arts Centre’. To make things more complicated, there are not one, but two concert halls, if one counts the smaller Purcell Room as a separate facility.

⁴ Kenneth Morgan described the mood in the country as ‘confident. … The sense of national decline, even humili-ation at the time of Suez drifted away. … the land appeared to be thriving and self-confident, with Macmil-lan’s curious ability to bridge old and new values highly appropriate and symbolic. … Underlying the surface of growth was a pattern whereby Britain had steadily lagged behind …’. Kenneth Morgan, *The People’s Peace – British History 1945-1989,* (Oxford: OUP) 1990, 193.

⁵ ‘Cohn-Bendit in Britain for 24 hours’, *The Times,* 12 June 1968.
The development of the second stage of the South Bank, though envisaged by Abercrombie and Forshaw, and later Matthew and Martin, started very slowly. The new Conservative government elected into office in 1951 showed no particular interest in taking up the project of developing the South Bank that had its origins in the reform agenda of Labour. As advocates of a strict control of public spending after six years of Labour's alleged financial irresponsibility, the Tories presented themselves as guardians of the national treasury and were less inclined towards committing money to cultural institutions than their predecessors.

The change in the political climate in the early 1950s is reflected in the long period of inactivity on the South Bank and indecision about the future use of the site. In the years following the demolition of the festival pavilions various ideas were floated and dismissed, and by the mid 1950s the new (additional) headquarters of the Shell oil corporation emerged as the only tangible result of continuous, intensive negotiations between the London authorities and the national government. The delay in the development of the site reflected the profound conflicts of interest between the two major players, decisions being complicated by the competing claims of a number of governmental departments, cultural institutions and corporations.

The Forshaw and Abercrombie plans had included proposals for the National Theatre, a youth centre and sports facilities. Despite the size of the area it was clear that not all of these ideas could be realised, and the planning for a National Sports and Youth Centre on the site of the former Crystal Palace in South London, in any case, meant that this part of the programme disappeared from the brief for the riverbank. There was, however, the stated ambition to complete the Festival Hall and turn it into a ‘real’ cultural centre, with a second concert hall and exhibition spaces, all of which needed to be fitted onto the site. The existing plans for a National Theatre and the prospect of a substantial enlargement of the Festival Hall, but also the precedent of the festival, created a context for a National Theatre and the prospect of a substantial enlargement of the area it was clear that not all of these ideas could be realised, and the competing claims of a number of governmental departments, cultural institutions and corporations.

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to make London the Athens of the world. By using the National Theatre to house a Summer Festival we could very likely attract large sums in foreign exchange, which will help our balance of payments and add yet another invisible export. 9

Hayward seems not to have replied to Lyttleton’s letter. 10 We can therefore only speculate how the Labour politician may have viewed this instrumentalisation of a cultural initiative for realising the post- or neo-imperial ambitions of its author. In any case, the letter (written in 1953, the year after the Suez crisis) remained a fairly isolated document in the general post-war correspondence about the National Theatre, which one of its earliest campaigners, the actor and theatre director Harley Granville-Barker had envisaged as ‘a popular institution, making a large appeal to the whole community’. 11 Neither do these desires for building national shrines for a lost empire appear in any of the other projects on the South Bank.

At the same time Lyttleton’s note may be taken as evidence that the absence of an overriding general statement setting out a broad cultural agenda for the institutions on the site left room for speculation of this sort. Perhaps it is an illustration of a real or perceived need to frame the realisation of cultural buildings in London in the context of other agendas, economic as well as political, in the discussions with a Conservative government and to argue for the beneficial effects these buildings were to have for the financial balance of the country or the status of the city.

The letter may have been a reaction to the difficulties that the National Theatre had to face in the long history of its planning and realisation. 12 As one of first buildings projected for the South Bank – the origins of the initiative went back to the early twentieth century – the National Theatre was particularly affected by the recurrent changes in the plans for the site. From being the centrepiece of the Forshaw and Abercrombie plan it became the junior partner of the Festival Hall, squeezed into the space between the concert hall and Waterloo Bridge. A foundation stone for a building designed by Brian O’Rourke that had been laid by Queen Elizabeth (the later Queen mother), had to be relocated in 1954 to comply with a revised plan, which proposed relocating the theatre in Jubilee Gardens, between County Hall and Hungerford Bridge and combining it with a new opera house. It was for this site that the architect Denys Lasdun started to make a series of proposals in 1963, which were abandoned again when it was finally decided to locate the theatre on yet another, definitive site west of Waterloo Bridge where the building was eventually realised and opened in 1976 after almost four decades of planning.

Compared to the aspirations expressed for the National Theatre, the early beginnings of the initiatives for the other cultural institutions on the South Bank, which eventually were to lead to the combination of an art gallery and a concert hall in one new building, were comparatively modest. Neither the project for the gallery nor that for an auditorium had a long history. Rather they can be described as relatively new ideas that took shape in the aftermath of the Festival of Britain and as products of the newly established institutional framework for cultural provision after 1945.

The idea of building an exhibition gallery had its roots in a programme of travelling exhibitions organised by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), the predecessor of the Arts Council during the war years. While the LCC was still considering what could be done with the site of the 1951 Festival of Britain the Arts Council had launched the idea of using one of the existing temporary buildings – the Lion and Unicorn Pavilion – for a gallery where travelling exhibitions could be shown. The discussions between the Arts Council and the LCC failed to lead to a concrete result as it became clear that the pavilion would have to be altered significantly in order for it to be used as a permanent art space.

In December 1952, soon after the idea of re-using the pavilion had been abandoned, Ernest Pooley, the chairman of the Arts Council, approached Isaac Hayward directly and announced that his institution wished to ‘renew its proposal for the inclusion on the South Bank of an Art Gallery expressly designed to display the many important visiting exhibitions we bring to London from abroad.’ 13 Pooley envisaged this new gallery as ‘the British equivalent of the Orangerie, which accommodates the numerous international exhibitions in Paris’, pointing out that London had no gallery of this kind. Visiting exhibitions could only be held in the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery, forcing these institutions to dismantle part of their permanent collections in order to make room for the visitors to temporary events. ‘This state of things is thoroughly unsatisfactory and will remain so until London has an institution especially designed for this important function.’ 14

Leslie Martin eagerly adopted Pooley’s ideas, stating in a note written in December 1952 for Hayward that “… it is most desirable that any Exhibition Galleries for the Arts Council should be on the South Bank site, and in close proximity to the Festival Hall.” 15 Martin mentions the plans for the Festival Hall extension and a scheme for a ‘Government Conference Centre’, later referred to as ‘hospitality centre’, which was projected for the site to the east of the Festival Hall. The note included a reference to the idea of a ‘high level link between these two buildings’, adding that the gallery as is proposed by the Arts Council might be a
suitable building to form the necessary link' and warmly supports further discussion on this matter with the Arts Council. 16

Already in 1951 the London County Council had committed itself to completing the Festival Hall by adding a recital room on the unfinished south end of the building. In the preface to the book published by the council on the occasion of the opening the musical director had also added another consideration. In what could have been interpreted as a veiled criticism of the acoustic qualities of the new hall, the conductor Malcom Sargent had expressed the hope that one day the Queen's Hall, a late Victorian concert hall that had been destroyed in the Blitz of 1941, would be rebuilt. 17 With this remark, slightly out of context in a Festschrift celebrating the new hall, the director voiced a concern that seemed to have been shared by other performers. 18 With its 3500 seats the Royal Festival was a very large venue for a concert hall. Most conventional auditoria for classical music hold between 1000 and 1500 seats, and much of the work of the acoustic engineers in the new building had at the time been absorbed by controlling the effects of the sheer size of the hall. The case for a smaller hall for approximately 1000 was, therefore, arguably contained in the building initiative of 1951, and its shortcomings.

In the following years, between 1951 and 1955, the proposal for a smaller concert hall effectively provided the impulse driving forth the further development of the South Bank. Initially the project for the recital room may not have been much more than a welcome excuse for a reconsideration of the Festival Hall. Leslie Martin, who succeeded Matthew as council architect in May 1953 was, apparently, unhappy about the 'overworked elevations' of the building and wished to simplify them. 19 The catering arrangements, too, had been found wanting, their space standards being derived from those for school canteens.

The redesign of the hall was the prerogative and the responsibility of the council architect and Martin, whose leadership of the now rather large LCC architect's department is generally described as loose, and 'as a matter of delegated interest' 20, relying on the commitment of the group leaders, intended to keep this project in his own hands. A small group of staff members was selected to work near Martin's own office, at some considerable distance from the drawing studios and offices of the other groups. One of the chosen staff was Norman Engleback, a twenty-six year old junior employee who had been working in the schools division for three years and who was to support Martin on the project for enlarging the Festival Hall and the National Youth and Sports Centre on the site of the former Crystal Palace. Martin's choice of Engleback, in his own characterisation a 'technical assistant or maybe a grade 3', seems to have been characteristic of the way in which young contributors were recruited for prestigious projects, a strategy which had proved itself in the development of the Festival Hall.

At the same time Engleback's background was different from the young designers who had worked on the Festival Hall and who had graduated from either the Architectural Association School or the Regent Street Polytechnic, the two established centres of design teaching in London in the late 1940s. Born in 1927 to North London working class parents, Engleback had trained in evening classes at the London Northern Polytechnic – 'at a total cost of £129' – while working as a tracer for the North Eastern Railway during the last year of the war. 'The design teaching at the Polytechnic appears to have been fairly rudimentary, in the classical manner' in the first three years and in 'the modern style' in the third year. 21 It was only when joining the Architects' Co-Partnership under Tony Cox, who taught at the Architectural Association School, that the working student found an environment where concerns of modern architecture were discussed at all. At ACP Engleback worked on designs for schools and it was this field which he continued to explore when he joined the architect's department of the London County Council in 1950.

In this period the LCC was developing a 'hefty school-building programme'. 22 The young Engleback was taken on in the schools division and given a brief for a school 'straight away', for a new building in the South London borough of Lambeth. It was as the designer of this school, which was presented at a conference at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1953, that he was spotted by Martin and selected to join the team assisting on the designs for the South Bank and Crystal Palace. 23

The South Bank as an exercise in townscape: the 1954 design

The choice of a relatively inexperienced assistant with a limited design background may indicate that Martin had decided that he himself was to take direct responsibility himself for the two culturally most significant projects in the portfolio of his department, and that he viewed the extension to the Festival Hall as a re-fitting job rather than a fully developed design project. The new recital hall was still projected under a pedestrian terrace facing south and above the tunnel of the Bakerloo Underground Line. In this form the preliminary scheme was published in the RIBA Journal of January 1954. Reiterating the history of the South Bank and the argument for the planning initiative the author Gordon Stephenson is hopeful that 'the successful redevelopment is now within easy reach due to the consistently high post-war enterprise of the largest and wealthiest local government and to the imaginative yet realistic approach of its architects and other officers'. 24

The article is accompanied by photographs of a model with a rectangular National Theatre next to County Hall, a square overlooked by the tower occupied by the Shell headquarters and a deck with an L-shaped hotel opening itself towards the river. A central air terminal situated south of the proposed theatre and a helicopter landing ground on a platform above Waterloo Station were to serve the extensive office population estimated at around 12,000.

In the model a deck surrounds the Festival Hall and connects with another one attached to the conference centre and a small exhibition gallery around an open courtyard. The scheme shows not only that the proposal for an art gallery had at this stage been fully absorbed into the
scheme, but also that a multilayered arrangement was established as early as 1954. The reviewer emphasises the importance of the separation of pedestrian and car traffic. ‘The South Bank scheme recognises the problems of the great city’, and is hailed as a successful alternative to the ‘amazing’ persistence of the rue corridor and the streets lined by buildings of uniform height and mediocre façades’, ignoring ‘use, demand, daylighting and layout techniques which are modern’.²⁶

The layout of the project shown in the model can best be described as an extension of the formal language and geometry of the Festival Hall; the National Theatre faces the river in much the same way as the concert hall, symmetrically and frontally, and the open spaces surrounding the proposed buildings are informed by similar ideas of monumentality. The review expresses the hope ‘that the final development will express richness and variety in architectural thought’. This may be a veiled criticism of the architectural appearance of the Shell headquarters and its stone clad fenestrated façades with faint classical undertones; the metaphor used by the author suggests something in this direction: ‘There is the constant danger of falling between two stools; the one still under those who have gradually emasculated the classical renaissance, the other vacated by Le Corbusier some twenty years ago.’²⁷

The review praises the arrangement of pedestrian squares and footbridges, principles which ‘are exactly similar to those which were proved successful in the 1951 Festival, and have for centuries made Venice the only town in the world in which the pedestrian may go about his business and enjoy himself in safety’. In the final passage, however, the author expresses some reservations about the elevated pedestrian bridges and the extensive, and expensive, underground works proposed in the scheme. ‘A simpler and more economical arrangement might be to give most of the existing ground space to vehicles and to raise the pedestrian level over the whole of the site to a series of great platforms perforated at intervals’.²⁸ This, he adds, should then be accompanied by abandons the temptation to elevate buildings on piliars leaving wide views under them’, and instead providing colonnades linking the separate parts of the scheme.

J. M. Richards, who commented on the scheme in the Architectural Review a few months later, welcomed the design for the South Bank as a ‘victory for imaginative planning’ and a ‘great advance on any of the previous official proposals’ for the area.²⁹ Whether or not Richards had the monumentalising sketches produced in the offices of the LCC during the late 1940s in mind is not clear, when he referred to the previous plans. The motives for this strong endorsement of the scheme were two-fold. ‘Not only is the area designed as a whole (in marked contrast to, for example, the City’²⁹, but perhaps more importantly because Richards viewed the design as a fine example for the Picturesque approach, which he and Nikolaus Pevsner had been promoting in their magazine. The interpretation of the scheme as a picturesque townscape, a systematised version of the layout of the 1951 Festival site, is certainly suggested in the description of the new design: ‘... the area has also been designed with a proper regard for the moving viewpoints provided by

the curve of the river, from which a lively, changing, three-dimensional composition of vertical and horizontal planes will be obtainable.’³⁰ The drift of the scheme, in Richard’s view, was an illustration of the townscape approach advocated by the Architectural Review, ‘a series of inter-connecting squares, providing spacious settings for a number of important civic and commercial buildings, and giving the greatest variety of views of the river from all parts of the site’.³¹

At this stage the scheme still departed from the assumption that the proposed smaller concert hall would be realised in the form of an extension of the Festival Hall. According to Engleback the excavations required for the new auditorium brought the platform level within 6.5 feet (2 metres) of the tunnel. The idea to create a small concert hall as part of the Festival Hall came to an abrupt end, when Hope Bagenal, the acoustic consultant, arrived on the proposed site with a cardboard tube which he used ‘as a kind of ear trumpet held against the boiler room floor’, and announced that the noise of the underground line running below the location would be heard in the auditorium. The new hall would have to be realised somewhere else. The site next to Waterloo Bridge, which had previously been considered for the National Theatre, was now earmarked for a separate building.³² Martin and Engleback prepared an ‘outline development’ for a small concert hall, conceived as ‘simple, triple-glazed box, accessible from the pedestrian terrace, within which the auditorium was sunk’, surrounded by ‘a series of free-standing screen walls’.³³

Setting out a vision for the South Bank – the ‘Housing the Arts’ report

In May 1955 a parliamentary committee of inquiry was invited to look into a replacement for the Queen’s Hall. The committee started with a careful analysis of the existing venues in London and their deficiencies. Assessing the Festival Hall the committee was mixed in its judgement: ‘The acoustics of the Royal Festival Hall are recognized to have very fine characteristics; but it appears to be commonly accepted that neither its platform nor its acoustics are altogether well-suited for the performance of choral music’. Finding that a concert hall to contemporary standards and including the parking facilities would not fit on proposed sites in Central London, the report recommended establishing a formal parliamentary Committee of Inquiry with the task of identifying the need for a broad range of cultural facilities: a new concert hall, possibly accompanied by an art gallery as well as the National Theatre and a new opera house. For the concert hall two locations would have to be considered: a site near Regent’s Park (for which the National government would have to provide the land) and the South Bank, leaving the initiative to the London County Council.

Of the two possible agencies which might accept a leading role in the development of these plans, at a total estimated cost of £10 million over a period of 10 years, the committee clearly favoured the local authority, suggesting that the council might also manage the concert hall: ‘We accept too the argument that it is undesirable that the power to select

²⁵ ibid., p. 95
²⁶ ibid., p. 100
²⁷ ibid., p. 100/101
²⁹ ibid., p. 399
³⁰ ibid., p. 399
³¹ ibid., p. 399
³² Engleback (1999).
³³ ibid.
what concerts should be performed should be concentrated chiefly in the hands of the London County Council. We ought to say at once that we believe that this power has been exercised in a most enlightened way.34

Correspondence between Hayward’s office and representatives of the Arts Council shows that the LCC was eager to take the initiative for the concert hall accepting that it would be much larger than the previously envisaged recital room. While the national government was still considering how to respond to the recommendations in the report on the Queen’s Hall, closely guarded by the Conservative press, the local authority committed itself to supporting the idea for a new concert hall on the South Bank and even proposing to build it.

The committee demanded a commitment to public patronage for the arts from the agencies of the state as a matter of fact. The report endorses the argument for the active patronage of the national government or municipal authorities, a view which was based on some external evidence. In an analysis of culture and entertainment prepared for the Standing Committee on the Arts of the London Council of Social Services the author of the preface William Robson noted: ‘The fine arts are now in a state of critical transition. … Today heavy taxation and death duties have everywhere greatly reduced the purchasing power of even the wealthiest commercial magnates … [and] in consequence painters, sculptors, musicians and poets must find a way of living in and through democracies or they cannot survive.35

A year later, in 1956, the British government (then headed by the Conservative prime minister Anthony Eden) installed a new Committee of Inquiry ‘at the invitation of the Chancellor of the Exchequer’ (the minister of Financial affairs), this time with the larger task of examining the accommodation of the arts across the whole of Britain.36 This ‘Housing the Arts’ committee was organised and partly staffed by the Arts Council. Even before the committee started to meet in the spring of that year the Arts Council’s chairman contacted the LCC looking for support and noting that the committee would start by examining proposals for metropolitan schemes, particularly those relating to concert halls, including the council’s plans for ‘developing the South Bank site as an arts centre’.37

The response of the LCC was prompt. A note to the Arts Council prepared for one of the first meetings of the committee, lists the plans already developed by the LCC, including a small concert hall to seat about 1,100 [i.e. substantially as recommended by the earlier Queen’s Hall Committee], and possibly also a picture gallery [as suggested by the Arts Council].38 The description of the plans is detailed; alongside the water a strip of 35 metres wide had been formally dedicated as ‘public open space’, to be laid out as ‘a memorial garden in memory of Londoners who lost their lives during the war.’ The National Theatre was to be placed next to County Hall and a hotel next to Hungerford Bridge, a ‘piazza’ connecting the two. For the area between the Royal Festival Hall and Waterloo Bridge a ‘proposed smaller building which will form an extension of the Hall’ is mentioned. ‘There will eventually be a very considerable provision of underground parking facilities over the whole site, and it is hoped by this means to keep the extensive open areas that are planned about the building fully available for public use and enjoyment.’ These developments would involve the disappearance of the existing provisional National Film Theatre, for which an alternative home was to be provided in the southern archway abutment of Waterloo Bridge. Finally the note mentions the developments on the edges of the development; a Government Science Centre and offices.

It is one paragraph of this note that provides a hint of a broader vision on the future of the South Bank as ‘a centre of the arts’.39 The authors note that, ‘although any practicable scheme for the rehabilitation of the South Bank— for long an important item of the Council’s policy—must include, and indeed should rightly include, a substantial proportion of commercial development (shops, offices, hotel, etc.),’ the LCC’s aim was to develop the area ‘as a major contribution to the re-planning of the Metropolis’, providing ‘opportunities for relaxation and enjoyment’ and an active part of the city also outside working hours. All of these main points were reiterated in a formal letter to the committee, which suggested that the LCC was looking ‘towards the national government for financial participation.40 The clerk emphasised the opportunities on the South Bank for the ‘Government hospitality centre’, possibly in order to forge an alliance with the government suggesting that there was intensive lobbying happening between the LCC and the Treasury (the Ministry of Finance).41

The content of the note and the formal letter, in which the LCC effectively committed itself to building a substantial arts centre on the South Bank, were read with ‘considerable interest’. In his response to Hayward, Wyn Griffith, the chairman of the committee informs Hayward about the assembling of a committee by the Arts Council which is to undertake a survey of the cultural building needs of London and the whole country, also announces that he wished to discuss the ‘possible siting of a metropolitan opera house on the South Bank, even though the likelihood of such a scheme coming to fruition may appear remote at the present moment.42

The statements of Hayward and Martin at the first meeting of the Committee of Enquiry indicate that the LCC’s scheme for a cultural
centre on the South Bank was gradually becoming definitive, even if the finances were still unresolved. Yet, despite the concrete plans for the buildings there is no evidence that ideas of what precisely was going to fill the structures were developed with a comparable sense of urgency. The local authority seems to have relied exclusively on the 'experts' from the Arts Council for the artistic or cultural content, and accepted the role of a generous facilitator. The question which audience would be attracted by the cultural institutions in the arts centre was, however, approached from the perspective of the effect a concentration would have on the use of the area in the city.

The LCC was concerned about the effect of a large concentration of public buildings on the site. The ideas for the Arts Council's exhibition gallery were becoming increasingly precise: in the minutes of a meeting of LCC staff the building is presented as 'a free standing building with good lighting on all sides' containing a series of exhibition spaces with a total area of 10,000 square feet, some of which would extend across the full height of the structure. Meanwhile, the LCC Architects department had done 'some preliminary work' on the concert hall, 'mainly to determine the approximate size and structure of the building as an element in the larger scheme'.

The need for a 'Metropolitan Arts Centre'

When the Committee of Inquiry eventually wrote its report 'Housing the Arts' in 1955, all it apparently had to do was to endorse the LCC's proposals. Occasionally even the wording of report correspond with the statements made by Hayward or officials from the London County Council. In the introduction, presumably to address possible criticism, the committee noted that it was 'advised not to assume that public money would necessarily be forthcoming to pay for the recommendations we would make' but had decided 'that nothing but good can come from publishing this Report at the present time'.

In this first meeting of the committee (to which Hayward and Leslie Martin had been formally invited) Griffith expressed his anxiety about the main question: "Has the space on the South Bank been finally allocated and, if not, are there any final dates before which any proposals must be made? Hayward's reply that 'economics must loom large, since the London ratepayer was ultimately responsible for financing its development and could not be expected to carry the whole burden of what should rather be national projects'. He warned that there might be a 'snowballing tendency' of separate institutions approaching the Council for similar, if not overlapping schemes. Leslie Martin explained the layout of the South Bank project, 'the tentative plans for the small concert hall and art gallery to provide for the extension of the Royal Festival Hall', which according to Hayward will go ahead as soon as the current 'credit squeeze ceased'. The council leader pointed out that the council was already subsidising the Royal Festival Hall and would have to contemplate also managing the small hall. The art gallery, which formed part of the extension, ought to be made 'economic' and, though the actual scheme for managing it had not yet been considered, the council would have to look to the Arts Council for co-operation, offering an 'empty gallery in the sense that it would be available for letting for exhibitions, receptions, etc'. Finally Hayward disclosed that the LCC was going to start building a new National Film Theatre under Waterloo Bridge, starting in October 1955. Notes taken at the meeting of the Committee of Enquiry by W.O. Hart, 19 July 1956, LMA/LCC/CL/GP/2/113/44

In a meeting of the LCC's South Bank Sub-Committee these concerns were expressed, the South Bank was expected to draw 'diverse audiences' and offer 'a choice of entertainments' allowing the area to be 'alive after the end of the working day'. Minutes of Meeting 14 January 1958 W.O. Hart, F.G. West (dep. Architect), Norman Englebach (Archs. Deptmn). Notes (assistant values), J.E. East. Paul (Clerk of the South Bank Sub-Committee), Eric White (assistant secretary Committee of Inquiry Housing the Arts), LCC Housing the Arts South Bank development, LMA/LCC/CL/GP/2/113/45

The committee was, however, clear in its conclusion: a new concert hall with a capacity of 1000-1500 suitable for recitals, chamber music and performances by small orchestras was necessary and this need would be most satisfactorily met when the London County Council carries out its present intention to build a hall of this size on the South Bank, on a site between the Royal Festival Hall and Waterloo Bridge, a project that should be realised 'without delay'. The committee was equally adamant that a new exhibition gallery should be built, welcoming the LCC's initiative to realise such a building and hoped that this project could be developed quickly, suggesting that the council was 'associated with a considered policy for presenting the visual arts in London', something best to be realised in close collaboration with the Arts Council. For the management of the gallery alternative options had been considered. Yet, since none of the existing national museums wished to manage a new gallery for temporary exhibitions on the South Bank the options were narrowed down to an agreement between the Arts Council and the LCC. The former was to organise the exhibitions while the latter would administer the entire programme and provide supporting staff. In periods that the gallery was not used by the Arts Council other users could be invited, including the organisers of commercial exhibitions.

It is in the subsequent passage that the broader vision of the South Bank as a 'Metropolitan Arts Centre' is explicitly set out with some clarity:

The LCC is now moving towards a more active patronage of the arts and is planning to make the South Bank into a part of London that is alive both night and day – a centre of the arts drawing diverse audiences and offering a choice of entertainments and attendant amenities. With this aim in view, important office blocks and a hotel have been included in their development scheme in addition to various buildings for accommodating the arts including concert halls, an exhibition gallery, the National Theatre and the National Film Theatre. This will produce a carefully planned enclaves of buildings connected with the arts as distinct from the haphazard growth of theatres, halls and galleries on the North Bank of the Thames.

As if to summon support for the initiative for the 'Metropolitan Arts Centre' the committee noted that the projects on the South Bank had attracted some foreign attention, notably of John Rockefeller III and his entourage who had been visiting the site in 1956 and shown themselves 'most favourably impressed by the Royal Festival Hall and the development possibilities of the rest of the South Bank site'. After their visit, the committee added, the Americans had pushed ahead with their plans for the Lincoln Center in New York which was to include the Metropolitan Opera House, the New York State Theatre, a concert hall and the Juillard School of Music.

The reference to the Lincoln Center, clearly intended to emphasise the argument for the necessity of the cultural centre in London, introduced a final passage which sets out the role of the new buildings for the cultural life of London and the whole country.
The value of the LCC South Bank scheme is more than just the sum of its component parts. If the conception is justified, then it is important that all should be done to help the LCC achieve their object, because every addition to the existing units of the Royal Festival Hall and the National Film Theatre will consolidate the advance already made towards bringing into existence an Arts Centre that is worthy of the capital city of Great Britain and the British Commonwealth. Such a Centre might prove to be one of the most imaginative and exciting planning conceptions to be carried out in London during the twentieth century.50

With this strongly worded endorsement of the LCC’s plans the Committee of Enquiry effectively formulated the argument for a project which had until then almost exclusively been discussed within the ranks of the council. More importantly, the experts in the committee had taken up the task of explicitly addressing the general public and the government; something Hayward and his staff had up to this point not done, at least not openly.

The reactions in the press on the report were far from favourable, most of the papers depicting the call for financial commitment by the government as an invitation to irresponsible spending of taxpayers’ money.51 In its leader the Daily Telegraph for instance, showed itself unconvinced of the necessity for the buildings, asking the rhetorical question, where the money was to be found.52 The Times was equally critical and suggested that the research carried out for the report was incomplete, criticising the document as ‘rambling’ and naively departing from ‘the hopeful spirit of a child drawing up a list to be put up the chimney for Father Christmas’.53 In its conclusion the paper dismisses the entire report as ‘not more than a faint and sketchy blueprint’, illustrating, if anything, ‘the need for a comprehensive survey of all public spending on the arts, related to the capacities of both purse and people’.54

50 op. cit., p. 9
51 ‘Three Housing Priorities for Arts in London’, The Times, 22 April 1959 ‘Housing for the Arts in Britain’, Financial Times, 22 April 1959 £ 1 m.
52 A Year needed to house the Arts – Call to Chancellor on National Theatre’, Daily Telegraph, 23 April 1959 ‘South Bank Opera hope – Sadler’s Wells Mover Foreseen’, Daily Telegraph, 23 April 1959 £ 10,000,000
53 Please – for Art’s sake’, Daily Mail, 22 April 1959
54 ‘Money for the Arts’, Daily Telegraph, 22 April 1959
55 ‘Housing the Arts’, The Times, 22 April 1959 56
57 5.2 Patronage and bureaucracy: Isaac Hayward and the London County Council

The South Bank is a project characterised by a great degree of continuity. The main actors, the institutions or bureaucracies and the persons, remained the same for long periods making their views and modes of operating, though subject to change, can be assumed to show at least a degree of consistency over time. This aspect of continuity is especially embodied in the person of Isaac Hayward, the leader of the LCC both at the time of the inception of the Festival Hall and the planning of the second phase of building on the South Bank. Hayward’s personal involvement was of essential significance for the commitment of the bureaucracy of the LCC, its architects and the professional arts administrators who supported the project for so long.

Isaac James Hayward was born in South Wales in 1884 into a large working class family. Raised in a Christian Baptist environment and strictly abstaining from alcohol, Hayward’s development as a politician started in the temperance movement, something he had in common with Herbert Morrison. From the age of twelve to fifteen Hayward worked in the pits of his home region and later became an official in the National Union of Enginemen, Mechanics and Electrical Workers. He moved to London to become the capital’s district secretary as his union was about to merge with the Transport and General Workers’ Union in 1924, and held the office of the general secretary of this larger union between 1938 and 1946. As a union leader Hayward had been spotted by Herbert Morrison, with whom he is said to have established ‘an instant rapport’55, and been asked to stand for the London County Council in 1928. In 1934 he joined the ‘quadrumvirate’, the inner circle around Morrison that effectively governed the council until 1940.56

As Chairman of the Public Assistance Committee in 1936 Hayward focussed on the Poor law system, turning it into what the Times later described as a ‘genuine welfare service available to all in need, rather than a deterrent system for a narrow category of destitute persons’.57 Hayward had been second in line after Morrison’s departure to national politics; when he was finally appointed in 1947, he was already 63 years old and looked back on almost two decades in London’s administration. Unlike his predecessors the new council leader had not sought attention with visionary public statements, but seemed to have presented himself mostly as a caretaker of the ambitions as well as the values of integrity and efficiency established by the council. Meanwhile he held a tight grip on the council and its members, allegedly prompting Clement Attlee to label the LCC as ‘the nearest approach to a totalitarian state in Western Europe’58, Freda Corbet, Labour’s chief whip on the council, with whom Hayward collaborated closely in order to control the proceedings, later described Hayward as an ‘“old-style labour political boss”, who “dealt effectively with the few who dared to challenge him, and, having inherited a “highly centralised machine”, maintained it.59 At the same time he is described as ‘mild-mannered and almost diffident’, operating as an eminence grise rather than in the public limelight. Behind
this façade of calm restraint, Hayward, whom others experienced as ‘despotic’ or a ‘little tenacious Welshman’, seems to have been very effective in controlling and manipulating the council, which he clearly saw as his limited empire, since he had no ambitions for a role in national British politics. Regularly invested with large majorities on the council, and supported by Corbet, Hayward repeatedly managed to exclude opposition within his own party, invoking ‘the (always) unique circumstances of the hour’.

Using the methods available to a politician who can rely on an established power base, the leader was in a position to operate with a large degree of autonomy. The effect of this position is illustrated both by the handling of the Festival of Britain and by the further development of the South Bank in the next decade. Although the replacement of the Labour government by a Conservative administration in 1951 deprived him of his direct line to the centre of the cabinet, Hayward continued the established pattern of pulling strings in the complicated mechanisms of local and national politics, generally avoiding the public arena. For the Labour Party the London County Council leader remained an important authority throughout the 1950s, while the party remained in opposition, assuming some of the roles that otherwise national politicians might have played.

There is an anecdote illustrating the occasionally confused relationships between local authorities and Socialist politicians from different countries in Western Europe, but also the curiously insular attitude of the LCC leader. In 1959 Hayward was approached by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, who had attended a conference of Social Democratic Parties in Stockholm and had been entertained by the financial councillor of the Swedish capital, the politician Hjalmar Mehr, the central actor in the large-scale reconstruction of the inner city who a few years later was to play a central role in the initiative for the Stockholm Kulturhus. Gaitskell wished to introduce Mehr as Hayward’s opposite number in Stockholm, i.e. the effective leader of the Council and asked the London politician to arrange an official visit, which ‘would be a good way of cementing the close ties’ between the Swedish and British Social Democratic parties, recommending Mehr as ‘highly intelligent, with much experience in municipal work.’ The request was accepted by Hayward, who promised to ask the London council to give ‘sympathetic consideration’ to the suggestion; a month later, however, it emerged that matters of protocol required some diplomatic finesse in expressing an official invitation to the Swedish politician, who after all was not an ‘Oberburgomaster’, as the office of the leader of the council had discovered. Eventually the matter was left undecided; in his letter to the English leader of the opposition Mehr could barely conceal his disappointment and hurt pride: ‘If London should be interested to about our urban reconstruction activities […] which, on a much smaller scale, are similar to those of London, there is a valid reason for sending an invitation. I suppose that my opposite number in London might find it reasonable to invite me. Maybe though that this is too complicated. Hayward, it emerged, was more interested in hosting Nelson Rockefeller, who had been received at County Hall with due égards, than a Socialist politician who was responsible for the major re-planning of another European capital.

‘War of Taste’ – Isaac Hayward’s argument for local patronage of the arts

It is in the extensive private correspondence between Hayward’s office and a large range of public figures, politicians as well as protagonists of the arts world, that the leader of the council emerges as a skilful administrator who combined pragmatism, dexterity and a sense of purpose with stubborn commitment to the idea of realising cultural and other facilities on the South Bank, and elsewhere in the city. Few of the moves undertaken by him or his direct entourage were visible to the general public, ideas generally remaining unstated. The archive of his office, which is held in the London Metropolitan Archive, contains a large number of private letters, notes of lunch meetings and minutes of committee sessions, showing not only Hayward’s general support for cultural institutions, but also how he pushed forward the building projects.

That these proposals, facilitated by the 1947 sixpence in the Pound addition to local taxes for local arts initiatives, stemmed from a profound commitment to the role of culture as an educating force becomes apparent in one of Hayward’s rare recorded public statements. In a speech addressing the conference of the International Union of Local Authorities in 1954 – the London council leader was the chairman of the its British section – Hayward puts forward the mission of a publicly funded arts policy and the role of local authorities. He describes art as a ‘venture, an act of faith’ and goes on: ‘If local authorities were to enter into this venture – as it seems they must – they must have courage, and must, like all wise legislators, lead public opinion and educate it into acceptance of the risks, financial and otherwise, which all artistic venture involves.’

At the same time Hayward is wary that judgements of politicians on art could become part of party-political confrontations, while on the other hand private parties have to step in to facilitate particularly the ‘expensive’ arts. ‘It seemed clear that greater opportunities for the practice of the arts and crafts and for the promotion of good taste and the capacity to criticize and discriminate, were needed more than ever before as a counterpoise to the vastly increased opportunities for passive looking and listening.’ Whether this mission stemmed from the desire to make cultural products accessible to a greater audience or whether it was rooted in a more traditional idea of enlightened patronage, is not entirely clear.

Hayward’s description of the aims of a state-led cultural policy, the fostering of cultural production allowing the citizens to develop a critical and discriminating attitude, is open to contradictory interpretation, and might be seen as an endorsement of the essential nature of this production in terms of artistic excellence. On the other hand the...
referenced to the need for a ‘counterpoise’ to the influence of the mass media – a regular television programme in Britain was resumed in 1946 – and the passive roles to which their audience was reduced introduces a different, possibly more radical note and could be seen as an expression of a profound unease with the effects of mass culture. Yet, cultural policy was also to promote ‘good taste’, the privilege of the leisureed and educated classes, and the state, or the local authorities as its agency, would need to offer leadership in matters of quality and content. This was not to say that politicians would have a right to intervene, it implied that a judgement about what was worthy of public support needed to be transferred to experts. With the founding of the Arts Council, not mentioned in Hayward’s address, such a system of expert assessment was available in Britain, and local authorities could therefore limit themselves to providing the physical framework, the buildings and spaces.

Hayward admits that such an active role of local authorities is not without risks. For a Labour politician of his generation, who had literally left behind the pits and ground his way up through the trade unions and local administration, Hayward’s statement was strong and, it seems, deeply authentic, as well as extraordinary. Despite the general support for the public patronage in the arts and the establishment of a funding infrastructure, Labour had almost no history of engaging with writers, performers or musicians and few relations with the artistic avant-gardes in any of these fields. Was Hayward’s commitment to substantial support for the arts – he stepped in with a £1 million grant to keep the National Theatre development on track when it went through a difficult period – an act of personal compensation for being deprived of culture in his youth or the result of genuine belief that the arts were necessary in developing a democratic culture? Probably there was an element of both; his instrumental role in the realisation of the South Bank as a cultural centre is underpinned by the speech for the local authorities association and it is reflected in the judgement of others.

The architect’s department as part of local administration bureaucracy

For the LCC architect’s department the South Bank provided the foundation for its own development into a powerful design office. In 1945 the department had been struggling to extend its role beyond merely facilitating the planning of as much housing as possible, and John Forshaw’s departure as council architect was the consequence of a conflict about who was to take a leading role in the city’s reconstruction. The planning and realisation of the Royal Festival barely four years later, confirmed the LCC architect’s department’s reputation as ‘the newest and brightest star in the firmament of modern public architecture’, a position earned through the professionalism of its leading members, but which would not have been possible without the strong backing of Isaac Hayward.

The design of the Festival Hall created the pretext for turning a municipal department of salaried civil servants into the largest and most prestigious architectural office in the country. The architect’s department recruited talented designers, who had either just returned from military service or finished their architectural training, who were attracted by the opportunity of working on projects for schools and housing, or if they were very lucky on a public building like the Festival Hall. The difficulties in identifying the exact authorship of the Festival Hall illustrate the extent to which the work was understood as the result of collective effort, and the structure of groups and ‘divisions’ prevents clear attributions. Royston Landau observed that before Matthew joined the LCC in 1946 the architect’s department had been organised along the lines of ‘hierarchical status relationship, with each level of seniority having control and authority over those immediately below it’. Under Matthew each division containing a design team was allowed a large degree of autonomy. Despite the freedom given to the designers, visible in the inventive detailing of the Festival Hall, ultimate authority was placed exclusively with the head of the department, who officially bore responsibility for each design decision. At the level of everyday arrangements the department showed more similarities with conventional municipal organisations, its employees subjected to a fairly strict discipline of time clocks and other forms of control. As late as 1953 the post of chef-de-bureau was held by a former colonial officer who, in the description of one of the architects, treated everyone ‘like a lot of awkward natives’.

During Robert Matthew’s period as LCC architect these day-to-day arrangements remained in place. Even those young architects who probably saw the experience of working within the municipal office as a first step towards independent careers – for example Peter and Alison Smithson who submitted their entry for the Hunstanton School while employees of the council or the young James Stirling who lasted just a few weeks – were subjected to this regime of hierarchical control. When Leslie Martin succeeded Matthew as head of the department in 1952, these arrangements were somewhat relaxed, and the group leaders acquired a larger degree of autonomy. It was in this form that the LCC architect’s department finally developed into something of an alternative finishing school for recent graduates, and a hotbed of the debates which emerged in the schools of architecture and found their way into its offices and workshops. Working for the LCC, therefore, was very attractive for a young London architect during the 1950s, not just for the portfolio, but also because the office prided itself for being, in the words of Reyner Banham, ‘the biggest, best known, most resourceful and omnipotent public design office in the world’.

69 Sinfield, in Ffrith (1995), p. 211
70 Corbet, DNR, p. 86
72 Glendenning (2003), p. 312
74 Landau states that the ‘only overriding authority’ was placed at the level of the divisional head. Landau, op. cit., p. 44. The episode of the attempted interference of Hubert Bennett, Leslie Martin’s successor, in the project for the South Bank Arts Centre in 1968 shows, however, that this is not quite correct; the authority of the divisional head was, in fact, one delegated from the Council Architect, even if under Matthew and Martin the divisions operated with a large degree of autonomy.
75 Norman Engleback, BL NSA, C 467/42/02
76 Norman Engleback, BL NSA, C 467/42/02
77 See also: Andrew Saint, Towards a social architecture, (London: Yale) 1987, p. 186
78 Banham, (March 1967), p. 318

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Christoph Graf | People's Palaces

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Technocracy and cultural reform | A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames
In 1959, and presumably prompted by the ‘Housing the Arts’ report, Isaac Hayward proposed the idea of an Arts Festival to be organised in 1964. The particular reasons for the timing of initiative are not entirely clear. The official version was that the leader of the LCC wished to continue where the 1952 festival had stopped with the organisation of an ‘arts festival for the 1960s’. Hayward was keen to use the situation created by the endorsement by the experts of an extended arts centre and a generally positive financial climate, but there may also have been the desire of the LCC to restate its ambitions at a time that a major reform of local government in London was discussed. Three major projects in London were to be finished in time for this event: the completion of the Festival Hall, the sports centre at Crystal Palace and the building of the concert hall and art gallery on the South Bank. The ambitious programme required a reorganisation of the LCC architect’s department. A new ‘Special Works Division’ under the direction of George Horsfall was established in order to complete these three schemes in time. Norman Engleback was appointed group leader for the concert hall and art gallery, handing over responsibility for the building works on the Festival Hall and the Crystal Palace schemes to colleagues.

Since Engleback had done some rudimentary research on the programmes of a concert hall and art gallery because he had shown his planning capacities in overseeing the design and construction of a new British Film Institute in less than 15 months, he was made responsible for the group working on the new buildings on the South Bank. The architect’s department had been going through a period of instability. In 1955 Leslie Martin, whose health had been precarious, was appointed new head of the LCC architect’s department, but found himself almost immediately embroiled in the controversial debate around schemes to redesign Piccadilly Circus. When Martin produced the LCC scheme and before the report of the Committee of Enquiry, the brief for the new buildings had, in Norman Engleback’s words, been ‘rather nebulous’. Neither the use of the art gallery nor that of the concert hall were definitively fixed. Following the report, at least the size and character of the concert hall were a little clearer, while the art gallery was now seriously discussed with the Arts Council, which was to use the new spaces for its flagship exhibitions. Besides the Arts Council the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) had also announced an interest in a share. In 1958 the council agreed in principle that the ICA could rent 7,000 square feet of gallery space, but in an internal note for his colleagues from July 1958 the clerk of the LCC revealed that there were tensions. These tensions were mostly the result of an uneasy working relationship between the LCC architect’s department and the architect Jane Drew who was working for the ICA. The interference of Drew, one of the pioneers of continental modern architecture in Britain, caused considerable irritation and the clerk noted: ‘… the ICA’s architectural adviser is inclined to design the whole building and its surroundings, whereas her responsibility will be simply for the interior fitting up. She has produced a scheme (including a restaurant) which do not accord with our present plans.’ The possible relocation of the ICA to the South Bank, however, remained an episode: on 25 April 1959 Isaac Hayward was officially informed that the institute had decided not to move to the South Bank, leaving the Arts Council as the main user.

While negotiations about these arrangements occupied politicians and administrators, Norman Engleback had established contacts in Arts Council with Gabriel White, head of the arts section who guided the Arts Council committee and, according to the architect, ‘charming, if a little vague about the accommodation requirements’, in order to establish a brief for the gallery. White provided Engleback with an itinerary for a ‘Grand Tour’ to the Continent, an excursion to cultural centres, galleries and performance spaces in Europe. In March 1960 Engleback, Horsfall and T. C. Bean, the manager of the Royal Festival Hall went on an extensive study trip to Germany, Northern Italy and Switzerland to look at galleries, music halls and opera houses. White had particularly mentioned the Kunsthaus in Zürich, Rudolf Schwarz’ Wallraf Richards is probably one of the best examples of a sensitive and careful modern approach to building in a historic context in post-war Germany.

Engleback, ICA, C 467/62/02
Engleback, 1999
ibid.
Engleback, ICA, C 467/62/03
Internal note by the Clerk of the London County Council (Hart), dated 7 July 1958, LMA/ LCC/CL/LEA/1/1/9
The inclusion of the museum in Cologne is particularly remarkable. Designed as a partial reconstruction of a bombed nineteenth century building by the architect Rudolf Schwarz, the Wallraf Richards was probably one of the possible relocation of the ICA to the South Bank, however, remained an episode: on 25 April 1959 Isaac Hayward was officially informed that the institute had decided not to move to the South Bank, leaving the Arts Council as the main user.

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However, the selection also reveals something else. It included none of those museums of modern or contemporary art known at the time to experiment with new forms of exhibiting art or addressing their audience. The committee did not travel to Amsterdam, where director Willem Sandberg had made the Stedelijk Museum into a venue not only for showing art pieces but also for organising performances and other events, nor did the itinerary lead to Denmark or Sweden where the Louisiana Museum at Humlebæk and Stockholm's Moderna Museet had undertaken similar experiments with new ways of presenting art.80 White's choice, one has to assume, reflects a forgone conclusion: the new gallery building was to offer a technologically advanced space for exhibitions of a certain scale, medium to large, showing them as well as technically possible but without much of an interest in curatorial or artistic experiments.81 Rather than setting out a direction for the artistic programme of exhibitions, the selection included a series of possible options for a technically proficient environment for art exhibitions. In its absence of a view as to how the new building might reflect current tendencies in the presentation of art works – other than facilitating a conventional form of showing classical masterpieces – the recommendations of the Arts Council confirm the general impression that the South Bank had a brief formulated in exclusive functional terms. A larger, ideologically motivated programme, however, did not exist and was never to emerge.

Architects, specialists and experts: design as a team effort

Provided with a definitive functional programme, references and a serious timeframe Norman Engleback proceeded with the design for the Arts Centre through the early months of 1960. From within the LCC he recruited Ron Herron who had previously been responsible for a school and Warren Chalk who had designed a College of Advanced Education.82 Chalk and Herron in turn persuaded the recent Manchester graduate Dennis Crompton to join the LCC department and he, too, was selected to work with the design group led by Engleback.83 These architects, all three under 35, collaborated with experienced staff members on the new scheme and were assigned specific tasks: Herron made designs for details of junctions and materials, Chalk was asked to focus on the terraces and the transition towards the adjacent bridge and Crompton had the task of producing schemes for the lighting and air control in the galleries. The layout of the gallery, meanwhile, was developed by two other architects, Terry Kennedy and Graham Whitlock.84 Apart from the architects, the design team included a large number of specialists, including those from within the LCC and the Building Research Station, to cover the concerns of air treatment in the concert halls and the gallery, acoustics and light. This involvement of many participants created a pretext for the technocratic approach informing the design and which relied on first identifying separate issues and their solutions and only afterwards integrating them into the overall scheme.

The initial design period has been characterised by Engleback as ‘a joint team work’, a term which situated the design method and its outcome in the collectivist culture of the architect’s department in this period. The solution of organising the programme is explained by him by the concern that the new building ‘could challenge the dominance of the Royal Festival Hall’, suggesting that the massing of the building in a number of smaller entities connected by terraces would have to be understood as an act of respectfully continuing the existing development. To this end the terrace system was developed to link the Thames Promenade with Waterloo Bridge, creating walkways on and over the buildings.96 Internally the galleries were organised around a centralised core of access directly connecting them to the workshops, where were placed below the public access and above the car park. This allowed the mounting and presentation of two or three separate exhibitions, providing ‘variation in scale and character’ of the spaces and ‘secure access to the storage and assembly workshops’.97 The design of the concert hall – apparently Engleback’s own priority – was affected by the proposals for a heliport at Battersea and a landing platform above Waterloo Station, a few hundred metres from the buildings site. After a trial with passenger helicopter it was decided to enclose the entire hall in 15 inches of dense concrete and ensure the ‘careful attenuation of all ducts to the open air to reduce noise penetration’.98

In order to achieve flexibility for showing exhibitions simultaneously, the art gallery had been conceived a series of artificially lit exhibition spaces arranged around the service core. Engleback had proposed this pragmatic solution and his partners at the Arts Council had seen no problem with it. The proposal went through the usual procedures and received the backing of every step in the hierarchy of the LCC.

Then the scheme was presented to the Arts Panel, the committee advising the Arts Council on exhibiting art works where the architects presumably expected another round of nodding approval. Suddenly, however, there was serious opposition to the idea of an artificially lit art gallery. It was Henry Moore who ‘in the nicest possible way, took exception to cutting out a naturally-lit gallery’.99 Engleback did his best to defend the decision, noting the presence of the sculpture terraces (curiously described as ‘courtyards’), but Moore ‘pressed his point gently, but firmly and finally ‘his word went’. For the architects the intervention of the famous sculptor constituted an annoying setback, since it complicated the planning. More importantly the idea of natural lighting was seen to be at odds with the concept of a fully flexible exhibition space divided by moveable screens. The outcome, in Engleback’s account, was something of a showdown for the architects:

‘Dennis Crompton who was part of the group worked very carefully on a system of diffracting glass suspended ceilings, which would in fact bend the light form vertical onto the screens and he reached quite an advanced stage with this. I thought it would be much better to explore this in a full-scale mock-up before we went ahead. We took over one of the pavilions on the Crystal Palace site where we
Hayward Gallery, solution for natural lighting of the upper galleries (November 1963, LMA) and elevation (below, 1963, LMA)

Hayward Gallery, sections of the art galleries (April 1961, LMA)
produced a full-scale mock-up of a cell from the art gallery. All the
walls were lined in glass, including the mirrors and the ceiling that
Dennis Crompton had proposed was set up. Lighting was set up and
we took the Arts Council along with a few prized exhibits to see how
they reacted to it. It was a disaster. The means of bending the light
worked very well for the pictures, but they also affected the viewer."100

Eventually other forms of suspended ceilings were explored. The solution
to the problem was (in Engleback's description) 'a sort of plastic skin'
that was translucent and would transmit the light from the character-
istic pyramidal roof-lights (an element the architect had also used in the
Crystal Palace Sports Centre). In order to control the level of lighting a
photoelectric cell system was installed, with roller blinds, 'a very highly
elaborate system, which required careful maintenance.'101

The episode illustrates the complicated character of the design
process, the architects finding themselves opposed by experts.
Engleback's account of this experience is revealing, not only for the
technocratic approach which it communicates but also for the way in
which external influences affected the design. Eric White, the secretary
of the Arts Council, later described the result as a compromise, 'as is
inevitable in a modern multi-purpose exhibition gallery, where tempera-
ture, humidity and lighting must alike be under strict control.'102 A
similar compromise affected the design of the concert hall. The audi-
torium had been designed with an asymmetrical seating arrangement,
intended to use it flexibly for audiences of 400, 700 and 1000 by closing
off balconies. Despite an enthusiastic reaction from Yehudi Menuhin
to this solution, the hall had to be redesigned after Roy Henderson, one
member of the Music Panel of the Arts Council, insisted on a symmet-
crical arrangement.100

The design team had been working on the detailed project for the
Art Centre for almost a year, when, in December 1960, Hubert Bennett,
Martin's successor as LCC chief architect, realised rather suddenly that
the design was well advanced and that he did not like the result. On
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I spoke to Diana Rowntree from the Guardian and she put it a piece
in her paper which in effect told Bennett to let us get on with our
work and not interfere. She and I had a personal friendship and
I knew her from the Crystal Palace. She was a useful diva and it
did the trick: the scheme was passed in March 1961 and went into
working drawings.'105
Engleback’s public relations approach proved successful. Publicly threatening to resign, he and his team put Hubert Bennett under pressure. A mass walk-out would have jeopardised the tight schedule for the building, and the support from the Guardian had weakened his position of authority. Eventually Bennett gave in, left ‘humiliated’. The team resumed work on the scheme and the project was presented ‘with huge, very expensive photographs’ in March 1961 at the Tea Centre in Central London. Rowntree, reporting in the Guardian on this event gives a fair description of the atmosphere of the presentation: ‘After Mr Bennett, …, had explained them [the plans for the South Bank], his team of assistants, intelligent enthusiastic young men in crew cuts and Italian suits, listened anxiously to the comments. One of them explained: ‘We would like to see flats and cinemas on the South Bank, too, so that it becomes alive; a place where people live and enjoy themselves in different ways, rather than just a cultural centre.

If we believe Engleback the presentation was a great success; he specifically noted ‘a wonderful review from [Robert] Furneaux Jordan’. In Reyner Banham’s version of this episode, published a few years later, the outcome of the confrontation was a victory of a younger generation of architects: ‘There was a good deal of sagacious nodding when the architect’s department, and especially for some of the younger architects near to the seat of power.

The incident of the clash between the chief architect and his project leader illustrates the tension between the hierarchical structure of the organisation of the Architect’s department and its status as the leading design office in post-war Britain. The Special Division of which Engleback’s group was a part had, in the words of Reyner Banham, developed into ‘something of a post-graduate forcing-ground’. The resources of the organisation, the fact that it was supported by technical staff who could construct full-scale mock-ups of design elements and the very direct lines to decision-makers created extraordinary opportunities for the designers. It may not, however, have done much to foster a self-critical attitude among the staff of the office. On the other hand the individual designers, from junior staff to experienced project leaders like Engleback, were part of the bureaucratic processes characteristic of any public service organisation, and an iron hierarchy. Ultimately it was the Chief Architect (Leslie Martin and later Hubert Bennett) who was responsible for every design coming out the office, but who was himself directly dependent on the decisions of the council and its leader. Framed within this set up of a powerful yet bureaucratic organisation, the episode seemed to illustrate the ‘intergenerational struggle’ that was to affect larger sections of British architecture in these years.

**Attributions**

Norman Engleback’s account of the design history of the South Bank positions the project within a continuous process of planning and building there. His influence on the selection of architects working on the scheme was limited: as group leader he was not in a position to choose his staff, or only to some extent, and ‘once staff was there you could not get rid of them’. For Engleback the involvement of Chalk, Herron and Crompton was little more than an episode in a long process managed along the lines of large municipal architects office. In 1961 all three left, having been invited – or ‘poached’, as Engleback has it – to work on the re-planning of Euston station in a team of the Taylor Woodrow Design Group headed by Theo Crosby, a member of the Independent Group and editor of the magazine Uppercase. In 1962 they were asked by Peter Cook, Mike Webb and David Greene to join the Archigram group and made their first contribution to Living Cities, the first larger exhibition project of the group at the ICA in 1961. Engleback’s view is not devoid of slightly sour irony: ‘… they could get on and build a master piece there – but one of the ironies was that we didn’t see any evidence of that masterpiece there and they went into teaching.

Later, when the project was at working stage, the number of collaborators increased significantly. Norman Engleback has noted that there was a constant flow of people who wanted to work for his group and adds: ‘The result was that we got some 200 people all of whom “designed” the South Bank scheme, with identical sets of drawings.’ The effect of this way of running the project is tangible in the archive material of the project: while all the sketches and preliminary drawings seem to have disappeared, there is a vast amount of information produced for details of the scheme between 1961 and 1965, often containing fairly identical information.

Because of the incomplete state of the archives of the LCC architect’s department it is difficult to make a detailed examination of the exact development of the design. The earliest drawings still existing in the London Metropolitan Archive show the state of the design as it was presented to the public in 1961 (fig. 57). Later drawings illustrate the refinement of particular elements of the design, including the rooflights (fig. 53), the Queen Elizabeth Hall (fig. 54 and 55). One particular aspect, where this refinement was more explicitly visible is the introduction of a more flexible geometry of the plans for the entrance ‘ducts’ connecting the foyer with the two auditoria. Whereas in the initial presentation design these were characterised by a particular leanness, the execution drawings (fig. 56) show a more subtle and complex plan development allowing for

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106 Bl. NSA, C 467/62/06.
107 Engleback 1999
109 Records of the article are difficult to establish. Parts of the article are reproduced in Dennis Crompton, Concerning Archigram (London: Archigram Archives) 1999, p.32. The article can, however, not be traced in the national edition of the newspaper which is held in the Newspaper Archive of the British Library at Colindale.
110 Banham, (March 1967), p. 318
111 ibid., p. 318
113 ibid.
114 Living Cities was shown at the ICA from 29 June to 2 August 1963 and then toured to Manchester, Cambridge and Folkestone. Sadler (2003), p. 53
115 Bl. NSA, C 467/62/04
116 ibid.
Queen Elizabeth Hall, footbridges from the foyer to the auditoria. The plan shows how the footbridges are structurally separated from the main volumes (January 1964, LMA)

1961 design for the South Bank Art Gallery and Concert Hall (later Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall); foyer and entrance level (top) and stage
a certain degree of souléss where different elements meet, in the transi-
tions from hall to entrance bridge, and from entrance bridge to foyer. It is
unclear whether or not these changes were made due to technical consid-
erations (bridge and hall are separate structural entities) or artistic ones.
Curiously, when the finished project was reviewed by magazines in 1967
and 1968, the documentation contains different sets of plan drawings,
referring to different stages in the design development — as if the changes
in the geometry, small as they were, did not matter. Engleback observed that two hundred people claimed a signifi-
cant part in the design of the project points to a larger problem of
attribution. In this respect the second phase of building on the South
Bank resembled the first; as we have seen, there are at least two versions
of the authorship the Festival Hall. In the case of the Queen Elizabeth
Hall and Hayward Gallery there are even more. Reyner Banham identi-
fied Chalk, Herron and Crompton as ‘the real designers’, in inverted commas. Engleback clearly saw the entire process as a group effort,
but explicitly claims the main design ideas for the planning of the
gallery, the introduction of the granite aggregate concrete panels and
especially the acoustics. The relationship between Engleback and
Hubert Bennett never recovered after their clash about the design in
1961 — according to his own words Engleback was from then on denied
the customary promotions — and this was hardly improved by the fact
that some years later Bennett had himself included as designer of the
South Bank Arts Centre in the Who’s who list. Bennett’s claim to the
design has also been included in the semi-official version of the history
of the South Bank by Charlotte Mullins and published on the occasion of
the re-opening of the Festival Hall in spring 2007. In Mullins’ account it is Bennett who ‘modified’ the exterior, by introducing the pre-cast aggregate panels instead of in-situ concrete for the façades and changing the material for the Helmholtz resonators inside the concert hall from concrete to the more agreeable and conventional wood in
which they were executed. Whoever may formulate a claim to specific elements of the design of the South Bank Arts Centre, it is quite probable that the result was mostly the product of a group absorbed in the bureaucratic machinery of the municipal administration. This was also noted by the critics of the scheme. The architect Lionel Brett, who had hardly a good word for the ‘benton brut townscape’ on the South Bank, suggested that the project was the result of an absence of clear architectural and artistic vision, ‘whose designers, given too free a hand in line with LCC notions of shop-floor
democracy, have remained sensibly anonymous’. Bridges and decks – polygonal geometry
In June 1961 Hubert Bennett presented a selection of large-scale
projects in Central London, from the reordering of the precinct of the
Tower, the surroundings of St Paul’s Cathedral and the Barbican project
by the architects Chamberlin, Powell and Bon to a plan for Bloomsbury
by Leslie Martin and Trevor Dannat and Sir William Holford’s controversial project for Piccadilly Circus, in an article in the magazine Architectural Design. All these projects, with the exception of the
Barbican and Bloomsbury proposals were conventional exercises in the
tradition of 1950s town-planning, featuring tall slabs mostly organised at
right angles to each other and leaving large open spaces between them.
The image of the South Bank scheme, an bird’s-eye view photograph
of a model of the project is immediately and notably striking. Whereas
all other projects more or less successfully endeavoured to impose a
notional grid onto the unruly geometry of London, the design for the
South Bank demonstratively heightens the irregularities of the site and
exhibits a series of geometric inflections indicating a profound rejection
of the principles of rational town planning visible in the other schemes.
The plans of the two main building components, the concert hall and
the gallery, appear to derive from their respective functional footprint,
leaving the auditorium in its shape of a box and the gallery as a stepped
composition of rectangular exhibition spaces and terraces around a
central core. The deck system that surrounds two buildings and is
carried through towards the Festival Hall, however, defies orthogonal
grid and forms a continuous plane of narrowing and widening
walkways at first floor level, connecting the abutments of the bridges on
either side and absorbing the disparate elements into one ensemble. The
planning principle informing this layout could be described as organic or
picturesque, were it not for the fact that the deck in its sheer extension
established a uniform reference throughout the scheme and unifies the
fragments.

The appearance of the project from above as a monolithic arrange-
ment of polygonal surfaces appears as a result of the irregular shape
of the terraces and walkways and the roof of the asymmetric foyer
fractured around the concert hall like a claw and the stairs folding
down to ground level. The directions and inflected geometry of the
deck and terraces derive their logic from constructed connections between a series of points. The ensemble reveals itself as the result of a series
of complicated, intuitive operations, all of which are aimed at under-
mining, breaking down or at least manipulating simple geometries. On
the east side this results in an irregular terrace squeezed into the space
between the main auditorium and the smaller recital room continuing in
a bridge across to the deck placed between concert hall and gallery, then
widening and enveloping the Festival Hall. Towards the riverbank the
deck forms a terrace, deep and spacious at one end, narrow at the other
and allowing raking views of the straight line of plane trees along the
water.

Compared to the footbridges that were part of the standard reper-
toire of contemporary planning strategies of separating cars from
pedestrians and which invariably present themselves as linear connec-
tions, the deck appears not only generous but suggests a fundamentally
different idea of movement: roaming, free, almost aimless. The presence
of people, single or in small groups of two or threes, scattered around
on the access deck, on the roof of the concert hall foyer and the terraces
of the gallery supports this understanding of the horizontal surfaces as a
set of undirected, yet highly connected planes, the buildings dissolving into horizontal fragments.

In a very complete publication of the project, which appeared in the *Architect and Building News*, the new buildings on the South Bank were shown with a model photograph of the North elevation facing the river.¹²⁶ The buildings presented here are almost realised, at least in outline. The rendering of the model photograph emphasises the silhouette, which is as fragmentary as the geometry of the plans. Behind the row of fully-grown plane trees along the river bank the buildings appear as conglomerates of horizontal layers, stepping back to form terraces, or forward, creating an oversized cornice at the top of the concert hall.

The main constituent parts can be discerned as separate, but only just, as the language of volumes broken into smaller parts governs the appearance of the ensemble. Even the bridges with their solid concrete balustrades appear as long horizontal boxes. There is not the slightest indication of the programme of the building or its parts; nor does it appear that an attempt in this direction is intended. In contrast to the fully glazed front and symmetrically massing of the Festival Hall, new buildings are presented as both literally and metaphorically opaque. Only the small model figures, faintly visible in this perspective, give an indication that the terraces are proposed as accessible for the public.

Details of the deck system appear in three photographs of the model taken with an endoscope. These views of the exterior terraces and bridges presents the project as a peculiarly dark, gothic form, of unrelated objects towering over the pedestrian walkways populated by lone *flâneurs* aimlessly wandering about. The inclusion of these images which appear as representations of an urban dystopia is utterly puzzling, raising the question exactly as to which qualities of the design they were intended to demonstrate.

By contrast, the plans of the arts centre, which are documented on the following pages, show the design as a fairly rational combination of two programmes. The concert hall is a conventional symmetrical box, its geometry slightly inflected by tapering the stage end; the art gallery, following Engleback's laconic description, emerges as a series of exhibition spaces arranged around a functional core. Even the irregularly polygonal foyer of the concert hall, which in the exterior views disappears into the landscape of horizontal planes, appears functionally logical, as a space clearly following the lines of access. Contrasting with the main public spaces, the foyer seems to respond to the logic of the layout of the outdoor footbridges, and is articulated as being part of the public walkways connecting the project with its surroundings.

**Critical reactions to the presentation of the 1961 design**

The review by the architect and novelist Robert Furneaux Jordan¹²⁵, which Engleback singled out as one particularly positive critical reaction opened the presentation of the ‘new South Bank scheme’ in the *Architect and Building News* and contained a strong endorsement of the project.

Furneaux Jordan praises the designers for avoiding the solution of closely following the wedge-shaped plan of the site and the “natural” urge of architects to address a ‘river front’.¹²⁷ Instead, he observes, they had realised what previous schemes had overlooked, that the abutment of Waterloo Bridge forms a strong frontage, ‘almost as compelling as the river itself’. The ‘def’ turning of the frontage away from the river line to the bridge, according to Furneaux Jordan, allows the project to avoid the difficulty of treating the sides of the building.

The critic also pointed to one of the problem of scale, which the design had sought to avoid. The existing large volumes of County Hall, the proposed National Theatre, Shell Building and Festival Hall already occupied much of the area. Adding another big volume, in Furneaux Jordan’s view, would have added to a perception of the site as a conglomerate of large free-standing buildings. This ‘was something that had to stop’. The most important achievement was the ‘consideration of the entire site, both indoor and outdoor, as a single, three-dimensional thing’ and the separation of pedestrians and traffic. ‘This separation on a site of very varied levels would in itself suggest a solution both sculptural and three-dimensional’, and results in the scaling down of the development. From these observations Furneaux Jordan arrives at a general assessment:

> Avoidance of a large mass competing with the Festival Hall; the importance of the Waterloo Bridge frontage; exploitation of levels. Only when these three are all appreciated does the new LCC scheme begin to make sense, to explain itself and – for all its apparent complexity – to become almost obvious. One more gargantuan mass … would have been disastrous. Fortunately, the actual accommodation does in fact permit a series of comparatively small architectural units. … there is a steady scaling down in fact, as well as in architectural forms … As it is whatever detailed criticism may be made, the basic solution seems to be correct.¹²⁸

The interpretation of the project as a series of architectural fragments, each with their own ‘sculptural’ presence, which was so utterly different from the precedents on the South Bank implied a deliberate departure from the existing models. Furneaux Jordan writes: ‘It is a much rarer and more interesting thing than that … a complete and highly architectonic design for a site as such, a complete integration in a single design of both the indoor and the enclosed spaces, of the traffic areas and the pedestrian areas, and of linking both to existing roads and bridges.’¹²⁹

From this point of view the handling of the buildings as a ‘large scale abstract sculpture seen from every level and from all round’ seemed as logical as the rejection of the academic modern idiom of the Festival Hall. Instead, Furneaux Jordan argued, the new building was ‘as near to a pure aesthetic as anything in architecture’ emerging not as the result of an aesthetic theory but as the ‘end product of a thesis which starts with the broadest town-planning consideration – the non-alignment of three great bridges – and then goes on to an almost inevitable aesthetic conclusion.’¹³⁰ Having said this, Furneaux Jordan expresses his reservations: ‘… there is a feeling not of too small a scale, but of too many parts – as in a nursery floor carpet. … many fascinating but superfluous “incidents” which enliven the design but also afford it a certain restlessness.’¹³¹ The
conclusion, however, is unequivocally positive: ‘This scheme, however we judge it, is clearly important. Possibly it will one day be seen as a landmark in the history of post-war architecture.’

Furneaux Jordan had presented the design as the outcome of a series of inevitable decisions. This assessment is difficult to follow, given that the critic explicitly presented the scheme as a radical departure from the architectural language of the surrounding buildings. Neither the polygonal geometry nor the emphasis on the deck system had any precedent in the previous projects for the site. The question is how they came into a design, which in its earlier form, in the 1950s, had been described as ‘standing aloof’ and as ‘clean structural form’.

The transition from the simple orthogonal geometry of the schemes devised under the responsibility of Leslie Martin and consisting of slabs and towers connected by the odd footbridge to the abstract sculpture as described by Furneaux Jordan is intriguing, and it seems to imply the introduction of a completely new set of architectural concerns in the collective design culture of the LCC architect’s department. Yet, apart from the conflict between Bennett and the design team in the months leading up the public presentation of the scheme, there is no hard evidence of a larger debate about the direction in which the project was heading. None of the contemporary publications makes an attempt to reveal the deeper considerations of Engleback and his young collaborators. The ideas behind the design remained as opaque as its suggested materialisation.

The track record of the members of the design group offers no further clues either. Neither the earlier projects Herron and Chalk had produced for the LCC, nor Engleback’s own project for the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace (designed in the late 1950s and constructed between 1960 and 1964) show any indication for the design ideas of Furneaux Jordan. An explanation for the approach and the specific architectural responses will have to be found elsewhere.

The stark contrast between the layout shown in the 1954 model and the definitive proposal for the South Bank justifies an examination of both schemes in some detail. Although the definitive scheme had to accommodate a gallery and a larger concert hall (but not the Government Hospitality Centre), the most dramatic changes are not related to the brief itself, but to the appearance of the ensemble and to the way in which it relates to the context. The 1954 layout can best be described as a rationalised version of a city consisting of freestanding large buildings forming streets and open spaces. The enclosed nature of the courtyards inside the hotel complex and between the Festival Hall and the conference centre suggested a semi-private use. In the model these spaces show some similarity with the formal open courtyard inside the Shell offices, which occupy a site just to the south of the South Bank; a space surrounded by corporate architecture of the blandest sort.

The shift between the conventional modern layout of the 1954 scheme and the ‘single three-dimensional thing’ nestling on the side of the abutments of Waterloo bridge, as proposed in 1961, cannot be explained by the changes that had occurred to the programme. Nor is it a result of significantly changed ideas about access and circulation: at the level of traffic arrangements the two schemes show a large degree of continuity: the idea that the development of the South Bank should allow for a comprehensive separation of pedestrians and car traffic was already firmly established in the 1954 model. The difference between the two projects, therefore, is not one between different concepts of traffic separation, but of the experience and expression of the different modes of movement. Whereas the 1954 scheme had chosen to relegate all car traffic and parking to ground level and then cover everything up, in the 1961 design the conflict between the pedestrian and the car is made explicitly visible. The arrangement of service roads in the open undercroft of the building and pedestrian bridges crisscrossing above emphasises and celebrates the layering and co-existence of different forms of movement within one larger structure.
5.4 A Cultural Centre for an affluent society?

What were the origins of the design for the new building? The presentation and the defiant stance towards the superiors within the architect’s department might indicate that the design was proposed as a statement of youthful non-compliance with established ideas. Yet, the ‘young architects’ had not explained themselves. It was only retrospectively, when the building was approaching completion, that one of them made an attempt at illuminating the ideas behind the design. This text, together with a series of statements by Norman Engleback published on completion, and his reminiscences thirty years later, are the only explicitly formulated statements trying to explain the calculations informing the design. It is from them that one could expect to reconstruct some of the discussions within the team leading to particular design decisions such as the polygonal deck system, the use of concrete throughout or the tough detailing.

In 1967 an article by Norman Engleback on the new buildings appeared in *The Arup Journal*, a publication of the eponymous engineers’ and architects’ firm responsible for the structural design. Much of the text is devoted to particular technical solutions for the acoustics and the structure. It is almost in passing that Engleback provides his readers with a summary of the major decisions informing the architectural design. The tone of the description is partly laconic, partly rather curiously defensive. The primary objective of the design is ‘to break down the buildings into their components, and expressing them’. In order to achieve this fragmentation, ‘some elements could be suppressed below horizontal laminates of terraces’. It is only when explaining the detailing (along with other technical aspects of the building), that Engleback seems to be entirely confident: ‘Detailing has been of a strong and vigorous kind and has been carried through from the Queen Elizabeth Hall to the Hayward Gallery, so that the buildings, although having functions, have a common and simple vocabulary of materials and details which are readily identified.’ The article ends on a defensive note, against ‘criticism of the austere nature of this design’, to which Engleback responds that ‘this was the power and the handling necessary to achieve a significant contribution to the whole’.134

Warren Chalk’s review of the building, published in the same year but directed at the readership of *Architectural Design*, is even more defensive than Engleback’s. Chalk describes the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth as the result of an ‘agonizingly slow process of getting architecture off the ground’, which is tangible in the ‘lack of immediacy from which the building now suffers’ and a ‘deflation of values current at the time of its inception’. Beyond these differing observations, which indicate a distance towards the design, Chalk offers some clues about the considerations which had informed it and identifies some of the references.

Chalk does not explain, however, how these references related to the purpose of the building on the South Bank and a possible interpretation of the cultural programme in the context of the early 1960s. Given the scarcity of material and the opacity of the explanations one has to speculate and discuss the scheme in its context, to make at least an attempt at understanding what had informed its design – while being careful not to confuse these ideas informing the design with various post-hoc interpretations, both by the architects and critics. Still, it seems useful to look at the cultural context in which the design was conceived. This includes an examination of British society in the period and specifically of the ways in which broader debates about the role of culture in society may have been received by the architects. In positioning the design within the specific architectural culture of London towards the end of the 1950s and in the early 1960s it seems to me that the role of Reyner Banham deserves particular attention. Another avenue for investigation are the references mentioned by Warren Chalk in his 1967 review of the building. Finally I will also discuss which alternatives to what was actually built on the South Bank might have existed, by discussing two initiatives for cultural centres in London that were developed at more or less the same time.

This method of finding circumstantial evidence for the development of the 1961 South Bank Arts Centre design may be perilous. It departs from the assumption that the design activity within the LCC architect’s department was influenced by a general cultural climate and adjacent, i.e. contemporary practices. In the absence of hard evidence this approach seems the only possible option, but it retains a risk; it is in danger of prioritising one particular interpretation. The construction of a connection between some aspects of the design and particularly its architectural appearance with contemporary debates within the architectural culture of London in the early 1960s may be equally debatable. If both avenues are nonetheless pursued here, this is with some degree of caution and because they appear to offer some fixed points from which a design process, for which there is little conventional evidence, may be understood.

The end of a long revolution? – Britain in the Sixties

In order to investigate in what way the design could be positioned within the wider culture of the late 1950s and the early 1960s it may be useful to review the 1961 publication of the scheme. The model photos had presented the scheme as a landscape of terraces populated by, mostly, individuals making their way across the footbridges. This rendering of the project as an environment to be negotiated by single urban *flaneurs* may have been the result of using the model as the main object of communicating the design. Yet these images contrast starkly with the emphasis on showing architecture as a provider of collective association that is so clearly expressed in the many illustrations of architectural projects of the period. In the illustrative repertoire of architectural schemes of the post-war period there is an explicit emphasis on showing how urban and interior spaces are occupied by groups of people. Gordon Cullen’s illustrations of the Festival Hall had presented the building as a venue for polite sociability, whereas the conventional illustration of

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134 ibid., p. 14

135 Warren Chalk, ‘South Bank Arts Centre’, *Architectural Design* March 1967, p. 120
squares and public buildings in the new towns was usually populated by heterosexual couples, families and children playing somewhere in the background. Alison and Peter Smithson, as well as continental Team Ten members, had developed illustration techniques using images of informal gatherings to show the relationship between architectural form and patterns of association. In most cases these images constructed an idea of architecture as a context for collective experiences.

The South Bank images, by contrast, seemed to imply that the new buildings, despite their evident public nature, would be used by anonymous and distinctly single people – a somewhat anonymous environment in a city of strangers. Kenneth Frampton has described the ‘peculiar London cultural climate of the mid 1950s’ as heavily influenced by Parisian existentialism, which ‘decisively shaped the ethos of the British Brutalist movement’138, and these images appear to confirm this. Indeed, one cannot help imagining the lonesome figures as étrangers wearing black turtle-neck pullovers or sharp suits with narrow legs while walking across the pathways and bridges. The entire environment seemed to be designed as a set for perambulation across an artificial rock landscape that combined the experiences of privileged views and exquisite solitude of the English picturesque tradition with the imagery of controlled advanced technology. In this environment the individual, liberated from limiting cultural values and social ties, was to play out his right to withdraw from older concepts of group loyalty or society, in order to explore the possibilities of modern technology.

The rendering of the South Bank can be seen to point towards a departure from the interest in the social, which had been a pervasive characteristic of the architectural discourse of avant-garde architects of the 1930s. If the Smithsons view had been ‘split between a sympathy for old-fashioned working-class solidarity and the promise of consumerism’139, the South Bank scheme indicated an unequivocal acceptance of a consumer society made up of sovereign individuals, loners of the James Bond type rather than participants in the social theatre of the welfare state. The coupling of the principle of picturesque planning with

Illustrations of images of collectivity; Philip Johnson, the 1964 New York State Theater in the Lincoln Center (drawing by Helmut Jacoby, top); Jaap Bakema/ Aldo van Eyck, the 1962 Buikslootmeer urban scheme (bottom)

the concept of the building as a well-serviced, functionally designed container housed in a concrete shell, services and circulation dramatically exposed to the outside world, suggests that this concept for a ‘metropolitan arts centre’ entailed a position, not only vis-à-vis the established positions within British architectural culture of the period, but also the broader problem of the position of culture as part of society.

Reporting from the 1961 presentation of the scheme, the Guardian correspondent had noted the presence of the younger members of the LCC design team with their ‘crew cuts and Italian suits’. The reference to the sartorial style of the younger generation may not have been wholly accurate,148 but it certainly offered an indication that the decidedly urban appearance of the junior members of the design team signified an act of dissociation from the cultural preferences of their seniors. The suits as much as the design itself were meant to be a statement, and were received as: the wearers presented themselves as representatives of a younger generation who stood against those who were ‘nodding sagaciously’, their superiors within the LCC architect’s department and the politicians. The eagerness with which the younger designers confronted the press, also noted by the newspaper, was another indicator that this generation, in contrast to their predecessors, was not prepared to be ‘grateful for small mercies’149 and modest in their ambitions.

By the early 1960s Britain had developed into an ‘affluent society’ (a term borrowed from the eponymous book by Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith published in 1958), which politicians promised and journalists predicted Britain was to become.140 In 1961 the Parker Morris Report, a government report on housing, noted the evidence of increased prosperity in the private homes, and the advent of cars, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, fridges and television sets, summing up: ‘these possessions are spreading fast through all income groups, fastest of all in the lower brackets, and we are promised a doubled standard of living in 25 years’.141 By 1960 the most innovative sectors of British industry, including communications, construction and food processing, had been subjected to major rationalisations and were in a state of seemingly boundless growth,142 prompting Harold Macmillan, the Conservative prime minister, to state that ‘... in material terms people are better off than ever before’.143 The effect of the economic upturn, materialising in a property boom in 1961–62,144 were reflected in the image of the period as a ‘renovated, electronised New Elizabethan Age’.145 The gradual improvement of the material situation of the average Briton was reflected in an ‘excited rhetoric of consumer demand’.146

136 Frampton (1980), p. 272
137 ibid., p. 265
138 Contemporary photographs of the main contributors show no evidence of the American military hairstyle. But then, hair styles can change very quickly.
139 Judt (2005), p. 163
140 Galbraith’s book was, primarily, an analysis of the coincidence of private wealth and public poverty in the United States, but this aspect seems not to have been noted much in journalism at the time, neither in Britain nor elsewhere in Europe. John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1958
143 Morgan (1990), p. 187; According to other sources the quote was, in fact: ‘Let us be frank about it most of our people have never had it so good’. Judt (2005), p. 324; Black/ Pemberton (2004), p. 2
145 Mellor, in Robbins (1990), p. 229
146 Morgan (1990), p. 191
147 Judt (2005), p. 227

A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

People’s Palaces

Technocracy and cultural reform
the King’s Road in Chelsea, West London[149] was another indicator for new forms of consumer demand targeting distinct groups, and especially the young, whose disposable income had increased rather more dramatically than that of the average population.[150]

The cultural historian Arthur Marwick has identified six factors for what in his judgment was an ‘upheaval … at least as great as those of the Second World War …’, executing ‘an irreversible influence on British society’. [151] These were the growing spending power especially of younger people, the softening of class boundaries, the emergence of a specific youth culture most visibly expressed in pop music, a transformation in sexual attitudes and behaviour, an increased emphasis on the freedom of the individual and the cultivation of an unprecedented degree of ‘frankness and openness to the extent of … “explicitness”’.[152] He also notes that this included a new openness to ideas and attitudes from both the Continent and the United States[153], which in Britain were given a specific turn: ‘Now a country which lacked the antediluvian bigotries of the American Bible Belt, the clerical and anti-clerical factionalism of France and Italy, or the reviving bourgeois stoiledness of Christian Democratic Germany, showed itself responsive to the new pressures.’[154]

The result of this change, he asserts, amounted to no less than a ‘cultural revolution’[155] and a ‘very genuine liberation of the people’,[156] who seemed to have broken out of the straitjacket of dullness and conformity which had pinned it [British society] since Victorian times.[157] This view is reflected also in Terry Eagleton’s assessment:

‘As far as culture goes, the bland, paternalistic cultural establishment of the post-war epoch was rudely shattered by the populist experiments of the 1960s. Elitism was now a thought-crime only slightly less grievous than anti-Semitism. Everywhere one looked, the middle university classes were assiduously at work roughening up the accents and distressing their jeans. The working-class hero was triumphantly marketed. Yet his politically rebellious populism also paved the way for the rampant consumer culture of the 1980s and 90s.’[158]

At the time, the term ‘affluence’ itself was not free of pejorative undertones.[159] Many commentators interpreted the sudden and long awaited upturn in the economic prospects as indicative of a process of alienation and of undermining established social relationships.[160] The left particularly, disillusioned by almost a decade of Conservative governments, viewed the new popular mass culture as ‘egalitarian, commercial, and sexist’, and the country generally ‘still at a stage of transition from a social stratification based on birth to one based on money and actual position’.[161] The discontent with the status quo particularly among ‘the young’, despite the improved material circumstances, was reflected in the emergence of a fashion for so-called ‘kitchen sink’ neo-realist dramas depicting everyday life in northern English working class towns and the critical success of John Osborne’s play ‘Look Back in Anger’ in 1956, made into a film two years later. In Tony Judt’s assessment these renderings of contemporary realities had an impact on the collective national psyche, because Britain was ‘a largely apolitical society’ and the British ‘increasingly interested in consuming and being entertained’. [162] In any case, it seems to reflect the perception of at least some cultural commentators at the time, one of whom gloomily wrote: ‘[the middle classes] have withdrawn into an introspective contemplation and a passive submission to the dictates of administrative minded decision makers.’[163]

The ‘unease and nagging humanism’ of intellectuals, combined with a loss of traditional working class attitudes and the adoption of a middle class life-style diagnosed by Richard Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy,[164] and the persistent electoral success of the Conservatives indicated a new social fluidity.[165] They could also be seen as evidence for a lack of disorientation, successfully but thinly camouflaged by the celebrated and commercialised youth culture. On the other hand, young people did not only spend more, they also were much more likely to study. During the 1960s the number of university students had almost doubled and across the country new universities were founded and built. [166] Perhaps it was this, the fact that an increasing number of people who would never have had a chance to gain access to higher education were finding a way into universities, which prompted Raymond Williams to find some reasons for optimism about the future prospects ‘of Britain in the Sixties’. In his book The Long Revolution Williams characterised the moment of publication – 1961 – as a decisive one in the ‘genuine revolution, transforming men and institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual forms and ideas.’[167]

Questioning ‘humanist’ culture and its arbiters

One of the avenues for developing an understanding of the institutional concept and the design is by positioning it against the background of debates on the role of culture in the welfare state. It is here that the


Richard Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy (Harmondsworth: Penguin) 1958

Hughes in Campbell (2000), p. 60


Williams, Long Revolution (1961/1965), p. 10
period around 1960s seems to represent a moment of transition in the general directions of official cultural policy and its function in society. The general questioning of the post-war proposal of the responsibility of the state to give access to the ‘cultural heritage of the nation’ (combined with the roughening up of the accents of the upper middle classes) was, however, not a sudden development.

In 1948 an instruction booklet issued by the BBC for its entertainment programmes stated the moral responsibility of the producers and actors: ‘The influence that [the BBC] can exert upon its listeners is immense and the responsibility for a high standard of taste correspondingly high’. The underlying assumptions about the task of institutions like the BBC to ‘educate, inform, entertain’ the population also formed the ideological underpinning of the cultural patronage as it was established in 1946 with the founding of the Arts Council of Great Britain. The aim to make culture previously enjoyed by the middle and upper classes available to everyone permeated through the documents circulating within the BBC and the Arts Council. Isaac Hayward’s speech on the responsibility of local authorities for arts initiatives – and by implication creating an infrastructure for them – is also most usefully interpreted along these lines, too.

The responsibility of the institutions, operating at ‘arm’s-length’ to educate the general public to appreciate works of art was, by implication rather than explicitly, based on the unquestioned authority of experts on unselected advisory boards as to what should be supported as artistically valuable, and what should be barred from the public channels or institutions. The BBC’s instructions were clear that explicit sexual references would not be tolerated, nor were those to lavatories or ‘effeminacy in men’. Light entertainment music was, of course, broadcast; yet jokes at the expense of established cultural traditions would not be tolerated. Generally the judgement relied firmly on the assumption that those invited to assess the artistic quality of forms of expression were legitimate arbiters of taste and content.

Within the cultural consensus of the immediate post-war years, the firm belief in art and culture defined by a canon and judged by experts, remained intact. For an opponent of the entire concept of the welfare state like T. S. Eliot, who was adamant that ‘our own period is one of decline’,177 culture, like education, was a means of selecting an elite. Representatives of liberal modernism like Herbert Read, the founding president of the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and dubbed the English ‘Pope of Modern Art’,178 departed from the assumption that products of creative activity could be judged according to their intrinsic artistic value, implying a clear hierarchical separation between what counted as art and what did not.179

For Read it was clear that this role of the artist required a detachment, or artistic solitude, and the freedom to be left alone. Only if this freedom was realised could artistic production flourish. Read’s examples – Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Blake, Bach or Mozart – suggest that this role of the discoverer of society’s unconsciousness was essentially that of a small minority. In the essay ‘To Hell with Culture’, originally written in 1948 and edited for a 1963 collection of essays, Read struggled with the implications of his basic conviction that ‘in a natural society there will be no precious or privileged beings called artists: there will only be workers’176 and his emphasis on the solitary – and essentially priviledged – nature of the arts and the artist. The basic assumption, however, that it was for the experts, the cultural producers and their critics, to define what was artistically valuable and to express the ‘enduring values of human life’, remained intact. The ICA itself certainly was invested with a considerable exclusivity. Viewing itself as a ‘lonely outpost for avant-garde experiment in dour post-war Britain’, the institute had a membership of between one and two thousand during the early 1950s.178 Its context, in other words, was entirely different from existing or emerging Continental and North American institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which relied on public or private funding from which an extensive educational activity could be financed.

As early as 1951 the conflict between Read’s proposal of a British modernism softened by an appeal to English traditions of artisanship and the interests of a younger generation of artists had led to a first clash when Read vetoed the inclusion of the installation ‘Growth and Form’ conceived by the artist Richard Hamilton as part of the ICA’s contribution to the Festival of Britain.177 In the following years the rejection of what Reyner Banham called ‘the marble shadows of Sir Herbert Read’s Abstract-Left-Freudian aesthetics’178 and his defence of a canonical view of modern art provided a catalyst for an artistic reaction which, in due course implied a fundamental departure away from the fine arts towards an interest in the phenomena of popular mass culture. At the same time, as Mark Wigley has argued, the Independent Group saw itself as ‘maintaining the spirit of the avant-garde’, reframing the rejection of pre-war avant-garde’s rejection of history by absorbing mass reproduced images.179

Perhaps paradoxically, this change went hand in hand with a gradual change of the ICA, which became more rather than less respectable as it was funded with American money. Gallery openings which had been populated by ‘bearded artists in duffle coats … sculptors in overalls and
successful playwrights wearing white gardens', increasingly became occasions attended by upper echelons of London society and attaches at the American embassy.\textsuperscript{180} As Anne Massey has argued, this change in the cultural perspective away from the Continental pre-war avant-garde to contemporary and largely American culture at least to some degree can be described as an alignment with the directions of post-war cold war politics.\textsuperscript{181}

Against the background of new forms of visual culture, present in the form of advertisements in magazines (mostly imported from the United States), and popular music, younger artists launched an attack against the authority of the first generation of English modernists. As Anne Massey put it: ‘The old, radical, European ICA began to disappear at the expense of a new, liberal, American-oriented ICA.’\textsuperscript{182} Artists like Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale, Nigel Henderson found themselves associating with the critics Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham and the architects Alison and Peter Smithson, James Stirling, John Voelcker and Colin St John Wilson in what became known as the ‘Independent Group’.\textsuperscript{183} They were united by their opposition to both the tasteful, timeless modern art represented by Read and the architectural ‘Contemporary Style’ popularised by the Festival of Britain. Instead, the Independent Group introduced ‘advertising, Detroit cars, fashion, Hollywood movies, and science fiction’ as references – this a marked difference also to the 'Black Eyes and Lemonade' celebrations of traditional English working class culture, which the ICA had sponsored earlier.\textsuperscript{184}

The exhibitions mounted by members of the Independent Group, ‘Growth And Form’ in 1951, ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ in 1952 and ‘This is Tomorrow’ in 1956, were presented as collections of objects and images from a ‘fine art-popular art continuum’ which, Lawrence Alloway suggested, entailed a shift in what was defined as culture.\textsuperscript{185} In the essay ‘The Long Front of Culture’ published in 1959 Alloway summarised his own position and that of at least some of his fellow exhibitors: ‘Instead of reserving the word for the highest artefacts and the noblest thoughts of history’s top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of “what a society does”.’\textsuperscript{186} Questioning the boundaries between the ‘fine’ and the ‘popular’ arts went hand in hand with a rejection of the authority of the expert, the ‘author’ who in the past had operated as “taste-giver, opinion-giver, and expected to continue to do so.”\textsuperscript{187} This role, on which the entire system of state-sponsored arts-length cultural provision was in fact based, was now ‘clearly limited’. The experts had lost legitimacy and their grip on the values of the wider public because of a ‘failure to handle technology’ and the ‘impotence of the literary, humanist, established culture in the face of scientific advance’.\textsuperscript{188} The issue was no longer one of access to culture but one of the values culture needed to represent: ‘The aesthetics of plenty oppose a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of the elite’.\textsuperscript{189}

Alloway’s contempt for, of the ‘custodians of culture’ echoed the attack on the alleged intelligentsia of intellectuals in the influential Rede lecture titled ‘The Two Cultures’ by the novelist and civil servant Charles Percy Snow.\textsuperscript{190} Snow’s diagnosis, that ‘the intellectual life of the whole of western society is increasingly being split into two polar groups’, scientists and those working in the humanities, could have been read as an invitation to reconnect the two separate practices. Instead, however, Snow launched a full-blown attack on the ‘non-scientists’. Not only were they complacently assuming that scientists were shallowly optimistic while never having ‘tried, wanted, or even been able to understand the industrial revolution, much less accept it’.\textsuperscript{191} Worse, many of the most prominent intellectuals, in Snow’s view, were at best naively apolitical ‘natural Luddites’\textsuperscript{192}, at worst prone to supporting anti-democratic political causes. Snow approvingly quotes a question that a scientist had once asked him: ‘Why do most writers take on social opinions which would have been distinctly uncivilised and demode at the time of the Plutagenets? Wasn’t that true of most of the famous twentieth century writers? Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time – weren’t they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn’t the influence of all of them represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?’\textsuperscript{193}

The anti-intellectualist stance displayed in the lecture prevented Snow from noting that it had been precisely an uncritical faith in technological progress which had facilitated the industrial organisation of the killing in the destruction camps and that it had also been intellectuals (admittedly others than the select group of writers mentioned by Snow) who had fought the Nazi ideology with their pen, brushes and lives.

One particular point made by Snow had especially powerful resonances in the British context. ‘Compared with the rest of the intellectual world’, he stated, ‘considerably more scientists in this country and probably in the U.S. come from poor families.’\textsuperscript{194} This seemed to support the idea that the sciences were less affected by class differences than the humanities, proposing the engineer and scientist as a modern sage, and that the traditional definition of culture or ‘bourgeois culture’

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\textsuperscript{180} Reyner Banham, ‘Klee’s Peda
gogical Sketchbook’, Encoun
ter, April 1954, p. 53. Quoted from Massey (1995), p. 65.\textsuperscript{181} As Anne Massey points to in her discussion of the ICA’s competition for a Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner, which was organised by the Independent Group, ‘Parallel of Life and Art’ in 1952 and ‘This is Tomorrow’ in 1956, were presented as collections of objects and images from a ‘fine art-popular art continuum’ which, Lawrence Alloway suggested, entailed a shift in what was defined as culture.\textsuperscript{185} In the essay ‘The Long Front of Culture’ published in 1959 Alloway summarised his own position and that of at least some of his fellow exhibitors: ‘Instead of reserving the word for the highest artefacts and the noblest thoughts of history’s top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of “what a society does”.’\textsuperscript{186} Questioning the boundaries between the ‘fine’ and the ‘popular’ arts went hand in hand with a rejection of the authority of the expert, the ‘author’ who in the past had operated as “taste-giver, opinion-giver, and expected to continue to do so.”\textsuperscript{187} This role, on which the entire system of state-sponsored arts-length cultural provision was in fact based, was now ‘clearly limited’. The experts had lost legitimacy and their grip on the values of the wider public because of a ‘failure to handle technology’ and the ‘impotence of the literary, humanist, established culture in the face of scientific advance’.\textsuperscript{188} The issue was no longer one of access to culture but one of the values culture needed to represent: ‘The aesthetics of plenty oppose a very strong tradition which dramatizes the arts as the possession of the elite’.\textsuperscript{189}

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\textsuperscript{194} to 1960. In 1946 he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Technology in the Labour government of Harold Wilson, this probably a direct result from his Rede lecture at Cambridge University in 1958, The Columbia Encyclo

\textsuperscript{192} Luddites was the name used for the textile artisans who destroyed engines and machines in protest against the threat to their occupation by the introduction of indus

\textsuperscript{193} Snow (1959), p. 7

\textsuperscript{194} ibid., p. 10
(as it would have been called in Continental Europe) was a mechanism for cultural exclusion. Snow does produce no evidence for this claim, and the surveys (for example those carried out by Harald Swedner in Sweden and Pierre Bourdieu in France in the 1960s and 1970s) showing that there was a correlation between social background and consumption of culture had not yet been carried out. Instead he voiced a general and unspecific resentment against intellectuals and the entire field of the humanities as an elitist conspiracy resisting the scientific and technological advances which were to improve the life of humankind.

Snow’s attack on the ‘cultural Luddites’ had considerable influence. On the conservative side, it seemed to offer an explanation for the relatively poor performance of Britain against its main competitors (and especially Germany) by those who saw the nation in decline. Yet it also provided ammunition for those rejecting an alleged anti-Americanism supposedly pervading post-war English politics and culture. The admiration for consumer culture and advanced technology, for ‘Detroit’, ‘jetliners’, ‘magazines’ and ‘packaging’, on the part of critics like Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham, was at least in part an intuitive counter reaction to the resentment against the concept of cultural politics as a defence mechanism against American popular culture. The polemical advocacy of a scientific techno-culture in opposition to established traditions, ‘a standard frame of reference in the mid-fifties’, provided the foil for an exploration of the ‘Popular (designed for a mass audience)’, the ‘Transient (short-term solution)’, the ‘Mass produced’, the ‘Young (aimed at youth)’, the ‘Witty’, the ‘Sepoy’, the ‘Gimmickly’ and the ‘Glamorous’, terms which defined the sensibilities as well as the ideological programme of the Independent Group and its entourage. As Wigley summarised the argument: ‘High art connoisseurship was to be displaced by an unpatronizing embrace of popular taste.’

There was probably more than a hint of specifically British class resentment in the anti-elitist and anti-culturalist rhetoric of Alloway and others within the Independent Group. David Mellor has suggested that many of the protagonists originated from working or lower middle class technical cadres and were anxious to mark their position by setting themselves apart from the ‘ubiquitous upper-middle-class British art-amateur and his milieu’. Whether or not this self-conscious positioning as self-made men from lower orders opposing a well-established elite from the metropolitan upper and upper middle classes was actually correct is a matter of some controversy. The studied absence of polite propriety in the style of both Alloway and Banham, as well as the explicit absorption of banal, chauvinist (in the gender sense) and commercial imagery in the work of Paolozzi or Hamilton could be seen as part of a larger agenda that embraced American corporate and mass culture, in order to épater les bourgeois at home. Banham was clear about this when he interpreted the embracing of American mass culture with the emancipation of the British working classes in his 1964 article ‘The Atavism of the Short-Distance Mini-Cyclist’. The effect of Banham’s forceful language and his cultural analysis applied to objects of everyday culture is probably undeniable. As Adrian Forty has pointed out ‘Banham’s recognition that one might subject ordinary, everyday products and buildings to serious historical study was radical and exciting’ against the background of the bias towards interpreting the great traditions, modern or classical, of art. However, the attack on the custodians of culture looks misguided and undirected when compared with the ideologically more explicit statements of, for example, Willem Sandberg in Amsterdam or Pontus Hultén in Stockholm, both of whom operated from a firm belief in culture as a vehicle for egalitarianism.

The cultural position of writers like Banham and Alloway was a curiously complicated one. On the one hand their critical stance towards an art establishment embedded in a privileged class was entirely understandable. Towards the end of the 1950s the absorption of classical modernism into the canon of the cultural heritage to be promoted by state-sponsored agencies was more or less complete, and had definitely lost its disturbing potential. As Terry Eagleton points out, modernism ‘had run out of subversive steam’, its protagonists being awarded the usual signs of recognition and peerages. Yet, the disregard of Banham and Alloway for the modernist cultural elite also had a curiously anti-cultural, not to say, philistine element. Whereas the experimentation with new dramatic forms of, for example, theatre director Joan Littlewood was rooted in an informed politicised world view, Alloway’s and Banham’s critique of the prevailing cultural establishment, for all its strident rhetorics was curiously shallow and overcome by its inverted class resentment – reproducing a contempt of culture per se, deeply engrained in sections of British society.

In how far all this may or may not have affected the attitudes of, particularly, the younger member of the design team working on the scheme for the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall will remain a matter of speculation. Yet, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that some of these ideas may at least to some degree have been influ-
enced by the debates within the London art scene of the mid and late 1950s. There seems, in any case, to have been a reproduction of the figure of a young ‘avant-garde’ distancing itself from an older one in the architectural culture. This may have included, as Fred Scott has suggested, a similar class antagonism, ‘with the rough, tough new boys and girls coming from lower-middle-class provincial backgrounds taking exception to the work of the metropolitan upper-middle-class designers of the Festival [of Britain]’, the latter associated with ‘socialist collectivist aspirations’ while the former tended ‘towards individualism and the free market’.208

Cultural institutions and artistic experiment in an apologitical culture?

In the debates of the Independent Group a critique of the negative aspects of the emerging consumer culture and the quite tangible processes of commercialisation, concentration and levelling in culture and the culture industries is notably absent. Forms of expression that, as Alloway, Banham or Hamilton suggested, had a far greater vitality than the established culture of the ‘humanists’ – consumer design, comic strips and Hollywood films – were (and are) rarely intended for social criticism. They were, it is true, geared towards people and groups who were generally not addressed by the official cultural institutions. In this sense the introduction of images from magazines and comic strips, the use of toy robots and advertisements certainly had elements of a critique of the detached position of the ‘custodians of culture’. Yet neither Alloway nor Banham seemed to have been much concerned by the implications of their embracing popular and particularly American mass culture, and the underlying assumption that, ultimately, all forms of cultural expression were of equal value. It may have been this argument against a distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, by means of a celebration of the ‘low’, which Raymond Williams had in mind when he wrote about ‘the danger in a popular form of demagogy which … succeeds in avoiding the problem of bad culture altogether’.209 There would, Williams feared, be no hope of a serious debate about the role of cultural production or expression in collective efforts in pursuit of social justice or a greater degree of democracy. The celebration of mass culture, therefore, showed at least a certain amount of complacency and de facto affirmation of the status quo, something summed up by David Mellor in his reference to ‘Tory Futurism’.210 It was decidedly apolitical. ‘What society does’ was recorded, but not examined beyond the superficial collecting of images and symbols of consumer bliss.

An additional problem was that the reference to ‘popular culture’ proposed by Banham, Hamilton or Alloway was selective in a way that seemed to contradict the rhetoric. All three relied on a romanticised image of American culture that was as aspirational as the references to classical cultural ideals or the Italian ‘craze’ which mystified Banham. The ads which the Smithsons famously proposed as signs of a new popular consumer culture could, at least for a long time, only have been found in magazines that were specially imported and sold in selected newsagents. Besides, the celebration of Americana could be criticised as an affirmation of US cultural and political hegemony. Banham, according to his biographer Nigel Whiteley, was aware of the dilemma, and the possible contradiction of an ‘American leaning’ and the general diffuse ‘Left-orientated, even protest-orientated’ tendencies of many members of the Independent Group.211

Revisionist art histories have presented the Independent Group as precursors of Pop Art and as a rare episode of an interdisciplinary collaboration between visual artists and architects.212 Both these aspects of the projects of the group would explain the extraordinary attention given to what is essentially limited to a series of exhibitions and pamphlets.213 The nature of the association as a collaborative network of artists, architects and their critics seems to have prevented attempts at formulating alternative visions how new forms of presenting art were to affect the institutions dedicated to this purpose. The exhibitions may have been groundbreaking and the ‘This is Tomorrow’ exhibition, which was shown at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, is reported to have been ‘immensely popular’ with children from the surroundings in the East End, who would come into the entrance hall.214 Yet, despite, the position of Alloway as deputy director of the ICA between 1955 and 1958, there is no evidence that the implications of widening the definition of culture was also directed at broadening the audience. Reyner Banham’s reference to Alexander Dorner’s ‘living museum’ experiments in the poem ‘Marriage of Two Minds’ published in the ‘This is Tomorrow’ catalogue hints at a desire for an different kind of museum. The content and tone of the poem is faintly comparable to some of the texts written by Willem Sandberg for the Stedelijk Museum who had speculated about the end of the museum and its replacement by a open institutional form215:

‘this is where you come in when the barriers are down and only undifferentiated environment remains even within the space frame opens out ways beyond the arts doorkeeper
alexander dorner’.

Dorner’s pre-World War II experiments as director of the Hanover Landesmuseum, and including the collaboration of El Lissitsky and Kurt Schwitters, were an important point of reference for the avant-garde of museum directors in post-war Europe. Both Pontus Hultén and Willem Sandberg took inspiration from Dorner’s concept of presenting art in a context, an ‘Atmosphärenraum’, and would have agreed with the underlying view that art, and specifically contemporary art, provided a tool for understanding the effects of social and technological modernisations and conditions of modernity. For Banham and the Independent Group, as Helena Mattson has argued, Dorner’s work in the United States was

210 Mellor, in Robbins (1990), p. 229
212 These claims are critically discussed and dismissed by Anne Massey, who shows how both Banham and Alloway contributed to what she calls the ‘myth of the Independent Group’ which has become part of an ‘accepted history’. Massey (1995), p. 109-116
214 Walls, in Modern Dreams (1988), p. 9
215 for a discussion of Sandberg’s ideal of a museum that is no longer a museum, see chapter 5
Influenced by American Pragmatist philosophers, Dornier’s interests shifted towards an interest in the role of images in communication, the former educational impulses being replaced by the acceptance that creative production is part of a market-driven ‘dynamic process’, absorbing and altering the production of images and aesthetics. Banham’s reference to Dornier’s post-war American work is revealing, since it explicitly prioritised the medium, which had become detached from the original social purpose of the pre-war exhibitions. The educational project was now framed as ‘information’, which reflected and represented rather than commented economic and commercial realities or influences. Distinctions between types of images, whether from advertisements, photo features or those specially produced by an artist, were presented as irrelevant. Art not only showed what society does; the fundamental difference between life and art was to be eliminated. However, in the same process of eliminating the boundary, the capacity of art of operating as a means of fundamental critique of Capitalist society was lost.

Architectural Review: technology, not history

Norman Engleback explained the design of the new buildings on the South Bank as a declaration of modesty towards the Festival Hall. Yet, the 1961 design everything but a display of homage to the older building. Indeed it seems to avoid a direct lineage at almost every possible level: typologically, stylistically and in terms of programmatic organisation. In fact, it is difficult to identify any predecessor for this design, or a cultural allegiance comparable to the overt references to Continental modern architecture in the Festival Hall. Rather linking itself to a particular architectural tradition, modern or otherwise, it seems as if the designers of the new art centre wished to operate outside any form of architecture that had existed in Britain or elsewhere during the twentieth century – to produce, in other words, an architecture without a past. The question generated by this observation is why such a stark contrast was sought, and which references would have been available for the design, since the existing architectural models of British post-war modernism were so obviously rejected in the design.

To younger London architects in the 1950s the Festival Hall represented an outdated application of pre-war planning principles, whereas the picturesque planning of the Festival of Britain and its dissemination presented an outdated application of pre-war planning principles, whereas it explicitly prioritised the medium, which had become detached from the original social purpose of the pre-war exhibitions. The educational project was now framed as ‘information’, which reflected and represented rather than commented economic and commercial realities or influences. Distinctions between types of images, whether from advertisements, photo features or those specially produced by an artist, were presented as irrelevant. Art not only showed what society does; the fundamental difference between life and art was to be eliminated. However, in the same process of eliminating the boundary, the capacity of art of operating as a means of fundamental critique of Capitalist society was lost.

In the same article Summerson also identified the This is Tomorrow exhibition as a turning point when a group of younger architects ‘taking nothing for truth and testing the soundings of another, angrier, generation’ made itself visible, admitting that he was ‘neither percipient enough to predict in which direction architects’ thinking and preoccupations would move’.220 The noise, and perhaps angriness, was predictable by the architectural historian John Summerson, in his ‘Mischievous Analogy’, a lecture which he had delivered at the Architectural Association in 1941, and which he substantially reworked in 1947. John Summerson had predicted: ‘In 1959 Summerson felt himself proven by the events of the decade which had occurred since having made the prediction. In his foreword to an anthology of British architecture of the previous years he wrote: ‘Suddenly in the full (and very cold) light of peace it was seen that the war had also been a revolution; that in the course of it a social fabric had been steadily and remorselessly, and with general consent, demolished and that it now only remained to sort out the wreckage and rebuild. … Looking back from 1958, one may feel that 1945 and its immediate sequel looks such a small grim and comfortless and that its achievements do not shine so bright as we sometimes hoped they would’.220

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bureaucrats, square podia or basements, and strong semicircular projec-...226 in the utopian projects of Antonio Sant’Elia, the futurists were presented as neglected predecessors of a radical Anti-Classicism, an architecture directed against symbolism and eternal permanent values.227 Banham approvingly quotes the Futurist Manifesto and its insistence on a masterpiece that ‘must be burned with the corpse of its author’ and a celebration of ‘the becoming, the perishable, the transitory and the expendable’.228

The concluding chapter of Theory and Design showed that the presentation of Sant’Elia and Marinetti as important and suppressed modernists was not merely a historiographical operation. Having criticized the post-war International Style for its ‘formalism and illusionism’, Banham noted: ‘In cutting themselves off from the philosophical aspects of Futurism, …, theorists and designers cut themselves off not only from their own historical beginnings, but also from their foothold in the world of technology’.229 The impulse to redefine architecture as a response to rapid technological change had been lost in favour of a new set of formal dogmas. In order to regain connection with technological developments in industry and ‘to keep up’, Banham concluded, the architect ‘may have to emulate the Futurists and discard his whole cultural load, including the professional garments by which he is recognised as an architect’.230

Banham elaborated this position further in a series of articles, ‘Architecture after 1960’ which he commissioned for the Architectural Review in the year of the publication of his book. The first of these, written by Banham himself, is presented as a ‘stocktaking’ of the situation.231 The text is organised in two columns arranged side by side, under the headings ‘tradition’ and ‘technology’. The ‘tradition’ column is mainly an attack on the direction taken by some of the major first generation modern architects: ‘Mies van der Rohe has isolated himself in a bronze tower more pure than ivory, driven there by a logic that would have worked equally well in a vacuum where modern architecture did not exist’.232 Gropius has become the dean of the Formalists, Doric in Athens, Islamic in Baghdad. …233

It is in the other column, under ‘technology’, that Banham endeavours to set out an alternative agenda, which architects would have to follow if the discipline was not to lose grip on the situation. Reiterating the argument of Theory and Design, Banham writes: ‘Under the impact of these intellectual and technical upheavals the solid reliance of architects, as a profession, on the traditions of that profession must eventually give way’, relying on ‘measurable performance rather than some cultural sanction’. There would no longer be a ‘custom-sanctioned monopoly of architects as environment-purveyors to the human race’, but the architectural discipline would have to be defined as ‘the integration of a complex of intrapersonal relationships and mains-services’.234 Cities, Banham continues, would cease to be ‘collections of buildings with spaces between them’, but ‘collections of buildings with streams of metallic objects flowing round them – a revision that requires them [architects] to think differently about the way the buildings touch the ground, differently about the relationship of building to street, differently about the relationship of building to those who look at it, since the viewers may now be passing it at sixty-plus mph on a gently rising curve or in a underpass …’.235

Proposing the approach of the engineer, as a producer not only of technically performing objects but also of cultural icons (such as cars), Banham noted that the logic of industrial production had implications for the geometry of the artefacts: ‘… it should be noted that when prefabrication gets out of the direct control of architects, into the hands of engineers, it almost invariably ceases to be rectangular in its format. …’236 The articles commissioned by Banham and published in the subsequent issues of the Review were intended to illustrate where new directions were to be found. The first tranche of the survey was a series of three statements on computer technology, human sciences in architecture and, rather prominently placed, weapons systems.237 Banham’s agenda of proposing technology as the field of disciplines from which architecture would have to redefine itself is introduced via these three texts, all of which present the working methods of engineers, even if the third (on human sciences) was actually written by the architect Richard Lewelyn-Davies. The idea that design is primarily the result of a series of decisions, non-intuitive and scientific decisions is mostly clearly expressed in A. C. Brothers’ article on aircraft and weapon design, which presents the process of producing effective equipment strong enough to ‘kill the enemy’ as a collaboration of specialised engineers, and a high degree of integration between the various disciplines involved.238

The expose of these considerations, rather perplexingly, is neither commented upon by the author, nor by Banham, who contributed short introductions to the articles. It is only in the final discussion of the series in June 1960 that Hugh Casson rather dryly pointed out that the limitless expenditure by the military-industrial complex meant that the comparison between the design of aircraft and missile technology and the tight economies of school-building or housing production was ethically challenging and factually inappropriate.239

Banham pursued the proposal of an architecture, freed from its tradition and formal principles in a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), which was published as ‘The history of the immediate future’ in 1961.240 Echoing C. P. Snow’s characteris-
tion of literary intellectuals as cultural Luddites, Banham launches an attack on the cultural self-definition of architects: ‘Any electronicist or political economist can give you a succinct run-down of the sins and follies of architects – and 50 percent of what he says will be right, so painfully right that his views will be instantly dismissed as ignorant lay prejudice.’

Architecture, Banham argues, ‘is no longer central to our existence (if it ever was) and has been pushed over to the margins by science and technology … a marginal or luxury activity’. In this situation, architects should turn to the ‘strongest adjacent discipline’ and absorb technology in its own methods, have it ‘wrapped up inside, or together with, the process of architectural design’. This, finally, was not a matter of choice: ‘Either British and world architects will join the intellectual adventure of Human Science and transform architecture, or it will fail to make the imaginative leap, and turn introspective again.’

Banham’s rhetoric at this time, in 1960–61, was most probably no longer directed at the generation of architects he had been associating with in the previous decade. By this time the Smithsons were already involved in a process of ‘regressive withdrawal’, of exploring exactly the types of references, including the recent buildings by Mies, which Banham had dismissed as irrelevant. Banham’s own hope, it seems, was now directed at a next generation and architecture that would no longer be based on a ‘sincere, responsible, deeply felt and long pondered attitude of masters and exponents …’

In a public discussion on the first Archigram publication in the same year Banham made this clear when he defended the initiative of the group (then still only consisting of Peter Cook, David Green and Mike Webb), asking ‘What will happen with students when what they see in their history lectures is stronger and tougher than they get taught in their studio instruction? What happens when the practising masters of the day produce near-beer, and the slides that shown in the history lectures are 80º proof?’

The message, that architecture in the consumer society of the early 1960s was to shed its stable identity, and sense of propriety, in order to respond to technological changes, clearly had a receptive audience among ‘the next generation after the next generation’, the students and recent graduates who were only too prepared to see the positions of their teachers as stale, old beer, keen to present themselves as representatives of the ‘immediate future’. Banham became this generation’s ‘major interlocutor’.

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240 ibid., p. 252
241 ibid., p. 257
242 ibid., p. 257
243 ibid., p. 257
244 ibid., p. 257
245 Reyner Banham, response to Nikolaus Pevsner, ‘Modem Architecture and the Historian, or, the Return of Historicism’, RIBA Journal, April 1961, p. 338. In the discussion, which followed Pevsner’s lecture, Helen Rosenau asked whether, ‘what we have seen, in fact, paralleled by the ‘angry young men’ who strongly react to their environment and somehow feel they have to be robust and unconventional … a far wider phenomenon than one which is only architectural and which, I think, is cultural in a much more general sense?’
246 Sadler (2005), p. 4
247 Banham, ibid., p. 255
Cities in layers – the influence of the Berlin Hauptstadt project by Alison and Peter Smithson

What was the origin of these ideas for the South Bank's polygonal deck as the dominating element in a three-dimensional integrated treatment of building and infrastructure? In his 1967 review Chalk offers the following explanation: 'At the time it [the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth scheme] was designed, the architects thought they had something to say, and said it consistently: through the mixed vocabulary of the building came the message of the city as a single building'.

Norman Engleback was vague in his account of the design process, mentioning only some unidentified 'continental schemes' that had been influential. It was, however, not on the continent where the idea of the multi-layered city, as it was now proposed for the South Bank, was most forcefully advocated, but in Britain. The continental projects Engleback referred to were most likely two schemes designed by English architects. Chalk explicitly mentions two entries for the Hauptstadt Berlin competition of 1952, one by Alison and Peter Smithson with Peter Sigmond, the other by Arthur Korn, as the defining points of reference for the design on the South Bank. There is, however, some reason for caution; Chalk's article was written several years after the design and may well reflect the development of thought that had occurred within Archigram in the almost seven years that had gone by.

Both competition designs were informed by the idea of a 'deck' covering large areas of the city and providing a continuous system of pedestrian spaces above the given street level, which in turn was handed over to cars. Both also suggested a series of smaller and larger buildings penetrating through this deck, whose geometry was developed independently from the orthogonal grid of seventeenth century Central Berlin. Korn's proposal included a variety of smaller pavilion-type buildings for public and commercial programmes, and tall thin residential slabs, as it were, cutting through the deck and across the existing city.

The Smithsons had publicised their scheme for the centre of the German capital in a series of publications and a film made to accompany the drawings and sketches had been shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The younger members of the design team for the South Bank, including Warren Chalk, were probably acquainted with this film, an imagined promenade through the new city centre of Berlin, incorporating footage of film scenes from London streets. The axonometric sketch of a pedestrian platform net laid out across the eighteenth century street grid of Central Berlin in fact shows a fair amount of similarity with the South Bank scheme. Here as well as there ‘free-moving, non parallel, narrowing and widening routes and angled junctions’ – as the Smithsons later described them – provided a fully continuous platform for pedestrians integrating points of access and monumental buildings (occasionally also absorbing them, as was the case with the ruins of Schinkel’s Schauspielhaus).

In the central commercial section of the Smithson project on either side of Friedrichstraße the geometry of the deck related rather loosely to the existing grid, but the site of the central government building was a composition of polygonal platforms connected to the remainder of the city by means of a very long footbridge. This connection offered a processional approach to an amphitheatre in an opening in the elevated deck, three terraced government buildings enclosing the plaza ‘in a series of rising tiers, like the fingers of a grasping hand’. At the southern end an enormous irregularly hexagonal platform provided space for a helicopter station connected to the pedestrian net. In their presentation of the scheme in the publication Uppercase, edited by Theo Crosby, the Smithsons wrote:

'The geometry of the pedestrian platform is irregular (but not systematic), and emphasizes the much freer system of routes that is possible for a pedestrian than for vehicles. The rectangular road net, and the angular pedestrian platform, together form a pattern of spaces within which variations can be made, or buildings added, without destroying the concept. The width of the footbridges allowed larger commercial programmes such as shops, restaurants and cinemas to be situated underneath. Where the deck crossed major car traffic routes, large longitudinal openings in the deck were to form what the Smithsons optimistically thought of as ‘piazzette’, escalators connecting the ground level with an intermediate gallery and the pedestrian deck. At these points elements of traditional Berlin street life could be clustered, ‘from cafes to newspaper stands, either as independent establishments of as part of big shops under the platform’, turning every street crossing into a kind of Rialto bridge.’

In the description of the project included in the posthumous anthology The Charged Void Alison and Peter Smithson identified four main ideas from which the design had developed:
the concept of mobility, derived from our observation of movement patterns, the inverted profile developed out of the realisation that the pyramidal density pattern for cities is too banal, ... ideas to do with growth and change, ... and the need for green zones in the city ...”

Following these points of departure the competition project was presented as a demonstration of the ‘scattered urban structure and patchwork form’ of post-war cities and the statement that the characteristic urban form in this environment was neither the corridor street, nor the traditional perimeter block or the enclosed square, but the ‘cluster’ of people, movements, activities and architectural incidents. From the enormous expanses of the platforms (which could be 70 metres wide and 180 metres long) the pedestrian was allowed panoramic views across of the open landscape of Berlin, the occasional monument such as the former Reichstag, the Schauspielhaus or the domed churches on the Gendarmenmarkt retained as isolated remnants of the historic city.

The parallels between the Smithsons’ Berlin project and the South Bank scheme designed three years later are obvious. Although the competition design did not include architectural proposals for specific buildings, it seemed to provide a precedent for the treatment of the infrastructural network and buildings as one three-dimensional structure and both projects shared an angular, non-orthogonal geometry. In both cases, the infrastructure somewhat overwhelmed the accommodation. The Berlin project, as Kenneth Frampton has observed, was characterised by its ‘proliferation of horizontally layered, largely unenclosed streets-in-the-air, accessed by escalator banks and evidently capable of handling a rush-hour population far in excess of the medium-rise towers that the complex seems to have been designed to support’. Something similar could be said for the extensive network of bridges connecting not more than two relatively straightforward entrances to public buildings to the remainder of the city.

The formal similarities go further: despite the absence of an explicit indication of materials in the Berlin project, the drawings and sketches suggest that here, too, concrete was proposed as the main building material. In some ways the South bank project appears even as something of a miniature version of the competition design, and a more literal one than Smithsons might ever have entertained. In a way that was comparable with the platform network in the Berlin project the walkways at the South Bank established a new ground level in order to absorb variations and additions, the South Bank scheme was essentially for two precisely defined buildings and their immediate surroundings. The suggestion of open-endedness implied by the deck system was, in fact, misleading; it suggested future possibilities of adaptation and change that were in no way intended. And whereas in Berlin the net of platforms had been separating pedestrians from a grid of traffic routes with cars cruising, the ground level at the South Bank was essentially a series of delivery yards and roads. On top of this both the concert hall and the gallery were conventional boxes whose functions allowed little or no relationship with their surroundings and which could not be used to establish additional connections with the ground level, as the Smithson had proposed the buildings should do in Berlin. Instead, the external deck and the foyer serving the concert halls, both meandering around the boxes and through the cavity separating the two parts of the building, took over the role of a public concourse firmly limited to a monofunctional enclave. Its designers may have viewed the project as the beginning of the city as a single building, a megalith. In reality, however, it was and remained a meagre structure stub.

At the time that the design for the South Bank was presented to the public the architects Alison and Peter Smithson had abandoned both their interest in the picturesque as exemplified in the Berlin project and the exploration of consumer aesthetics evident in their design for a House of the Future, made of fibreglass and plastic and produced for the 1956 Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition. The scheme for the Economist Building, first published in August 1961, just five months after the presentation of the South Bank project at the Tea Centre, indicated a shift back to calm Miesian orthogonality, explicitly leaving the city ‘outside the site boundary’. As the Smithsons could be seen to have changed position, or to have ‘lost their nerve’ — a favourite expression in the critical discourse of Banham and his contemporaries — the South Bank appeared to continue where they had stopped, exemplifying the ‘discontinuity of architectural generations’, which by now characterised British architecture.

The South Bank as an example of municipal Brutalism?

If the concept of the South Bank project as a cluster of volumes and decks could be directly related to the commitment to the multilayered city as formulated by the Smithsons and other representatives of Team Ten, the origin of the formal language is more difficult to locate. On the one hand the proposal to execute the building in exposed concrete, large narrow vertical concrete panels and over-sized concrete elements for the balustrades seemed to point in the direction of sensibilities shared by other London architects at the time. In the 1950s Alison and Peter Smithson had abandoned the Mies-inspired assemblage of steel and glass employed in the project for the Hunstanton school (1949-1954), in favour of exercises in the use of ordinary London stock brick and a large urban area, and were aware of the fact that this entailed a fair amount of change over time, emphasising the capacity of their project to absorb variations and additions, the South Bank scheme was essentially for two precisely defined buildings and their immediate surroundings. The suggestion of open-endedness implied by the deck system was, in fact, misleading; it suggested future possibilities of adaptation and change that were in no way intended. And whereas in Berlin the net of platforms had been separating pedestrians from a grid of traffic routes with cars cruising, the ground level at the South Bank was essentially a series of delivery yards and roads. On top of this both the concert hall and the gallery were conventional boxes whose functions allowed little or no relationship with their surroundings and which could not be used to establish additional connections with the ground level, as the Smithson had proposed the buildings should do in Berlin. Instead, the external deck and the foyer serving the concert halls, both meandering around the boxes and through the cavity separating the two parts of the building, took over the role of a public concourse firmly limited to a monofunctional enclave. Its designers may have viewed the project as the beginning of the city as a single building, a megalith. In reality, however, it was and remained a meagre structure stub.

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concrete. John Miller and Christopher Dean working for Lyons Israel Ellis had demonstrated in 1958 a similar approach in their design for the Old Vic Theatre workshops not far from the South Bank.

The use of explicitly rough exposed concrete, occasionally combined with equally coarse masonry, was not an exclusively English phenomenon. It had precedents in Le Corbusier’s use of similarly rough materials in the two Jaoul houses in Neuilly near Paris (1956) and the deployment of exposed concrete in the Unité at Marseilles (1948-54) and in the interior of Louis Kahn’s Yale Art Gallery at New Haven (1953). As early as 1950 the Swedish architects Bengt Edman and Lennart Holm had realised a small house in Uppsala in irregular engineering brick. Edman and Holm’s project had been described as ‘Neo-Brutalism’ in Sweden and this name somehow made its way to England. Here the term ‘spread like a wildfire’ and was adopted by a certain faction of younger architects. (In one version the reference was connected to Peter Smithson’s nickname Brutus, but this explanation may well be a carefully nurtured urban myth).

Reyner Banham’s article ‘The New Brutalism’, originally published in 1955 and (in extended form) made into a book in 1966, was both an attempt to define what could be understood by the term and how to identify the architects whose work qualified for being included. Banham was eager to explain that the use of concrete as such was not sufficient for discrimination, but by 1966 he was aware that these objections had missed the point: ‘… such was the prestige of Corbusier’s béton brut that the world was becoming convinced that this heroic material was “specifically Brutalist”. Any building featuring exposed concrete became classified as Brutalist and this included most of the schools and universities, hospitals and civic centres in Britain (but not only here) for which concrete became the material, faute de mieux, in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The concrete used for the various surfaces of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall was highly specific. A review of the building in the Concrete Quarterly (a publication of the Cement and Concrete Association) noted: ‘The dignity of the Hall is not monumental but rather attained by the beautifully consistent use of its material – concrete – both in the precast panels and in the board-marked in situ concrete of the exterior.’ The high level of control which was required in order to achieve this was explained in an ideological programme. Mattson (2004), p. 72

Banham, New Brutalism (1966), p. 10


268 Banham, New Brutalism (1966), p. 75

269 ‘South Bank Arts Centre, Concrete Quarterly, no. 72, February–March 1967, p. 3

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Helena Mattson makes a distinction between the Swedish ‘Neo-Brutalism’ which goes back to remark in a “mildly sarcastic tone” by Hans Asplund in a review of Edman’s and Holm’s building, and English ‘New Brutalism’, which was defined by the attempts of Banham and the Smithsons to theorise

an ideological programme.

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to achieve the different desired effects becomes tangible also in a review of the technical aspects of the building by A.J.J. Bartak, the engineer working on the building, who mentioned ‘the patience and high standard of drawing office work necessary’. The attention to detail and the need to draw every single aspect of what had become a complicated building may also account for the relatively long construction period of the project.

At the time that the design of the South Bank scheme was completed, what had started as ‘a violent and sustained polemic of style’ and as ‘a classic quarrel of generations’ had been ‘tamed from a violent revolutionary outburst to a fashionable vernacular’. The design of the South Bank Arts Centre coincided with this moment, ‘when Brutalism was slipping down a gear into the municipal’. Simon Sadler has pointed out that, somewhat ironically, “it was that ideas about multi-deck level access, independent systems of movement, the principle of “cluster” and, for that matter, béton brut, began to be properly realised not so much under the Brutalist “avant-garde” itself [a reference to the Smithsons], but under a “retardaire” of architects at the LCC.”

The formal language of the cluster with its allusions to the solid concrete volumes of the late Le Corbusier and the bold treatment of balustrades – in his 1967 review of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, Warren Chalk made the connection with Japanese contemporaries – disguised the fact that essentially the building was conceived as a machine. Channels of movement, of people and cars but also of air or electricity, were expressed as independent from the enclosed rooms that they served. The main feeder duct to the auditorium, for instance, appeared as a heavy ribbon draped around the its top, and air ducts materialised as cantilevered concrete bands resembling the pedestrian balconies winding around the building.

Simon Sadler had suggested that a few years later this conception of the buildings as a conglomerate of shells and separate elements plugged in to feed them might have been expressed in a light-weight steel or plastic structure. The first paper projects of Chalk and Herron, conceived less than three years after their departure from the LCC architect’s department, point into this direction. The 1969 Archigram ‘Living City’ exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art, for example, includes a scheme by both for a city titled ‘City Interchange Project’ made up of pipeline bridges and towers resembling bullets. Against the background of the architectural models available at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, the execution in state-of-the-art concrete construction methods, however, was probably the only way of building that was seriously considered by the architects. For the time being, concrete was still predominant; a competition entry for a civic centre in the small cathedral town of Lincoln on the English east coast submitted by Chalk and Herron in 1961 shows a large degree of similarity in plan with the South Bank scheme, ‘incorporating any number of irregular polygonal shapes, stacked in elevation over several levels, pulled together by a few deftly-placed walkways.’

In proposing a building free of the compositional ideas that had
governed the architecture of the post-war generation, the Arts Centre seemed not only to point to a city of the future, but also to one preceding history. Some features of the building evoke associations with the formal language of the products of the military industrial complex, the west window on the gallery's top floor, for example, has been compared to 'a pillbox gun installation or a visor, 'tempered by a comic-book eclecticism', There was, one notes, also a hint of the aesthetics of Italian Futurism highlighted by Banham in Theory and Design. None of these ideas were, however, explicitly stated when the design was presented to the public and the politicians in 1961. It is in Warren Chalk's article titled 'Architecture as consumer product' written five years later that some clues about the design ideas and 'the designers' preoccupation with styling the building as some sort of natural or organic feature' are given. Chalk literally describes the building as a pseudo-prehistoric landscape element, as 'an anonymous pile, subservient to a series of pedestrian walkways, a sort of Mappin Terrace for people instead of goats.

The reference to the Mappin Terraces, the artificial rock for wild animals (originally designed for bears) in the London zoo, is revealing, not only with respect to the likeness in appearance and the fact that in both artefacts a zigzagging silhouette disguises a fairly rational plan. Painting a picture of a rock inhabited by humans rather than animals, Chalk proposed the building as an adventure playground for tribes of urban dwellers, formed by nomadic patterns of movement and association. His description of the users of the city in general and the building in particular reads as an ethnographic analysis of tribal behaviour, rather than of forms of sociability and public display in a twentieth century capitalist metropolis: '… the pedestrian, the gregarious nature of people and their movement was uppermost in mind, and the built demarcation of space used to channel and direct pedestrian patterns of movement.'

The conception of the public building as both landscape element and as an intelligent machine is directly linked to an idea of self-determined behaviour in a consumer society, as if to reconcile Rousseau with McLuhan:

'In a technological society people will play an active part in determining their own individual environment. There will be more and more contributors involved in self-determining a way of life – we cannot expect this fundamental right out of their hands and go on treating them as cultural and creative morons. We must tackle it from the other end in a positive way. The inherent qualities of mass production for a consumer oriented society are those of repetition and standardisation, but parts can be changeable or interchangeable dependent on individual needs and preferences, and, given a world market, the idea economically feasible.'

Chalk's statement proposed a reading of the building and the surrounding city as an interactive environment, a place to explore, change and play with. 'Cities should generate, reflect and activate life, their
structure organised to precipitate life and movement. Situation, the happenings within spaces in the city, the transient throw-away world of people, the passing of cars, etc., is as important, possibly more important than the built environment, the built demarcation of space.'

The question is, of course, whether this post hoc interpretation of the South Bank is an adequate representation of the design ideas of Chalk (and Herron and Crompton) in 1961, or whether it must be taken as part of a general re-positioning of the project, after the event. In any case this version probably only ever reflected the views of the future Archigram members of the design team, who had a limited amount of control over the project. Against the background of the building’s precisely defined brief, Chalk’s suggestion of a pile shaped by informal footpaths is misleading and, at the same time, telling. It illustrates the huge discrepancy between the traditional concept of institutionalised cultural provision as laid down in the brief and the ideas, or fantasies, of the designers of how their buildings would invite interaction and accidental events.

Ironically, despite Chalk’s suggestions of an anarchic and adhoc inhabitation, it is the technocratic flexibility of the serviced shed realised (particularly) in the gallery spaces that is most successful; and this flexibility was the result of municipal architects like Norman Engleback plodding along, rather than the suggestion of endless opportunities for external circulation. The exterior, with all its promises of an informal, interactive behaviour offered, in fact, no invitation for change or growth. Nor was it truly inclusive. As Simon Sadler has pointed out, ‘the South Bank Centre’s insensitivity to the infirm betrayed its Futurist inspirations, prioritising the young and able-bodied, motorised vehicles, and, with ducts heroically scaled and standing proud of the volumes of the building.’

And Lionel Brett suggested, not without a certain indignation, that the ‘young LCC architects were not, as they saw it, designing for elderly Mr Wilkins of Bethnal Green, but for their own generation, capable of seeing the point of a brave new world.’

Other People’s palaces: Centre 42 and The Fun Palace

If we are trying to understand the considerations behind the institutional concept and the architectural design for the South Bank it may, finally, be useful also to look which avenues were not followed. After all the early 1960s were, to some degree, the beginning of a pluralist culture and the activities of the Independent Group, for instance, coincided with the first stirrings of the New Left in Britain, and an explicit cultural critique of the post-war political and economic realities.

Originating from a concept of enlightened state patronage, the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall followed the established models for public art galleries and performance spaces. The pride and eagerness, with which the ‘Housing the Arts’ committee had mentioned the interest of John Rockefeller in the South Bank development, and the reference to the Lincoln Center as an example for the arts centre in London suggests that considerations of cultural prestige were also a factor. Considerations that would have included a critical analysis of how the cultural provision and the stated intention to disseminate might alter under the influence of the dissemination, as Raymond Williams had argued, were of no consequence for the project – neither at the political level nor for the young architects, despite their intense desire to represent a ‘new’ approach.

It is when one compares the South Bank to two contemporary projects that the bias towards the established concept of cultural provision is particularly visible. The first of these was Centre 42 in a former Victorian railway engine shed in North London and operating between 1964 and 1972 as a cultural forum for experimental theatre and literature. Centre 42 had been established by the playwright Arnold Wesker and was seen as a direct outcome of the 1960 TUC congress in which the trade unions committed themselves to supporting cultural initiatives for its members. In the following years the Roundhouse developed into what the Swedish writer Kurt Berggren later called a ‘Pantheon of working class culture’ where performances and festivals were prepared in order to tour around the country, from factory canteens to pubs.

Wesker’s model of an institution engaged in fostering the development of a culture genuinely rooted in the traditions of the British working class seemed to benefit from the fact that its venue was a derelict building big enough to allow for a variety of uses yet sufficiently cheap to operate outside commercial culture industries. The maintenance of the old structure and its refurbishment for the new use, however, combined with the fact that working class audiences were not inclined to direct their attention to Peter Brooks Tempest (1968) or Toni Richardson’s Hamlet (1969), meant that the Roundhouse experiment was under continuous financial threat – despite its earlier success with the critics and the large younger audience attracted by performances of Jimi Hendrix, The Doors and Pink Floyd and in spite of the explicit support from the highest echelons of the Labour Party. Although being explicitly mentioned as an example in the first British white paper on cultural policy, ‘A Policy for the Arts – The First Steps’, the Roundhouse failed to establish itself permanently.

The other project explicitly involving a critique of the established models of state-sponsored cultural provision was the initiative for a Fun Palace by theatre director and actor Joan Littlewood and architect

283 ibid., p. 288
287 Kurt Berggren, När skönheten kom till city. (Stockholm: Ablas) 1976, p. 155
288 Reyner Banham derided the whole initiative for refurbishing the Roundhouse as ludicrously misguided (‘any organization that proposes that kind of money … to lumber itself with a bandaged-up load of Victoriania need its head examined …’). Reyner Banham, People’s Palace’, New Statesman, no. 68 (7 August 1964), republished in A Critic Writes (1966), p. 107
290 A Policy for the Arts – The First Steps, Presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty, (London: HMSO) 1965,
Cedric Price. Its origins were in the tradition of political theatre as it developed in Britain in the 1930s and Littlewood’s adaptation of Berthold Brecht’s plays for performances in Manchester and, from 1953, in Stratford in East London. In early 1962 Littlewood met Price and started to work on the idea of a project which gradually changed from a proposal for an experimental theatre to that of an environment ‘where there could be every kind of entertainment, classical and ad lib, arty and scientific, where you could dabble in paint or clay; attend scientific lectures and demonstrations; argue; show off; or watch the world go by.’

Price, who was working on the London Zoo Aviary at the time, was intrigued by the idea of a space ‘where the latest discoveries of engineering and science can provide an environment for pleasure and discovery’. The combination of Littlewood’s background in politically engaged theatre and Price’s own interest in an ‘architecture of enabling’ was reflected in the product of their collaboration. Littlewood’s interest in readjusting the fixed relationship between actors or performers and audience led her to search for a much greater flexibility than what was offered by conventional theatres. In a private statement she noted:

‘Nineteenth century society worked on the principle of “higher education” for a minority, and that education was designed merely to perpetuate that status quo; museums and art centres were built “to form and promote a taste for the beautiful …[and to] humanise, educate and refine a practical and laborious people”. These concepts have not changed and our society is perpetuating obsolete forms in which human energy can no longer be contained. The most important aspects of human development are still ignored by town planners and the problem of alleviating human misery, despair and apathy is so acute that every skilled teacher, cybernetician and artist must be recruited for the war of dullness.’

The contempt for the ‘apathetic’ attitude of the modern individual was something Price shared with Littlewood. He demanded ‘a new art of living instead of escaping from living into rather dreary art’. As far as the architectural response to the requirement of maximum flexibility and interaction between people cooperating to alter their environment was concerned, Price and Littlewood found that there were no institutional or typological models from which the project could depart. Littlewood had experimented with performances in the style of the nineteenth century music halls – and their tradition of robust interaction between performers and audience – and both she and Price appear to have had an interest in the ‘People’s Palace’ set up by the philanthropist Walter Besant in 1887 on Mile End Road in the East End of London. These models, however, relied on a fixed architectural form, based as they were on existing typologies of performance spaces.

An alternative to these stable architectural arrangements was the phenomenon of the pleasure garden as it had existed in London until the mid nineteenth century in the form of Vauxhall Gardens and various...
other similar establishments, and their juxtaposed existence of places for informal sociability and organised performances. The Fun Palace, it seems, was conceived along similar lines, the hedges and lanes of the pleasure garden replaced by a large scale steel structure ‘resembling’, in Price’s description, ‘a large shipyard in which enclosures such as theatres, cinemas, restaurants, workshops, rally rooms, can be assembled, moved, rearranged and scrapped continuously’. 296

The 1963 scheme for the Fun Palace for a site on the Isle of Dogs in the London docklands and devised by Price with the advice of the structural engineer Frank Newby envisaged an arrangement of tall steel ‘service towers’ on a structural grid of 18.3 by 18.3 metres, with a total length of 237.7 metres and a width of 109.7 metres. The plan of the structure, perhaps paradoxically for an artifice that was not to represent architectural traditions, resembled that of a basilica, with ‘aisles’ running along the edges, leaving a couple of ‘naves’ formed by quadrants of 36.6 by 36.6 metres, which in turn were served by two overhead gantry cranes spanning the entire width of the central space. 297 The service towers also accommodated lifts, stairs and services leaving the remainder free for arranging and rearranging walls, platforms or floors within the modular system. Accessible from all sides and providing an infinite number of options for making spaces under a suspended membrane roof, the Fun Palace was to offer its visitors an environment in which everything was constantly adjustable and moveable.

It is obvious that the proposal of the Fun Palace project, which was pursued by Price and Littlewood and a large number of supporters until 1966, was no longer merely an alternative theatre space, nor indeed any other form of institution as known. Even the description as a structure based on a grid of towers, as given above, is only possible by allowing a certain amount of poetic licence in reading the plans of Price and Newby. Most of the visual material produced to promote the project was a certain amount of poetic licence in reading the plans of Price and Newby. When local opposition towards the plans for the Isle of Dogs was building up, she – ‘a woman of the people’ – managed to turn it into explicit support winning the sympathy of the residents association. 300

The broad and interdisciplinary nature of the group supporting the scheme also had an effect on the focus of the initiative. It caused a gradual the shift away from experimental theatre towards the discovery of forms of communication, the emphasis on mechanical mobility being replaced by explorations of the possibilities of media and electronic equipment. 301 The stated objective of the Fun Palace, as a learning machine that enabled self-participatory education, implied a counter-reaction against the passive character of consumption and the division between the realms of leisure and work.

This definition of the objectives of the project distinguished it not only from the rather less critical celebrations of mass culture produced by the Independent Group in the 1950s and Archigram, which produced its first exhibition in 1961. It also implied a critique of the system of cultural provision of the state. Price’s characterisation of art as ‘dreary’ or Littlewood’s analysis of culture ‘perpetuating the status quo’ were by no means formed by the general contempt that permeates the writings of, for example, Lawrence Alloway. Rather it came from a genuine belief in the capacity of creativity to help individuals to cooperate and to explore grass roots self-organisation and a distrust in institutions. 302

In its emphasis on self-control and self-organisation the Fun Palace echoed Raymond Williams’ plea for a thinking of the system of cultural provision and his critique of the existing institutions (particularly the Arts Council), demanding instead the creation of ‘communication centres’ and facilities where people could access communication networks without external interference and learn to make considered choices for their leisure activities. 303

The rejection of a separation of the worlds of leisure and work, and of creative cultural producers and passive consumers, which was one of the main points of the Fun Palace, echoes another argument in Williams’s critique of the direction of the cultural policies of the post-war state, notably also those of progressive governments. For both Williams and for Littlewood, culture limited itself to merely offering uplifting leisure experiences, however artistically valuable, if it did not question society’s arrangements. In a passage in The Long Revolution, that seems to resonate with Littlewood’s statement (and also appears to anticipate much of the Swedish cultural debate leading to the building of the Kulturhus in Stockholm in the late 1960s), Williams summed this up when he wrote:

300 ibid., p. 110
301 Lobsinger (2000), p. 122
302 The non-institutional character of the project distinguished the Fun Palace from Arnold Wesker’s Centre 41, which was explicitly affiliated with the Trade Union Movement.
303 Williams’ criticism, like that of Littlewood and Price was also directed at the drift of Labour’s cultural politics and its “plea for the place of the arts” (Williams’s inverted commas), and proposes a public research and information service, with adequate offices and showrooms in every town, where genuine choice could be made available to the ordinary buyer.

Fun Palace Project: generic aluminium ‘silent glass’ curtain rails and electric equipment used for the model

architects and television producers. 299 It was probably this network of supporters, extending deeply into the Labour Party (in 1963 still in opposition, but ruling within the LCC), which allowed the Fun Palace to be considered seriously, despite the utter novelty of its concept and outright opposition from a number of theatre directors. Littlewood’s track record in travelling activist theatre groups and her determination rooted in the anti-Fascist struggles of the 1930s seem to have given her a considerable degree of personal authority. When local opposition towards the plans for the Isle of Dogs was building up, she – ‘a woman of the people’ – managed to turn it into explicit support winning the sympathy of the residents association. 300

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‘If socialism accepts the distinction of “work” from “life”, which has then to be written off as “leisure” and “personal interests”; … if it continues to see education as training for a system, and art as grace after meals ..., if it is limited in these ways, it is simply a late form of capitalist politics, or just the more efficient system organisation of human beings around a system of industrial production. The moral decline of socialism is in exact relation to its series of compromises with older images of society and to its failure to sustain and clarify the sense of an alternative human order.’

Eventually the Fun Palace remained a project, despite firm and even costed proposals for a series of sites across East and North London. Ironically, the reasons for its failure may be identified, as Stanley Mathews argues, in the fact that after 1964 a new Labour government under Harold Wilson with Jennie Lee as Britain’s first minister for culture adopted some of the general ideas for its policies, but directed its attention towards the newly founded Open University. Support may, however, also have drained away because of the lack of clarity as to what exactly the Fun Palace was to be beyond a giant flexible structure. Despite the references to pleasure gardens and the obvious experiences of Littlewood as a successful impresario, and in spite of a special cybernetics committee producing intricate diagrams and proposals for (then) advanced technology, the project in the end remained rather vague. It was neither a theatre workshop (as which it had started), nor an amusement arcade (as Price occasionally suggested) or pleasure park, and certainly nothing resembling the sort of cultural centre for which public funds might have been available. Its relevance lies in presenting a seriously considered alternative to the highly institutionalised forms that were still the mainstay of state-sponsored cultural provision in the 1960s. As such this unrealised idea, which attracted a considerable amount of media attention while the South Bank was under construction, could be seen as a critical footnote to the buildings along the Thames, revealing the lack of substance in Archigram’s rhetorics of adaptability.
A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

Technocracy and cultural reform

Hayward Gallery
(2008)
A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

South Bank (2006/2008)
Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, exterior (2006/2008)
5.5 ‘1968’ – The reception of the South Bank Arts Centre

The Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room were brought into use on 1 March 1967 with a short concert of music specially commissioned from the composer Arthur Bliss and pieces by Benjamin Britten. The new building was opened by the British queen, who had been taken on a tour and offered a large cake to mark the occasion. Press photographs taken at the event show the monarch intently looking at a model of the South Bank, Isaac Hayward proudly standing by. Apparently, the event had not proceeded without hiccups. The BBC broadcaster Richard Baker, who was reporting live from the South Bank, said later that the queen had arrived late and that much of his broadcast had consequently been taken up by describing the new building to his audience: ‘I had been reduced to talking about the aluminium used in the construction of the seats and the fact that the same material was used for the dust-carts of the Greater London Council.’

The art gallery was opened more than a year later, with similar attention. On this occasion the queen was met by the chairmen of the Greater London Council and the Arts Council, and arts minister Jennie Lee. Now the monarch, more known to be fond of racing than visual art, as the Observer reminded its readers, was guided around the first large exhibition organised by the Arts Council works by Henry Matisse. With this show – ‘a good send-off for a gallery that is going to play a vital role in the next hundred [years]’ as Observer critic Bigel Govling wrote – the building presented itself to the national public as a venue where large audiences could experience art works in an environment that offered an unprecedented wealth of opportunities for their viewing, as the Arts Council announced in its press statement.

As had been agreed with the Arts Council the concert halls and art gallery were managed by the Greater London Council (GLC), which had replaced the LCC in 1964, as part of a larger reorganisation of London local administration. The GLC itself, through its staff managing the Royal Festival Hall, took responsibility for programming the Queen Elizabeth Hall, while the Arts Council used the exhibition spaces for a ‘peppercorn rental’. Isaac Hayward, who had unsuccessfully opposed the replacement of the LCC with the GLC, retired from active politics before the project with which he had been closely associated reached completion. Possibly as an act of compensation, certainly in order to commemorate his efforts, the new gallery was named after him and a plaque marking the event had been unveiled in his presence on in December 1967. As the extensive reaction of the broadsheet papers shows, the calculation of the arts administrators that the new gallery needed to be opened with a large exhibition was successful. ‘Matisse 1860–1954’ attracted a large audience. Between July and September 1968 114,214 people visited the new public gallery establishing it as a major attraction both for Londoners and tourists.

The main features dominating the photographs of the interiors of the exhibition halls are the horizontal surfaces. The floor, appearing

307 Mullins (2007), p. 91
308 Court Circular, The Times, 9 July 1968
309 Bigel Govling, ‘Matisse and a landmark’, The Observer, 14 July 1968, p. 25
310 ibid.
311 ibid.
312 Arts Council press statement, 5 June 1968
313 GLC press statement, 15 December 1967
314 White (1967/68)
almost white and seamlessly covering the extensive gallery areas, has an immaterial quality. The contrast between its abstract surface and the ceilings could scarcely be stronger. In the lower, artificially lit galleries long rectangular ribbed aluminium panels form a pattern of silver strips suspended from a black background, spots providing small but intense points of light. The staircase and lift shaft executed as in situ concrete showing the marks of exquisitely regular shuttering and a enormous beam running across the larger of the two ground floor galleries with divide the ceiling and establish the presence of the monolithic primary structure.

On the upper floors, which after the intervention of Henry Moore in the design offered natural top lighting, the suspended ceiling with its square translucent panels turned the surface into a highly articulated grid. The light, having penetrated through several layers, was so modified as to have become diffuse and neutral, and is hardly perceived as daylight, but as ‘cold and somehow dingy’. The grid also provided fixing-points for mounting uprights holding up screens dividing the galleries while leaving their experience as large horizontally directed spaces intact. For the Matisse exhibition paintings had been distributed evenly across the immaculately white surfaces of walls and screens, no explanatory panels or even captions interfering with the pristine character of the galleries.

The absence of captions may reflect the preferences of the Arts Council’s curators in the period, contrasting with the more explicitly educational approach developed in Stockholm or Amsterdam. In combination with the overt presence of the main structure, the screen fittings, lighting and air treatment, this lends the gallery the air of a showroom, perhaps for luxury sanitary fittings or office equipment, as if only temporarily fitted out for displaying the masterpieces of a celebrated modern painter. The awkward proportions and the nondescript light enhance, to go by the photographs, the somewhat lifeless character of the exhibition. Images of the exterior demonstrated that the design, as it had been presented in 1961, was largely executed as originally drawn. The views of gallery and concert halls, shown mostly empty or with lone flâneurs ambling across the decks or the undercroft, recall the model photographs published seven years earlier in detail and atmosphere. The volumes in – then still new – concrete shine almost white against the background of the London sky, adorned for the occasion by characteristic cloud formations. The use of white aggregate panels introduced to give the hall ‘a sort of granite quality’, white Cornish granite also being added to the material of the pre-cast balustrades, emphasise the abstraction of the ensemble. The experience, still going from the photographs, is slightly unreal, as none of the volumes explains itself or reveals much about its interior. Where some sort of explanation is given, for example in the rare window, this is invariably overlaid by some other image, the aluminium screen or the heavy concrete box frame which hides the glass in its dark shadow.
A lusty and confident landmark or Britain’s ugliest building?

Critical press reactions

The critics’ discussion of the new arts complex in the major broadsheet newspapers focussed almost entirely on the stylistic aspects of the internal and external architecture. The architectural correspondent of the Financial Times complained about a lack of integration between the new venues in its context – ‘a lamentable result of design in committee’ – and rejected the interior of the Queen Elizabeth Hall for its lack of warmth, but admired the ‘intimacy’ of the Purcell Room. In the Times J. M. Richards described the exterior as a ‘complicated array of terraces, stairs and roof-shapes piling up in an agreeably picturesque way’, even if he also characterised the approach as a ‘somewhat aggressive informality of style’ and a ‘mixture of dexterity and clumsiness’.

The new buildings received more outspoken support by Bigel Govling, in his review for The Observer. Govling praised the design for not being a ‘tactful cluster of practical spaces such as art-lovers demand’ but instead a ‘pushy, romantic and theatrical pile firmly entrenched in the picturesque tradition and carried out with … panache’. The romantic, almost gothic qualities, which the critic saw present in the design, ‘hovering between a fortress, a science-fiction dream-palace and an Atlantic cliff-face’, allow it to become a ‘lusty and confident landmark’ and ‘a grown-up play-pen in concrete’, which he hopes will ‘indicate the end of the Reticent Age in British architecture’. The only criticisms in this glowing review concern some of the alterations which Engleback had introduced to make the architecture more acceptable, ‘the tall, rough-cast panels used in the upper structure which are a bit elegant in relation to the honest-but-clumsy detail’, and the internal treatment of the galleries, which is described as far too obtrusive and complicated ever to make a satisfactory art gallery and, as mentioned, the lighting.

Not all critics, however, were as positive in their assessment as Richards and Govling. In the Illustrated London News Alan Lyndford likened the new building to a ‘nuclear bomb shelter’, a characterisation which the architects may perhaps have seen as a compliment. A few months after the inauguration of the concert halls the conservative newspaper Daily Mail reported that a survey of five hundred engineers had shown forty-six percent voting the new structure ‘Britain’s ugliest building’. This act of collective condemnation by a group of professionals, arbitrary as the choice of the interviewees may have been, indicated also that the judgment on the building was neatly divided between ‘highbrow’, ‘progressive’ or ‘modern’ audiences and the view of ‘ordinary people’. The Daily Mail, which positioned itself as a voice of Middle England’s common sense, halfway between the popular – working-class – tabloids and established – ‘elitist’ – broadsheets, presented the critical opinion of the engineers as evidence for its general suspicion of state-funded cultural initiatives and an example for the waste of taxpayers’ money on cultural projects. In this light the report of the criticism of one of the key building projects of the cultural policy of the welfare state, which it would observe with reservations, could be
dismissed as a predictable reaction entirely in tune with the more philistine undercurrents in English society. As the reactions to the Festival of Britain and the Housing the Arts Report illustrated, the Mail’s little press campaign was hardly an incident; almost every new development on the South Bank, with the possible exception of the Royal Festival Hall, could count on being attacked for licentious spending of taxpayer’s money.

Compared to the broadsheets the critics in the professional architectural magazines were measured, almost inhibited in their appraisal of the finished buildings, as if the reviewers were tired after the long wait. This was certainly the drift of the slightly apologetic review by Warren Chalk in Architectural Design, which mentions that the design had been presented in the same year that the ‘Twist was introduced ‘heralding a new era’ (and light years from 1967, which saw the launch of the Beatles’ Sergeant Pepper album) and noting, as mentioned, the ‘lack of immediacy’ and the ‘deflation of values’ which was the result of the long building period. A similar fatigue certainly comes across in the editorial comments of the Architectural Review, which reminded its readers of the almost twenty years of planning, of ‘endeavour and indecision, courage and cowardice, conviction and neutrality’ and ‘unstinting committee work’ on the South Bank. The results, according to the Review, were mixed: ‘banal buildings that have no place on a building site of such major importance have been allowed there, buildings that should be there are not’. The editorial does not discuss the architectural design of the new buildings for the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. Instead the Review commissioned Charles Jencks to write an extensive critique of the building, offering the author the opportunity to explore his proposal of a new ‘adhocism’ in architecture.

The Architectural Review’s editorial criticism was mainly concerned with the monofunctional character of the South Bank, criticising the LCC and its successor for allowing the area to be ‘sterilized’ by building a cultural centre and not a functionally working urban environment. The article concludes with an appeal to the new administrators in the GLC. ‘To the South Bank must now come the housing, the hotels, the shops, the cafes, the throbbing of metropolitan life, which have long been promised’. The criticism of the monofunctional character of the area was echoed in the review of the German Baumeister (‘News from the art’s ghetto’) which points out that the new centre may have to be avoided by women after dark – a comment which proved to be prescient. Generally however, the Baumeister showed itself mildly positive about the completed project and this view was shared by critics in other Continental professional journals. None of these journals, however, presented the new buildings as a key project.

A building and its critics

Compared with the press response to the building, ranging from explicit acclaim or muted approval in the case of the Observer and J.M. Richards to the hostility in the Conservative newspapers, the measured response to the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall in the academic and professional discourses on architecture in the late 1960s is notable. The completion of what was a large and certainly striking building, equipped with the most advanced technological technology for air treatment, lighting and – in the case of the gallery – an unprecedented degree of flexibility could have been expected to attract far greater attention than actually bestowed on the new buildings on the South Bank. It is for this reason that two particular critical interventions, by Reyner Banham and Charles Jencks, are noteworthy, if only because they constituted rather isolated incidents of analysing and interpreting a building that left most of the critics nonplussed.

Both Banham and Jencks defend the buildings, even if the latter’s support is somewhat more ambiguous than that of the former. Banham’s long association with Archigram may explain his wish to put his critical weight behind a building whose design and construction he had closely followed. Jencks, who was working on his PHD thesis supervised by Banham after having completed his studies at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1965, took the role of a detached observer. Both, however, used the building as a vehicle for establishing their respective critical positions, and in the process appropriated it for their own very different purposes.

The well-tempered environment: Reyner Banham

Banham first formulated his view of the completed Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall in the 1967 radio talk, published under the title ‘The fourth monument’ in the BBC magazine The Listener. Although the talk starts as an appreciation of the entire achievement on the South Bank, it is the new buildings to which Banham directs most of his attention. Introducing the ‘long and complicated’ planning history and the ‘evolution of the project from a subsidiary space within an existing building to an independent existence’, Banham is eager to present the outcome as a major architectural achievement against the critics, the ‘people who have learned to live with ordinary modern architecture [and who] seem disturbed by the defensive and seemingly windowless of these two concert rooms’ and who ‘have difficulty in deciphering the sense of this cluster and the arrangements of its parts’. The new building, he states, ‘could hardly be modern architecture in any ordinary sense’, but constitutes ‘a very radical change in the external presentation of buildings’. The buildings are presented as an illustration of Banham’s thesis, formulated in the conclusion of Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, that architects ‘may have to emulate the Futurists and discard his whole cultural load’. In its diagrammatic simplicity it is the final consequence of the Brutalist what-you-see-is-what-you-get design approach: ‘a plant room on top of the other, and pedestrian access all around.’

As an ‘true manifestation of the Archigram vision of cities as giant single buildings of capsules connected by tubes and ducts’, the South Bank is, in Banham’s view, a tribute to the advanced technology at the

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322 Chalk (1967), p. 120
323 ‘The Long Haul’, Architectural Review, no. 144, July 1968, p. 34
324 ‘South Bank Arts Centre in London’, Baumeister, 64, Jahrgang, November 1967, p. 1372-1375
325 See, for example: ‘Centro per manifestazioni artistiche a Londra’, Casabella, no. 316, vol. XXXI, p. 44-51; ‘The South Bank Arts Centre, Londres’, L'architecture d'aujourd'hui, 135, December 1967-January 1968, p. 64-71
327 Banham (March 1968), p. 318
328 Banham, Theory and Design (1968), p. 330
329 Banham, (March 1968), p. 318
service of the users of the building. The description of how the building performs is expressed as a technical process of chemical reactions; people and air movements are equalled, as ‘a constant flow of air’, ‘musical reactions (taking) place within these capsules’ and the ‘products of this fusion’ flowing out into cars (‘small mobile capsules’) or the underground network. The South bank, then, proves ‘that, in our present circumstances, to build bare structure, to make enclosed boxes, is not to make architecture, and that to function properly, the enclosed boxes must be wrapped about with ducts and walks and pipes and wires and manifolds, wiring and accessories’. This, in short, is architecture that has successfully shed the whole cultural load and does ‘without the concealing bonnet’; an affirmation ‘that the human race is still in control of its environment’.

The presentation of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall as a key project returned in the *The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment*, published in 1969. This book both continues where the conclusion of *Theory and Design* had stopped – the discarding of the cultural load – and attempts to trace the historical development of mechanical services in buildings and to assess the effects of the availability of advanced technology on architectural values. Noting the bias of architectural history towards exploring towards explaining and interpreting buildings as compositions of hardware – bricks and mortar – Banham states that the historiography of modern architecture has failed to register the impact of environmental management on the development of building types and languages of expression in the twentieth century. ‘Ask a historian who invented the (equally important) revolving door and he can tell you. Ask him who invented the (equally important) revolving door and he cannot.’ It is also because of this bias and the contempt or disinterest of historians, architects and their critics, Banham suggests, that a book like Siegfried Giedion’s *Mechanization Takes Command* could receive the status of a seminal work, despite ‘such spectacular shortcomings as a total failure to attack the history of electric lighting’ and the ‘shallow and unconsidered nature of Giedion’s observations’.

His own book, Banham assures his reader, claims neither to be exhaustive nor definitive, focusing on the effect of applied technology on the course of architectural invention. ‘In practical arts like building it is not the original brainwave [the patent or the technological invention as such] that matters as much as the availability of workable hardware, capable of being ordered ex-catalogue, delivered to the site and installed in the structure’.

In an erudite (and apparently well-researched) revision of the architectural history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Banham examines traditions of civil and domestic architecture for inventions that improved the comfort of those using it; examples are the work of Theophilus van Kannel (the inventor of the revolving door), systems of general ventilation as applied in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast (1903) and the development of air conditioning in the 1920s and 30s in America. Turning towards the post-war period, Banham discusses Marco Zanuso’s Olivetti Factory in Merlo, Argentina (1959–64), Franco Albini’s Rinascente department store in Rome (1961) and the Richards Memorial Laboratorie in Philadelphia by Louis Kahn (1961) in a chapter titled ‘Exposed power’.

The discussion of the projects of Kahn and Albini in particular provides a context for introducing his English contemporaries. Whereas Albini’s technical solutions for the conditioning of the Rome department store ended up as ‘a nineteenth-century palazzo with a low-pitched roof and its classical detailing reworked into a finicky and elaborate exposed steel frame’ and Kahn monumentalised the services ducts, Banham finds evidence for a ‘much more relaxed attitude to piping and ducting (and services generally)’ in England. A first sign of this was the design of the Smithsons’ 1953 competition scheme for Sheffield University which ‘extends the concept of externalised services horizontally, moving piping and persons form building to building in double-decked ductways, piping above, persons below’.

The fact that Banham here equals heating and water to the movement of people was a very free interpretation of the Smithsons’ interest in patterns of movement and human association, which had informed the Sheffield design. The architects had envisaged the decks as ‘streets in the air’ for informal meetings and not as the ‘horizontal service ducts’, Banham finds evidence for a ‘much more relaxed attitude to piping and ducting (and services generally)’ in England. A first sign of this was the design of the Smithsons’ 1953 competition scheme for Sheffield University which ‘extends the concept of externalised services horizontally, moving piping and persons form building to building in double-decked ductways, piping above, persons below’.

The language of the building allows different interpretations: on the one hand it reflects the preoccupations of the ‘Brutalist’ strand in British architectural culture towards the end of the 1950s, on the other the design method and the handling of air treatment in highly visible elements anticipates the formulation of buildings as shells served by technology. Banham notes this difference, when he writes:

‘When the concert-hall parts of the complex were completed, in 1967, they were naturally enough scrutinised fairly closely for signs of Archigram’s “plug-in” aesthetic, whereas attention, when the model had been published some years earlier, had concentrated on allegedly Corbusian elements, such as the exposed concrete on the exterior. In truth, one could say that the Corbusian and Plug-in elements are manifest in one and the same thing, the silhouette the buildings derive from the external disposition of the main service ducts.’

In this interpretation, the South Bank emerges as a first sign of the Archigram city of ‘components on racks, components in stacks, components plugged into networks’. It is the retrospective view of developments, which he had influenced through his intellectual support for Archigram, that allows Banham to present the buildings on the
South Bank as an early, still somewhat undeveloped example of his own interest in an architecture conceived as an appliance and as a consumer product: ‘... there can be few buildings in which the main primary air-distribution is made so rhetorically manifest.’

The presentation of the South Bank as a key project for an architecture freed from aesthetic modern prejudices, Charles Jencks’ interpretation is both more ambiguous and detached. Rather than appearing as the partisan advocate – the position Banham had carved out for himself and which he clearly adopted towards the South Bank buildings – Jencks chose to present himself as a cultural critic, whose task it was to uncover the as yet unformulated and perhaps not entirely conscious responses to the conditions in which architects as cultural producers were operating.

In his article ‘Adhocism on the South Bank’, published in the Architectural Review along with the descriptive editorial comments on the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, Jencks took up the opportunity to discuss the buildings as an example of a fundamental shift in the value system operating within the culture of architecture, and culture at large. For him the mixed reaction towards the centre – Jencks refers to the Daily Mail survey among engineers – was not just ‘symptomatic’ of a pluralist age; it was also an indicator of an emerging design method that implies a fairly total departure from the tenets of the pre-war modern avant-garde. The observation that in Chalk’s explanation of the scheme the term ‘preoccupations’ had replaced the ‘ideals’ provided proof that the building implied something more profound than another move in the revision of the modern project, of the sort that had been intended by the Team X generation and Banham. The change, according to Jencks, was more far-reaching than a mere change of terminology: ‘Instead of universals we now have fashions. Architecture embedded in the market place, ... has marched out of Plato’s Ideal Realm right back into his Cave’.

Architects, Jencks argues, would have to relinquish the ‘Promethean attitude’ of the pre-war avant-garde and the underlying idea that architecture had to demand a position of independence, based on an uncompromised stance towards external influences interfering with the creation of absolute works of art. Jencks sees none of these claims at work in the design for the cultural centre on the Thames: ‘The South Bank ... is not meant to be the last word in cultural centres, or even the second to last. Instead of proclaiming some universal tenet about concert halls and art, it avoids all such claims as pretentious, unwarrantable, unscientific.’

From this perspective, the lack of formal coherence, the random combination of unrelated elements and the literal opacity of the ensemble turn out to be essential, inevitable qualities of a building reflecting the absence of an overriding design ethos, but offering functional and semantic openness. Instead, the choice of ‘at least four structural systems’ all of them unrelated to each other (Jencks suggests that this had most offended the engineers), the absence of a visual logic that would explain the functional layout, the ambiguity of the formal language, all of these aspects are taken as indicators for the ‘adhocist’
approach of the design.\textsuperscript{348} ‘Adhocism’, a term Jencks was to develop further in a book published in 1973,\textsuperscript{349} implied replacing architectural invention, made ‘superfluous in the face of our industrial cornucopia’,\textsuperscript{350} by the ‘bricolage’ of existing and tested elements, which in this operation change both function and meaning. The result is a ‘lively and fumigated eclecticism’,\textsuperscript{351} allowing the unresolved juxtaposition of mushroom columns borrowed from Owen Williams, ‘Japanese’ balustrades or the polygonal geometry of the deck system from the Smithsons.

Apart from the freedom to use different structural systems and architectural references Adhocism also made it possible to analyse a design and its parts ‘as a scientist might and then hand it over to the specialist’, allowing autonomy to each member of the team. ‘Thus the structural engineer of the GLC [a strange lapsus as most of the design activity had obviously taken place under the aegis of the LCC] worked fairly independently of the mechanical engineers, and they in turn worked rather loosely with the acoustic experts, who were fairly separate from the electrical specialists and so on.’\textsuperscript{352} The acceptance of specialist autonomy and the underlying calculation that for every particular part of the building and its performance there was a best solution – ‘best in the sense of expending least energy’ as Jencks defines it, echoing Banham – had allowed for a loose handling of technical problems and an admirable level of climate and noise control. ‘In short, judging by the list of credits, the South Bank was put together by semi-autonomous teams of no less than seventeen specialists. The implications of this are those of the city: it is created by a series of ad hoc forces which reach some kind of political compromise.’\textsuperscript{353}

The conscious acceptance of the design as a compromise for Jencks represents the ‘agnostic and ethnofugal’ (the interpretation of the latter term in the context is not explained) attitude in the team. The flexibility of Norman Engleback in dealing with conflicting technical requirements and external pressures – for instance the introduction of granite columns borrowed from Owen Williams, ‘Japanese’ balustrades or the polygonal geometry of the deck system from the Smithsons.

In his review Jencks rather studiously ignores the fact that the design had been conceived and presented almost seven years before. In fact, very few references to the project are either omitted or receives rather marginal attention.

Helen Mattsson points out that Banham’s project continues the notion of generations of historians against their predecessors. ‘Sigfried Giedion was a pupil of Wolflin, we whom he broke in part; Pevsner and Giedion were contemporaries and influenced each other; Banham a pupil of Pevsner whose views he indirectly criticised in Theory and Design. Charles Jencks wrote his dissertation Modern movements in architecture with Reyner Banham as his supervisor, in which he laid the basis for Postmodernism as a counterposition to Banham’. Helen Mattsson, Arkitektur och konsumption – Reyner Banham och arkitekturens öster, (Stockholm: Symposium) 2004, p. 35/16

Both accounts depend, however, on a critical detachment from their object, the building itself, which remains strangely immaterial despite the detailed descriptions of the ducts and pipes. Both these views, it has to be said again, are retrospective interpretations of a building that may invite them, but had clearly not been framed in this way by its client or its designers.

‘Tomorrow has been cancelled’ – The end of the Swinging Sixties

There is a strangely unreal air in the images and descriptions of the official events of the two opening ceremonies of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1967 and the Hayward Gallery a year later. Isaac Hayward, deposed political leader of the former LCC invariably appears, proudly
but also as if out of context. He takes central stage on another occasion, that of the unveiling of a plaque in his honour and naming the building after him. This is a gesture generally bestowed posthumously – Hayward was 84 years old at the time and was to live to the age of 92 – and could be taken as an indicator for the fact that the new buildings were as much a product of a distant past as the person who had been its avocate. The politely detached monarch is shown while viewing a model of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall and shaking hands with politicians and their wives, among whom there was the young Jeffrey Archer, later to acquire notorious fame as a novelist and disgraced Member of Parliament. Meanwhile, the London newspapers reporting on the grand opening of the Hayward Gallery in July 1968 were also full of the news about the political reforms in Czechoslovakia to be aborted by the intervention of Warsaw Pact troops in August. Paris, Berlin and American university campuses were gripped by student riots and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the Paris student leaders, was granted entry to the country for 24 hours in order to record a programme with the BBC.

In studies of post-war history, 1968 has been established as marking a cultural watershed and the end of the ‘economic miracles’ of the 1950s and 60s, Cold War politics and consensual arrangements between the trade unions and employers, and the beginning of a period of political radicalisation, secularisation and the emergence of feminism, ecologist and gay rights movements. Historians have questioned the effect of the May riots in Paris, and of the student protests elsewhere, in Britain. Kenneth Morgan, a life-long member of the Labour Party, was outspoken dismissive of the outbursts of student revolt in the country, particularly in his largely uncritical white paper, of ‘bridging the gap between (high and low)’ and challenging ‘the fact that a gap exists’. The new emphasis on popular forms of cultural expression – ‘the brass band, the amateur concert party, the entertainer, the music hall and pop groups’ as well as on traditional high culture did not have a bearing on the buildings on the South Bank.

Meanwhile the proposed beneficiaries of the arts policies were listening to the performance of Pink Floyd in the newly completed Queen Elizabeth Hall in May 1967 and were to gather for the much larger outdoor concerts of the Rolling Stones and The Who in Hyde Park in 1969. In the process the ‘striped jersey dresses . . . turtleneck sweaters, berets (especially knitted ones), granny shoes (mostly yellow, please) and big earrings’ which the Time author had spotted in his largely uncritical report from the ‘Swining London’ of 1966 were gradually replaced by other fashion statements, inspired partly by the Paris protesters, partly by alternative lifestyle communities. Against this background the implications of the progressive cultural policies of only a few years earlier seemed to have been overtaken by the speed in which cultural preferences and beliefs were changing. By the end of the decade the questioning of boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, presented as an objective of an enlightened state policy in 1965, was no longer problematic, but a fact; at least for the young urban population at whom much of the policies had been directed.

The distance between what had been formulated as enlightened cultural policies at one moment and the very different reception of their outcome in the form of buildings points to the trajectory of wider debates on culture in the late 1950s and the 1960s. This also affected the perception of the architectural proposal of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. Conceived in 1961 as a ‘radical’ new proposal for an architecture shedding the weight of cultural traditions and associations, and replacing these with references to advanced technology, the buildings now appeared either as anarchisms celebrating technological progress or as sinister reminders of a technocratic culture that was facing increasing attacks. The equation of technological progress with progress per se – a defining element in Reyner Banham’s critical work, and informing most if not all of the Archigram schemes of the period – had become untenable, and the evocation of a technological utopia no longer offered the naïve excitement that an earlier generation had experienced. Perhaps it was this loss of faith in the fundamental idea about the

Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall was launched was complex and also very different from the one in which it had been conceived and built. As Isaac Hayward’s statement on municipal arts policies implying ‘an act of faith’ from 1954 showed, the generous spending on cultural activities had been anticipated by the post-war generation of Labour politicians. The programmatic vision of the 1960s buildings on the South Bank is firmly rooted in this phase of post-war cultural politics and its objective of a promotion of good taste and the capacity to criticize and discriminate as advocated by Hayward. The genesis of the buildings preceeds the shift in cultural policies, as they were formulated in 1964 white paper, of bridging the gap between (high and low) and challenging the fact that a gap exists. The new emphasis on popular forms of cultural expression - the brass band, the amateur concert party, the entertainer, the music hall and pop groups as well as on traditional high culture did not have a bearing on the buildings on the South Bank.

In Britain, according to Judt and Morgan, the end of the 1960s was no more than an extension of the emergence of a distinct youth culture, targeting young people as consumers. Contrasting the prevalent set of attitudes in Britain to the radical student movements in France and Germany, Morgan writes: ‘young people managed to combine personal libertarianism with a staid, almost bourgeois attitude towards employment, the cash nexus, and professional advancement.’

On the other hand Morgan also concedes that there were dramatic changes to authority, and that new legislation, for example for legalising abortion and same-sex activities between consenting adults, offered clear signs that British society was undergoing profound transformations. In any case, the image of an apolitical crowd, a generation of uncommitted fellow-travellers, seems to be somewhat disingenuous. Mass marches on the US embassy in Grosvenor Square in October 1968 suggest that there was at least a certain amount of politically motivated unrest in Britain. There can be no doubt that the cultural context into which the

Isaac Hayward unveils a panel commemorating his name, December 1967)
A visit to the South Bank forty years after the completion of the 1960s buildings is revealing. One cannot fail to notice the significant and immediately visible differences between the Royal Festival Hall and the ensemble of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. Despite the traces of fifty years of use, a major extension in the early 1960s and various unsympathetic additions over this period, the Royal Festival Hall was generally maintained in its original form, even before it was refurbished in 2007. Throughout the subsequent periods the hall managed to retain its particular status as a symbol of the welfare state consensus, even when in the 1970s and 80s the results of modern town planning and design were facing violent criticism. As Miles Glendinning has observed, the Festival Hall was one of the few large Modern Movement buildings to escape the public vilifications of the 1970s and 1980s and right up to today [the early twenty-first century] a high collective rhetoric of praise is still applied to it by non-architects such as journalists and politicians. As a building that did attracted significant controversy and invested with ‘consensual prestige,’ it was the beyond criticism, an achievement that most other buildings of the post-war years.

function of technology in society that was reflected in Warren Chalk’s analysis of the ‘deflation of values’, which he identified in the new buildings on the South Bank. In 1969 Chalk finally summed this up in an article with the revealing title ‘Owing to Lack of Interest, Tomorrow Has Been Cancelled’. By this time the spell of the belief held by subsequent generations in a bright future, detached from connections with the past, clearly was broken, leaving its physical results as remnants of a recent, but now oddly distant past.

Architecture and its discontents – the difficult history of the South Bank

were unable to match in the eyes of the general public, or the ‘battlefield … saturated with polemic’ as Charles Jencks described British architecture in 1973.

Compared with the Festival Hall the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall present a different image. The black stains covering the originally white concrete panels reveal an almost total lack of maintenance. Some of the external staircases have been painted with cheap white emulsion paint, in what is clearly an attempt to break the geryness of the building material; elsewhere a wooden staircase appeared, its landing cutting through the concrete balustrade, as if to indicate that a more sustainable effort is not worth the effort. A new entrance hall to the Hayward Gallery, executed in glass and steel and employing the stylistic repertoire of average commercial building, has been placed against the existing building as an ad-hoc addition worthy of a parking garage or industrial shed, but so overly unsympathetic to it context that it has to be read as a temporary solution – implying that the gallery is not worth serious consideration.

The rugged nonchalance of the alterations and additions is reflected by the fact that the 1960s buildings have received far less attention from architectural historians or critics than its cherished neighbour. With a few exceptions and in contrast to the adjacent Royal Festival Hall the ensemble does not figure prominently in the literature on 1960s architecture in Britain – if it features at all. This is notable against the background of a constant stream of publications on British architectural production in this period, and the attention given to the contributions of Alison and Peter Smithson, Cedric Price or Archigram. Their critical histories of post-war British architecture is notable, given the high ambitions that had originally been invested in them.

In the 1980s the exterior of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, and particularly the extensive system of footbridges and elevated walkways, became one of the favoured spots of homeless seeking shelter and the building, un-maintained and treated as an expensive liability, acquired the role of a symbol of the crisis of Britain’s decaying inner cities. The ensemble’s by now grim appearance provided the dystopian background for an episode of the BBC’s popular science fiction series Doctor Who. How dramatic this change in the perception was can be inferred from the fact that since the early 1990s the South Bank Board, which had taken over the responsibility for the arts centre from the Greater London Council in 1987, was looking for radical solutions for the building, seriously considering its demolition.

Partly the difficulties of these buildings can be explained by the dramatic erosion of the institutions that were responsible for managing it. In September 1984 a press release issued by the GLC informed the general public that the council was to have formal discussions with the Arts Council about the future of the Hayward Gallery and decided to terminate the Council’s lease in order to integrate the Hayward into the South Bank complex, with its highly successful open foyer policy. In a conference the chairman of the council’s Arts and Recreation committee revealed that the Arts Council had wanted to ‘get out of
the gallery for some two years’ and that the GLC would seek to take on the staff and keep the collection of modern art in the basement. William Rees-Mogg, the chairman of the Arts Council, issued an angry counter statement, accusing the GLC of ‘unconscionable and irresponsible’ behaviour, ‘disrupting a planned exhibition programme at less than eighteen months notice’. In her account of the history of the South Bank Charlotte Mullins has suggested that this statement of the Arts Council chairman was somewhat disingenuous and that both he and the head of the arts panel had sought the opportunity to distance themselves from the building and the programme of exhibitions increasingly focussing on contemporary art. The GLC went on to manage the Hayward as London’s ‘municipal art gallery’ along with the concert halls when, in 1986, it was itself abolished by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher; a newly installed semi-public body, the South Bank Board, was formed as a charitable trust on 31 March 1988. Given this history, it may not be entirely surprising that the board, which was not accountable to democratic control and received most of its funding from the Arts Council, was ambiguous about the buildings it had inherited.

There were, however, also other factors that affected the perception of the buildings. The South Bank shared the fate of many of the buildings constructed during the 1960s and 1970s, and indeed became one of the prominent examples, which was seen to demonstrate the failure of post-war modern architecture. This view of modern architecture as a failed project was particularly powerful in Britain, especially since it was supported by prominent public figures, the most prominent of which was the British crown prince. The resentment against modern tower blocks, university campuses and civic buildings of the 1960s and 70s was by no means an exclusively British phenomenon. Yet the disillusionment after a period of extraordinary optimism and cultural change was probably felt more strongly in a society showing visible signs of serious decline in the 1980s. The architecture seemed to reflect general trends in British society: a decline in Britain’s domestic economic base, especially in manufacturing, a change in the character of the urban population as a result of migration and the derelict state of much of the country’s inner city areas. The very notable end of the long economic boom of the post-war decades and the radically deteriorating economic conditions of the 1970s seriously undermined the belief in the objectives of the post-war welfare state and its history as one of continuous improvement.

In an analysis of the reasons for the perceived failure of modern public architecture Adrian Forty quoted the political sociologist T.H. Marshall who identified the belief that ‘equality of status is more important than equality of income’ as the fundamental premise for understanding the contradictory expectations that the post war system faced. Since, despite the rhetoric, it was not the objective of the social democracy to bring about full economic equality, to follow Marshall and Forty, ‘the state could only satisfactorily assure people of their “equal social worth” in the face of persisting social differences by promoting the belief that change was taking place, and that future standards of living
Ron Herron, ‘ideas’ for the development of the South Bank, 1972

A concert hall and a gallery on the Thames

Technocracy and cultural reform


It should be noted that the results of the first building campaign after 1945 were perceived as very successful, as the example of the Royal Festival Hall, which was voted London’s most popular building in an Evening Standard poll. Forty (2001), p. 200


http://www.richardrogers.co.uk, consulted 4 October 2006

Ron Herron, ‘ideas’ for the development of the South Bank, 1972

Attempts to ‘improve’ the ensemble were undertaken almost immediately after the inauguration. In 1972 Ron Herron produced a staggeringly unconvincing collage showing the building covered by tents and other temporary structures. In the late 1970s plans for turning the undercroft into a video centre were seriously developed. In 1994 the first of several competitions for a comprehensive re-design was organised, with the declared aim of remedying what were now viewed as fatal deficiencies of the arts centre and its design. It should be noted that the results of the first building campaign after 1945 were perceived as very successful, as the example of the Royal Festival Hall, which was voted London’s most popular building in an Evening Standard poll. Forty (2001), p. 200

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The history of the planning and construction of the buildings on South Bank from the late 1940s to the late 1960s reflects the complicated and at times uneasy interplay of practices and discourses in local and national politics, the arts and architecture. It shows how these public buildings were conceived and planned within the general framework of post-war planning and policies to realise the objectives of the welfare state. The buildings emerged as the result of a large-scale project of urban reconstruction and the separate dynamics of political debates and machinations, of discourses within architectural culture and institutional ideas about performing music or showing works of art. It was my intention to show how, in the episodes of this history, from the 1951 Festival of Britain and the Festival Hall, via the cultural debates of the 1950s and early 1960s, to the planning and construction of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall and their reception, different forces and influences had an effect on the architectural result, its perception and use. In the concluding paragraphs of this case study of the South Bank I will attempt to address two main aspects of this history: the status of the initiative within the institutionalisation of state-sponsored cultural provision in Britain after 1945 and the position of the buildings within British post-war architectural culture. Finally, I endeavour to summarise some ideas about the significance of the South Bank for debate on the role of culture in a contemporary urban society like that of London.

Cultural provision and institutional concepts

With the completion of the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall the idea of the South Bank as a metropolitan arts centre was almost realised, thirty years after it had been launched in the County of London plan by Abercrombie and Forshaw. Only the National Theatre that had occupied a central place in the plan for a modern “acropolis” in London remained unfinished. When the theatre was inaugurated in 1976, what had been proposed in the 1940s as a compound of freestanding buildings facing the river emerged as a small and rather fragmented version of the city as a building, extending around and absorbing the Royal Festival Hall, the only building conceived according to the Abercrombie model. The deck layers disguised the reality of the group as a South Bank by the group of independent buildings, which were the result both of an incremental process and a series of different but largely implicit ideas about the provision of culture and its representation by architectural means.

The extreme emphasis on connections, paradoxically, could be seen as a compensation for the fact that the individual buildings were in fact utterly disconnected, despite the fact that the two concert halls and the gallery were all managed by one public body, the London County Council. The Festival Hall, probably because of the extraordinarily short span between the conception and its realisation, remained as the most consistent part, not only in its architectural geometry but also in its institutional concept. As Miles Glendinning has shown, it had been conceived by the architects as a container for a variety of cultural activities and as such anticipated the idea of multifunctional cultural centre as it was developed and widely adopted in the 1960s and 70s. The enormous foyer, much bigger than required for a concert hall, was a remnant of this vision of the hall as a cultural centre, with its suggestion of a mixture of formal and informal of the sort Maisons du Peuple or crystal palaces had offered in the nineteenth century. This combination of established forms of sociability with performances spaces, as a representation of the claim to realise a democratic society, is reminiscent also of the cultural palaces and workers clubs that were realised across Eastern Europe.383 The fact that the leaders of the Labour party chose the building for the celebration of the 1997 election victory reflected the ideologically-charged character of the hall as a ‘democratic space’.

The actual realities of use of the Festival Hall were, however, quite different. In the first three decades of its existence the foyer, while suggesting accessibility and being occasionally used for trade events, fashion shows or reunions384 was rarely open to the public and served mainly as a generous vestibule to the concert hall above. It was only in 1983 that an ‘open doors’ programme was introduced offering performances of music and literary readings free to all, and in 1988 a poetry library was located in the Festival Hall, realising at least partly the original intentions on the part of the architects.

The difference between the concept of a ‘cultural centre’ envisaged by, especially, the architect Robert Mathew and the fact that the commissioning body, the LCC, had envisaged nothing more ambitious than a concert hall to be built on the occasion of the 1951 festival, if these ideas were formulated at all, provided a precedent template for the initiative for the smaller concert hall and art gallery as it developed in the mid 1950s and received its definitive shape in the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. As I have tried to show in the study of the long period of discussions and planning, the institutional concepts for these buildings were strictly defined by technical requirements for conventional practices of showing fine art and performing music. There is no evidence that the idea for a metropolitan arts centre was formulated or even thought in any other way than as a collection, on one site, of a variety of separately functioning institutions. As such it epitomises the structural loose-fit of contrasting and often unstated assumptions that characterised both the institutions responsible for cultural patronage, the local administration and probably also within the équipe of designers. There was neither a statement setting out the broader cultural objectives of the building as a cultural centre, nor one on its future use nor one that would have explained the architecture. Despite, or perhaps because of, the presence of established performers and arts administrators on the ‘Housing the Arts’ committee which advocated the extension of the Festival Hall into a ‘metropolitan arts centre’ in its 1956 report, nobody seems to have suggested installing a board or a single person, a Generalintendant, with the power to enforce a artistic policy cutting across the disciplinary boundaries and connecting the separate institutions.

383 Adrian Forty suggests the comparison of the halls with Moscow workers clubs of the 1920s. Forty (2001). The combination of the political programme with spaces for entertainment is also reminiscent of the Palast der Republik in the centre of East Berlin, which was demolished in favour of the reconstruction of the Prussian royal palace in 2007.

This is notable, especially as there is a remarkable continuity in the patronage and the design history of the South Bank. All the buildings, with the exception of the National Theatre, were the initiative of one client body, represented by one person, Isaac Hayward, which was responsible for building both the Festival Hall and the buildings from the 1960s. This would suggest that Hayward’s ideas about the role of local authorities in providing venues for cultural events were instrumental for the ideas behind the buildings. Hayward’s policies, as far as he formulated them in his 1954 statement on taste and culture, were informed by a firm and unquestioned belief in the uplifting and improving capacities of the fine arts. There is no evidence, however, that these ideas extended beyond a general commitment to creating an infrastructure for culture. His approach relied on the institutional framework of cultural provision of the post-war years, on the Arts Council for the gallery and the municipal department administering the use of the concert halls.

The technocratic conception of the second concert hall and the art gallery as well- serviced environments may have been a logical consequence following from the gradual erosion of the cultural paternalism characterising 1950s cultural policies and its replacement by a less prescriptive and more inclusive definition of culture. Yet the combination of well-meaning support and arms length neutrality also created what might be described as an ideological vacuum. Questions concerning the exact objectives of cultural production and provision were largely ignored. Ideas about buildings as technologically advanced, responsive environments facilitating changes of use and their translation into structures with complex systems for access and climate control effectively filled the vacuum produced by the absence of a formulated institutional concept for the gallery and concert halls as public buildings.

The 1961 project can be analysed as a product of a particular constellation of the ideas about state patronage for the arts educating its citizens in matters of taste and culture that had informed cultural policies of the immediate post-war years. Yet it is also the result of the revision or rejection of exactly these ideas as paternalistic and out-dated. The occupations of a ‘younger’ generation of artists and architects, shaped by the rejection of the British ‘modernist’ establishment of the 1950s, found their way into the design, without, however, challenging the premises of the functional programme of the project. In the event both positions remained undisclosed, unreflected and unrelated; and the outcome, a combination of two perfectly conventional cultural venues with an architectural expression suggesting a radically new approach to using a city and its buildings, reflects a peculiar co-existence of opposing values systems, the contradictions remaining utterly unresolved.

None of this has prevented the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall (and its annex, the Purcell Room) from serving their systems, the contradictions remaining utterly unresolved.

The range of exhibitions that have been organised in the Hayward Gallery since 1968 suggests that one objective of the design, that of offering a large degree of flexibility, has indeed been met. The observations of a series of architects who have designed exhibitions in the gallery on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the building support this. Tony Fretton, who was responsible for exhibitions on the relationship between art and film and on the American artist Claes Oldenburg is quoted as describing the gallery as a ‘bit of a conundrum’ which, though ‘classically not very good, has ‘proven to be fantastically adaptable’ and ‘very rewarding as a space’. Adam Caruso, the co-designer of a show presenting Black American art from New York, characterises the range of spaces as ‘slightly hysterical’ allowing for memorable experiences; and Neave Brown describes it as both ‘bonkers’ and a ‘magic box’, with limitations that challenge the designer to ‘outflank and outwit them’, imposing a heightened sense of creativity. Fretton’s comparison of the gallery with an elderly actress seems to sum up how most of the architects see the gallery: as an environment that, while being difficult, offers productive opportunities once the designer has got to know it. Adam Caruso’s observation that the Hayward is ‘somewhere between a gallery and a museum’, more suited to ethnographic exhibitions than white cube art shows, seems apt. The slightly oppressive whiteness coming across from the photographs of the Matisse retrospective with which the gallery opened in 1967 compares unfavourably with images of thematic shows with strong curatorial and educational tendencies. In 1971 ‘Art in Revolution’, an Arts Council exhibition on Soviet art of the 1920s, for instance, not only offered the opportunity for presenting the objects, propaganda posters and paintings as a three-dimentional experience, reminiscent of the experimental exhibition programme developed by Pontus Hultén in Stockholm’s Moderna Museet, where a similar show had been held in 1968. It also allowed Christopher Woodward, Jeremy and Fenella Dixon to build a large model of Vladimir Tatlin’s ‘Monument to the Third International’ on the roof terrace facing Waterloo Bridge, to be viewed by the privileged passengers on the upper deck of the hundreds of buses passing each day. Woodward, who also designed the exhibition ‘Film as film’ in 1977, has noted that exhibitions involving a variety of media seem to benefit from the layout of the performers. As the Housing the Arts report had suggested, the availability of a medium-sized auditorium proved useful for new performance practices, such as Renaissance or early Baroque music or contemporary music, which were only emerging in the late 1960s. Programming events for a small dedicated classical music audience together with pop and jazz concerts and exhibition events was hardly common practice in the late 1960s, and the conception of the auditorium as well-serviced container rather than as a setting appropriate only for a particular form of established musical practice — classical or pop — may well have contributed to the cultural adaptability of the concert halls. The installation of Helmholtz resonators, an early experiment with this technology for adjusting sound in an auditorium and later introduced in the Centre Pompidou, supported a variety of uses, too.

See Hayward’s statement in ‘War of Taste in Art – Local Authorities’ Difficulties’ (1954)

The publications includes testimonials by Neave Brown (designer of British Art and Design, 1979), Adam Caruso (Rapsofies in Black, 1997), Mark Fisher (Art and Power, 1996), Tony Fretton (Spellbound/ Art & Film and Claes Oldenburg, both 1996) and Paul Williams (English Romancesque, 1984; Yves Klein, 1993; Spectacular Bodies, 2002; Relishing the challenge – 40 years of the Hayward, Building Design, 2 May 2008, p. 24)

A large-scale reconstruction of the Tatlin tower, as the work is generally known, was also made for the Stockholm exhibition. See chapter 5.
Art in Revolution (1971)

Film as Film (1977)

gallery as a series of extensive rooms and the possibilities for controlling light and climate. Although there is no evidence that this had been envisaged by the LCC or the architects, the Hayward Gallery seemed to anticipate curatorial tendencies of the 1970s which involved the presentation of art objects in a specially designed and educational context, resonating with the attempt of the newly-founded Open University (the pièce-de-résistance of the cultural policies of the Labour government of Harold Wilson).

During the 1980s and 90s the gallery and concert halls showed a tendency towards emphasising the individual institutions; in a highly competitive market of venues attracting audiences the Royal Festival Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Hall positioned themselves against other concert halls, while the Hayward Gallery (now led by its own director) struggled for its role, particularly after the opening of Tate Modern. The perception of the building as one structure with a complex geometry was almost entirely the result of the elaborate system of outdoor walkways and bridges connecting the Arts Centre with the river promenade, the adjacent Waterloo bridge and further into the Underground railway system. It was, in short, the architectural appearance and not the institutional structure that acted as the unifying agent for the buildings. It was only in 2005 that the South Bank Board – which describes it as its task 'to create an environment that is memorable and gives people pleasure, and to make the South Bank Centre a place distinguished by its hospitality, its rich atmosphere, and its spirit of democracy' – appointed an artistic director responsible for the general direction of the programme of the entire ensemble and whose prime objective is the creation of a 'united site'.

Modern acropolis and machine – the buildings

The status of the South Bank as a site onto which the hopes, visions and claims associated with the project of the British welfare state were projected in their most undiluted form, as representations of a new democratic culture, is tangible in the architectures which are assembled here. Reyner Banham’s description of the South Bank as a collection of four monuments points to the extraordinary concentration of ambition that characterises this result of a large, complicated and above all long process of urban restructuring. Today the South Bank is also a museum of the ideas, desires and unfulfilled hopes that materialised in an architecture embedded in state-led planning and collective arrangements after 1945.

Each of the stages in the process, from the representation of local pride in the palatial forms of the late Edwardian County Hall, via the modern monumentalism of the Royal Festival Hall to the studied rejection of representations of culture and its traditions exposed in the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, also entailed a revision of what had been proposed by a previous generation. The buildings and their architectural proposals, though appearing utterly unrelated, are invisibly yet strongly connected, each making an argument about the one

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Christopher Woodward, conversation with the author, 28 December 2007. The observations contrast rather starkly with the general comment on the Hayward Gallery in the 1985 Guide to the Architecture of London, of whom Woodward is the co-author. See footnote 589

The South Bank Centre, Financial Statement (2006), p. 4

Southbank Centre Annual Review 2006/2007, p. 7
it succeeded, reflecting positions about cultural ambitions, ideas about progress, social arrangements and the place of the individual in them.

For the designers of the Festival Hall questions pertaining to the position of architecture in society and their architectural responses had been relatively straightforward, despite – or possibly because of – the enormously difficult material circumstances in which they operated. Both the programme of the building and its translation into a spatially open, ‘transparent’ freestanding box fell within the repertoire established for earlier public buildings across Europe, and had parallels in similar buildings, for example in West Germany after World War II. The deployment of design solutions developed by the pre-war avant-garde and their softening through material and ornamental applications, had positioned the Festival Hall unequivocally within the reform project of the post-1945 Labour government. The core values which informed the hall – its implication that the initiative for social change resided with the state, the identification of ‘modern architecture’ with the reform programme and by extension the welfare state as a total political and cultural construct – had been elements in a coherent belief system that allowed its architects to view themselves as agents of change.

The proposal, by and large, seems to have been understood, perhaps because the building managed to deflect from the realities of post-war Britain by reflecting the hopes of a pre-war generation. The architecture of the Festival Hall is sufficiently rooted in monumental traditions from English Palladianism, via nineteenth century Beaux-Arts monuments to Continental modern architecture to be immediately recognised and acknowledged. Clough Ellis-Williams’s characterisation of the hall as an English gentleman struck a chord, summing up the drawing together of a language suggesting progressive change with the creation of a setting for social events and rituals. For the project of making the South Bank into an urban destination, or even an acropolis, a notional cultural centre of the post-war metropolis, this was probably of strategic importance. The adherence to a well-established model of a freestanding symmetrical building facing a river afforded the building gravitas and its location a presence it had not had before.

The messages emitted by the 1961 design for the South Bank were significantly more complicated. It could be described as the product of a series of fault lines between local politics and cultural administrators on one side and designers operating within the specific set of ideas and preoccupations of architectural culture (partly represented by critics and historians) on the other. On the one hand the brief for the buildings had its origins in the original impulse of the state patronage as a way of providing high culture for the citizens, municipal agencies having stepped in where the national government had abandoned the site. On the other hand the architectural design implied a radical departure from the proposal of a modern setting for classless social gathering and enjoyment of the fine arts, as it was offered by the Festival Hall. The almost complete absence of conventional formal gestures inviting collective ritual or ceremonial gravitas, combined with a proposal that these public buildings were essentially the solution to infrastructural

problems pointed towards a conscious rejection of representing cultural values. The project seemed to suggest that their functioning was best served by a professional treatment of a series of technical requirements – air treatment, acoustics, movement of people – in buildings that communicated so little about their functions as to be almost literally anonymous. Presenting a concert hall and a gallery as a suggestively provisional assemblage of air ducts, bridges, light fittings and other technical equipment and making no effort of monumentalising these, in the way that Louis Kahn had shown, implied the deliberate creation of what one could describe as a representational void. The building presents itself as a structure that was not designed to seek cultural sanction or interpretation.

The suggested adaptability of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall has never quite materialised. Their conception, as a series of usable spaces with appliances surrounding the constituent parts, positions the scheme between the artistically motivated use of béton brut pioneered by Le Corbusier and the ideas for a Plug-In City developed by Archigram in the years after the design had been made. As such the buildings remain a rare and fragmentary example of a particular period during which concepts for large-scale monolithic urban structures absorbing different forms of traffic, public and domestic programmes were developed, their most prominent British example being the project by Alison and Peter Smithson for the Hauptstadt Berlin competition of 1958.

Unlike the Smithson scheme, which was supported by explicit and, as Kenneth Frampton has argued, rather hopeful rhetoric about the interplay between built form and human association, there is no evidence that the layout of the buildings on the South Bank was intended to offer a background for collective experiences. If one looks at the images produced for the scheme in 1961 this absence seems to have been intended, perhaps as a rejection of conventional forms of bourgeois sociability or the celebrations of a classless co-existence that had been attempted in the Festival Hall. The fact that this rejection did not lead to experiments with other, possibly more open or politically charged stages for the assembly of citizens of the sort suggested by Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price in their Fun Palace project and provided by, for example, the Kulturhus in Stockholm, must be explained by the absence of a concept for the buildings as places of public representation in a democratised culture.

In the design for the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall the foyers, entrances and all other spaces supporting informal aspects of the programme remained undernourished. This has not, however prevented the main spaces from attracting a wide range of audiences. The technical adaptability of the concert hall, which has allowed the venue to be used for dance events, pop concerts and recitals of pre-classical music has certainly contributed to this, and a similar point could be made about the Hayward Gallery. Both the gallery and the concert hall with its adjunct rehearsal room operate in very different categories of cultural production and as such have been successful in softening
the boundaries between artistic disciplines, questioning and to some degree eliminating distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. The representational void, or cracks opening up in the fault lines, resulted in a design that is so full of intentions that many of its features remain unconnected and unresolved. Yet, while the architecture of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall may have been disconcerting to critics and users, it seems also to be productive in providing a space that is open to association; a space that is remote enough from preconceptions about particular cultural traditions to absorb a plurality of forms of art and music and their audiences. The mystifying nature of the buildings which have become seen ‘as endearing as a boxer with “cauliflower” ears’ is, at the same time, their greatest quality and affords them the unintended status of a monument to a particular moment in post-war British architectural and cultural history.

**Appropriations**

The buildings on the South Bank have survived four or five decades of embarrassed acceptance, unsympathetic additions, neglect and various proposals for demolition. In the same measure that the memory of the culture which produced them has faded away and was superseded by experiences of the period after 1979 and the radical redesign of British society under Margaret Thatcher, the intentions associated with the architectures have become part of a remote history. The history from the Festival Hall as the outcome of the initial phase of the welfare state via the 1960s buildings which could be seen to represent the pivotal point of this project to the current state as a ‘world-class destination and business model for the twenty-first century’ seems to reflect the development of British society. The playwright David Hare has summarised this process, poignantly stating that ‘after a war that made democracy fashionable, a thin, religious and homogenous people became fat, sceptical and diverse’. The fact that these buildings have now been relieved of many of their initial meanings – and of the politically motivated resentments against them – should provide a fresh opportunity to register, which forms of public and private behaviour they allow and how they have been absorbed by their surroundings.

Probably because of its status as a widely admired monument the Festival Hall has been absorbed relatively easily into the model of a cultural centre as envisaged by South Bank Centre, the trust in charge of managing the building. The foyer, restored to its original generosity after the 2006-2007 refurbishment, continues to function as an open, easily accessible public interior. Inside, one can ignore the row of shops, cafés and restaurants now facing the Thames promenade (and mostly branches of chains that operate in British airport terminals, shopping centres and restaurants now facing the Thames promenade (and mostly branches of chains that operate in British airport terminals, shopping centres and the privatised Millenium Dome) and experience the foyer as the transparent, ‘democratic’ space as which it was conceived by the architects in the late 1940s. In fact, the existence of free performances, exhibitions and the poetry library now realises the original vision of a container, ennobled by the use of exquisite materials, more fully than at most periods in the history of the building. The fact that, apart from the foyer, the building serves essentially one purpose – a concert hall – means that institutional innovations are limited to issues of changing insights and fashions in one particular field, musical performances. Given the size of the hall this may be a formidable task, a challenge of accepted ideas about the role of different cultural practices and their possible interplay it is not.

The 1960s buildings of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall pose more testing questions. The earlier discussion of their separate functioning may be taken as an indicator that, given a coherent artistic policy, both spaces can fulfil an distinct and useful role. Yet the state of the buildings and their perception has obviously made them vulnerable. Even if imminent threats of demolition may have disappeared, it is clear that their use as part of the South Bank and a cultural centre and unified site is not fully realised. The question is how an integrated and architectural strategy could be devised that would retain the character of these buildings as historical monuments, but more importantly as perfectly functioning cultural spaces. Such a strategy should explore the tectonic proposal and the combination of naïve futuristic pleasure and craftsmanship displayed in the building. It would try to benefit from the absence of genteel good taste that characterises the building and seek to make intelligent use of the decks, terraces and the undercroft. The idiosyncratic detailing might give some assistance here; it rejects additions of the sort applied outside the Festival Hall (and unsuccessfully tried at a new entrance to the Hayward Gallery) and which introduce clichés of corporate and contemporary retail design – steel and glass handrails, floor to ceiling sheets of glass and brightly coloured plaster screens – to a public building. The Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall need a sympathetic approach, but they also need guts and fearless respect.

One may regret that the South Bank in general, and the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall ensemble in particular, is not London’s pendant of the Centre Pompidou and that it never quite had the cultural impact of the Paris building. Yet, the absence of one recognisable image of the entire site and the tough appearance of the 1960s buildings might also be their strength. Whereas the Pompidou offered every opportunity of being absorbed into an emerging tourist economy that processes culture into a commodity to be consumed like a good meal, the concrete walkways and terraces quite effectively prevent the buildings from being transformed into a shopping mall for culture.

The fact that the faith in the redemptive power of technology, which informed the design of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, is hardly a position shared by cultural producers and their audience in the early twenty-first century lends these buildings the quality of a tough and unfinished ruin. The image of a rock to be climbed by an adventurous audience, which was introduced by Warren Chalk, may have been a rather helpful and hopeful metaphor in the 1960s, but it still offers a idea of how an active and irrevocable use of the building might give a unique opportunity for experimentation. Already these buildings, which were conceived as excessively accessible, are being entered, and in ways
which were not foreseen by their architects and their client. The most poignant (and probably over-celebrated and theorised) illustration of this kind of appropriation of the South Bank are the skate boarders, who have found in the sloping floors of the caves under the Queen Elizabeth Hall an environment for their pursuit. Organised performances and exhibitions using the roof terraces and decks, such as a show in 2007 by the artist Anthony Gormley, hinted at the possibility to use these spaces, above or under the gallery and the concert hall.

A strategy for the 1960s ensemble might absorb forms of the temporary and improvised use of existing, often former industrial or commercial buildings. These practices, which have become a well-established pattern for cultural institutions since the appropriation of warehouses as alternative art spaces and which were famously adopted at Tate Modern. How much these strategies are associated with the presentation of contemporary art (and to a lesser degree with musical performance) is demonstrated by the creation by the French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal, who stripped a 1937 pavilion in order to create the Palais de Tokyo. The new interior, reminiscent of a manufacturing hall or a parking garage, could be described as a perverse application of the aesthetics of squatters or of industrial archaeology, but the ‘restoration’ also provided the new gallery of contemporary art with an environment that was recognised by a young audience. The Palais de Tokyo relied on the explicit elimination of demarcations between galleries and the spaces for informal sociability, such as the café in the basement and a restaurant near the entrance, but also allowed the dual use of areas at different times of the week or the day.

For the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall such an approach would offer the opportunity to transform the ensemble into a coherent, visible counter pole and complementary environment to the Festival Hall. Retaining the existing concert halls and gallery, the decks and undercroft could become a working environment, occasionally taken over by lorries, but at other times to be used for conferences, workshops or as a large non-commercial public lounge with rather spectacular outdoor spaces. Used in such a way, these buildings which are remnants of the period when the realisation of the programme of the British social democracy was established, reached its peak and coincided with the cultural experiments of the 1960s could finally become what they might have been in the first place: a people’s palace for an agnostic, sceptical and intelligent urban population and an enclave in the commercialised environment of much of contemporary London.
A department store for a new man

Stockholms Kulturhus

Kulturhus, temporary parliament, Drottninggatan elevation (1970s)

Kulturhus, temporary parliament, Sergels torg elevation and debating chamber
Scenes from the Kulturhus (1970s)
Kulturhus, Läsesalongen (Reading room, 1970s)

Kulturhus, galleries (1970s)
Chapter 6

Stockholms Kulturhus
A department store for a new man
6.1 Introduction

If the South Bank Arts Centre in London hides its contents behind 250 mm of solid concrete, Stockholm’s Kulturhus displays the totality of its offerings in one enormous glass screen facing Sergels torg, the square that marks the centre of the Swedish capital’s commercial district. The Kulturhus spans the full width of the square and matches the scale of the buildings surrounding the open space with its constant stream of cars and buses moving along one side and, on a lower level, pedestrians hurrying towards the city’s central underground station, and a variety of political or religious demonstrators. Around the edges, partly roofed over to create space for the cars on the upper level, groups of men loiter, talk, possibly trade and observe the action in the square. If there is one place in central Stockholm that could be described as a contested site, Sergels torg would qualify. Situated on the south end of the largest reconstruction area of the post-war period, the square both embodies the exceptional force of the Swedish modern welfare state and marks the end of the period during which this system reached its climax.

The Kulturhus was conceived as the ‘shop window of the welfare system’ and its planning represented a significant moment in the cultural politics of the post-war period. The proposal for an institution proposed as an environment where professional performers or ‘cultural workers’ and the general public were to collaborate, and where boundaries between ‘official’ art and ‘amateur’ creativity would dissolve in one large, literally continuous happening constituted a radical departure from the system of state-administered access to ‘the arts’ that formed the basis of cultural policies in Sweden and elsewhere before the late 1960s.

In Sweden this transition was accompanied by a lively, and notably open public debate reflected in an almost constant stream of newspaper articles through the entire decade. The Kulturhus-initiative appears as the material expression of this debate, which found its way into official state policy in the government white paper for a ‘Ny Kulturpolitik’ (‘New Cultural Policy’) in 1974.

The specifically Swedish background of this transition, a strong and pervasive belief in the capacity of education and culture to improve, and the co-operative tradition of the ruling Social Democratic Party, allowed the protagonists in the debate to view themselves as part of an avant-garde creating the non-material conditions for the egalitarian modern society Sweden was to become. In the 1950s the pre-war agreement between employers and trade unions, named after the seaside resort of Saltsjöbaden, had been translated into a edifice of state-led planning, social security and an economy dominated by large corporations. The success of the ‘Swedish model’ of the ‘Third Way’ between Capitalism and Communism, which was studied widely by political thinkers in other European countries, showed not only in the extensive legislation for social security, but also in the emergence of a developed consumer society; in the 1950s Sweden had the largest number of private cars relative to the number of its citizens Europe.
Cultural reform came as a consequence of the successful realisation of the welfare state. The writers and intellectuals arguing about the role for the visual and performing arts, for film and television during the 1960s, seem to have inherited a position of authority, and a unique sense of confidence that transpires in the tone of their articles and statements. In an essay about Swedish culture, published by Arvidsson (1999), a foreign audience, the writer Lars Gustafsson describes the debate on culture in the country at the time – this with more than a hint of irony, revealing the critical position of this ‘liberal’ intellectual towards the cultural shift in his country:

‘Our problems of communication and our historical and social peculiarities have not made us [Swedes] exotic, but they have created a rather uneasy, especially ambitious type of discussion on such questions as involve morals, social problems, international questions, art and public education. Discussions of this type we usually call “cultural debate”, and in Swedish this term has a rather special aroma, formal and just a little abstract. The Swedish cultural debate is, for the most part, at a high intellectual level. It is less empirical and firm than the English and often is involved with more general subjects, while, on the other hand it is seldom so abstract as the French.4

The attitudes described by Gustafsson are reflected also in the implicit assumption that proposals for the fundamental reform of cultural institutions and their confident tone contrasts sharply with the often cautious, implicit, or even opaque statements, for example, of English cultural institutions at the time.

5 The term folkhemmet is not a Social Democratic invention. It can be traced to the agenda of the ‘young conservatives’ before World War I, and is influenced by national romanticism and liberal-conservative attempts at social reform. It was appropriated by Social Democratic political leaders in the late 1940s. Henningsen (1986), p.313
6 Arvidsson describes his intention as an account of 'how Swedish public opinion coloured red', and a how an agenda was established and translated into politics. (p.18). The book was published in collaboration with Timbro, an organisation that describes itself as 'a think-tank devoted to innovative economic and social policies founded on free-market principles', facing an uphill battle in a ‘political topography’ that was dominated by groups espousing socialization, collectivist economic planning and heavy taxation, www.timbro.se (accessed 12 September 2007)
7 Arvidsson (1999), p.102
8 The role of culture within a general idea about spiritual welfare, and the continuity of organisational forms in Swedish politics in a period of change, may be illustrated by the fact that until 1968 cultural affairs were handled by the ‘Ecklissaktivminister’ (Minister for church affairs). The career of the later Prime Minister Olof Palme also included a period in this office (1967-68), which included the control of education, culture, libraries and academic research. See also Chapter 2
9 Arvidsson (1999), p.71
10 The process described by Arvidsson was perhaps not unique to Sweden. It had its parallels in other European countries, notably in Holland, which according to James Kennedy transformed itself from a conservative and religious country into one thoroughly embracing progressive values in the 1960s. The shift went together with a loss of self-confidence in the political establishment. James Kennedy, Nieuwe Babylon in aanbouw – Nederland in de jaren 20-60. (Amsterdam: Boom, 1992), p.148-173
11 The most well-known and notorious of these ‘defectors’ was Olof Palme. Raised in an established family (with an extensive entry in the Swedish Biographical Encyclopedia), Palme’s political world view changed radically when, during his undergraduate studies in the United States

Context: Sweden – the moral super-power

Cultural actors, intellectuals as well as arts administrators, claimed a central role in the realisation of folkhemmet, the ‘national home’, as the model for an egalitarian society was labelled.5 In his revisionist history of the long 1970s, titled Et det Swedish in essay (Andersson, 2006), the author Claes Arvidsson identified a relatively small group of intellectuals and academics as the main characters in a gradual but radical shift towards the left, a ‘rödfärgning’ (red colouring) affecting all aspects of Swedish cultural and political life in the late 1960s and early 1970s.6 In his view, these intellectuals, ‘harbingers’ of change, constituted a close-knit establishment dominating the print media and cultural institutions, and would eventually take over control of Swedish state television. Their influence resided in their ‘ideal roles as critical examiners of the existing realities and as innovating forward-thinkers, but also because there was more attention to a political ‘cultural debate’ in the media.7 Although they most probably would have rejected the comparison, they seemed to follow in the footsteps of representatives of the Lutheran state church who had held a similar position in larger cultural debates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.8 Arvidsson also makes the point that in this period, during which Sweden assumed the role of a ‘moral super-power’, the language and terminology introduced by progressive and leftwing authors filtered through into publications and statements of ‘bourgeois’ political groups.9 That these radical ideas became influential inside the conservative camp may also have been the result of the prominent roles of the intellectual leaders of the left, not a few of whom had been born into the upper echelons of Swedish society and presented themselves as ‘överlopare’ (‘defectors’) from their class.10

Ideas which had been put forward by young radical authors such as Göran Palm and Sara Lidman, and established ones like Olof Lagercrantz, reappeared in the discourse of conservative intellectuals: ‘the discomfort with the idea of folkhemmet grew both on the left and on the right’.11 Particularly the publications of Palm, criticising the compliant attributes and hidden ideologies of rich Western countries in general and Sweden in particular became popular bestsellers.12 In 1964 Gustafsson had noted that injustices such as the Apartheid system in South Africa and Frech atrocities in Algeria were passionately discussed in Sweden and that for the young 11 it has become rather an everyday experience to sign one’s name to protest lists to be delivered to foreign embassies, notes in which we have expressed our indignation, our abhorrence, our repudiation of phenomena which have violated our feeling for democracy and human worth. Naturally a feeling of powerlessness has been associated with this, but also the experience of a necessary, practically hygienic act.13

From the early 1960s onwards the criticism of the post-war consensus gained force and started to dominate the cultural and political debate. Witnessed by a startled international audience, Sweden’s political elite – Olof Palme in particular – occupied a prominent place in the Anti-Vietnam protest movement, in direct and outspoken opposition in the 1970s he obtained first hand knowledge of the social inequalities and injustices resulting from unrestricted capitalism. In any case, both the progressive intelligentsia and the leaders of the Social Democratic Party in Sweden in the 1960s seem to have included a considerable number of members of what is called överklass (literally upper class, but more corresponding with upper middle class in English social nomenclature), and the notable examples of first of second generation immigrants such as Peter Weiss, Hjalmar Mehr and Harry Schein.14

11 Arvidsson (1999), p.129
12 The cover of Göran Palm’s anthology Vad kan man göra, (Stockholm PAN/Norstedt:) 1969 claims that in this year alone 30000 copies of the book had been sold.15
13 Gustafson, p.115

488 Christoph Grafe

People’s Palaces

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Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man
to US foreign policy. In 1967 Stockholm hosted Bertrand Russell’s Vietnam tribunal that included Lidman and the author Peter Weiss. 14

The Kulturhus was viewed, hailed by some and denounced by others, as the ‘real flagship’ 15 of the cultural consensus of the long 1970s which started with the protest against the war in Vietnam. While the building was under construction Göran Palm, whose book En orativt betraktes (An unfair discourse, published in 1964) had been among the most influential texts for the young protest generation, published a poem which introduces the idea of a ‘new man’, who is aware of the privileged existence of the Swedish middle classes and who, from this awareness, is prepared to take up his task (Palm only writes in the male form) in eliminating injustice. Invoking Gorky, and the appeal to educate not only the brain, but also the ‘hands’, Palm paints the image of ‘The new man/ The man in his full, undwarfed length’ 16. The reference to a ‘new man’, rooted as it was in Christian and Renaissance traditions, returns in various interviews with Peter Celsing, the architect of the Kulturhus. This coincidence points to the fact that architecture, too, played a role within the cultural shift which affected urban planning as well as the definition of the role of culture in society.

The Kulturhus: a product of cultural changes

From the 1940s onwards architects had positioned themselves within the development of the welfare state and identified strongly with its objectives and policies. Evidence for this high degree of identification with the project of modernising Swedish society can be found in the official documents and the public discussion surrounding the Kulturhus and the statements of Peter Celsing. At the same time the arguments for and about the Kulturhus reflect the paradigmatic shift in the thinking about the definition of culture and its role in society. In the Social Democratic tradition, culture, like education, had been a vehicle for self-improvement, for ‘uplifting’ working people.

Access to the ‘higher arts’, especially literature, but also classical music and drama, was therefore a natural part of the cultural policies when these were first formulated in the 1930s and 40s. As the consensus about what should be regarded as culture eroded during the 1960s, traditional forms of ‘high’ or ‘bourgeois’ art lost much of their status. On the one hand this allowed popular forms of entertainment to be valued, on the other it meant that the audience ceased to be seen as the passive receiver of canonic cultural offerings and was addressed as an active partner, contributing to performances and engaging in public events with professional cultural workers.

It was this understanding of culture as a process of encounter, interaction and exchange that was to materialise in the Kulturhus when the project for the building was started in 1966–67. The idea for the house as an ‘allaktivitetshus’ (‘house for all activities’) and as ‘kulturellt vardagsrum’ (‘cultural living room’) that found its expression in a new institutional concept was unique in its combination of concreteness and radicality. Rather than remaining a private, utopian and ultimately marginal initiative – the fate of the Fun Palace project conceived by Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price in London at almost the same time – the Stockholm Kulturhus developed into a project that was supported by agencies of the state and commissioned by the city council. The official status of the project also meant that ideas for it were formulated by various committees and sub-committees, by cultural experts and state officials.

One outcome of this process of negotiating the future use of the building was the extraordinarily concrete programme statement by a group of intellectuals led by Pontus Hultén, the director of national Moderna Museet, the Stockholm museum of modern art. 17 This document contains the blueprint for a radically new type of cultural institution. The translation of this programme into a building lends the Kulturhus a particular status in the history of the cultural centres in 1960s Europe, and as an object that illustrates both ‘universal’ design issues of flexibility and the possibilities of expressing these concerns in an architectural language indebted to traditional urban forms.

Planned and designed in a period of economic growth and released into the fundamentally changed situation of the early 1970s – the second stage of the building was only completed after the oil crisis of 1973 – the history of the Kulturhus also reflects the end of the period of social and cultural reform of which it was product. Parts of the building were suddenly allocated for use as a temporary Swedish parliament and the institutional concept was realised only in a very limited form, leaving the building behind as a somewhat mutated monument to the vision of an egalitarian, democratic culture. Journalists would describe the building as a ‘tenement building for institutions’ 18 or ‘enormous vacuum’. Hultén moved to Paris to become the first director of the Centre Pompidou, using his Stockholm experiences to set up this newest, largest and most prestigious cultural centre of the day. 19

The history of the Kulturhus since its inauguration in 1974 has some similarities with that of the Hayward Gallery and the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London. 20 Changing political majorities and ideas about the role of culture in society affected its use and physical state. Proposals were considered to change its use, to sell it or turn it into a commercial convention centre. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, and coinciding with a more general questioning of the cultural consensus of the previous decade, ‘bourgeois’ politicians seriously proposed to demolish a building which they viewed as a ‘left-over of a leftist, politicised concept of culture’, 21 a reminder of a period in recent Swedish history they would rather forget. In a comprehensive refurbishment campaign in the mid 1990s the interior was changed, to the extent that little of the original concept is visible today. The introduction of escalators across the exhibition floors, effectively dividing these, and deprived it of its original character of a labyrinth. 22 The building was in danger of becoming a staircase, as the architect Lars Westers put it in a newspaper article in 1999. 23

The Kulturhus is at once a late-born child of the politics of centralised planning and socio-cultural engineering and the result of the
changes in the cultural climate during the 1960s and the product of the crisis which gripped Sweden like other European countries in the early 1970s. Its history neatly reflects this transition. Although the size of the building suggests a large centralised institution, the layout and the organisation of the Kulturhus constitute a departure from the fundamentally universal planning structures of post-war planning. This being Sweden, the trajectory of this building from the idea to its realisation and the debates about its content is well documented and the arguments governing the major decisions on its planning and brief emerge with exceptional clarity.

The official documents do not, however, reveal the controversies that accompanied the development of the Kulturhus and its position in the lively, occasionally violent, cultural debate in Sweden in the 1960s. These aspects, the arguments which were not made explicit and the discussions about the need for a new type of cultural institution in a society gripped by protests against large-scale planning, are the subject of numerous articles in the Stockholm daily newspapers, broadsheets such as the ‘independent liberal’ Dagens Nyheter, the ‘independent moderate’ Svenska Dagbladet and the Social Democratic Stockholmstidningen, as well as the tabloids Expressen and Aftonbladet. They are also displayed in a book with the somewhat ironic title När skönheten kom till city (When beauty came to the ‘city’) by Kurt Bergengren which was published in 1976. As a cultural critic and contributor to the cultural supplement of Aftonbladet for two decades, Bergengren was knowledgeable about both the arguments of the major players in the debate. His book offers a lively account, written with great style, of the development of the city in the 1960s and 70s, their cultural background and the machinations – politicians and technocrats versus various constituencies: cultural critics nervous about the decay of traditional culture, conservationists mourning the traditional city, young protesters demanding a place in the newly created city of the welfare state.

This account of the emergence of the idea for the Kulturhus and its development examines the different initiatives and events which affected the genesis of the building: the intellectual debates and political arguments and the many actors in this history. Three of these deserve particular attention: the Social Democratic politician Hjalmar Mehr who

25 Stockholmstidningen ceased publication in 1966
27 Like in most continental European countries Swedish 19th century politics were dominated by the two power formations of the Social Democrats on the one hand and the representatives of various interest groups of the landowning middle classes, business and Christian organisations. The use of the term ‘borgerlig’ corresponds with the German classification of parties to the right of the Social Democrats as ‘bürgerlich’. As the names of the different parties – Moderata samlingarpartiet (until 1969 Moderata partiet, Party of the Right), Kristdemokraterna, folkpartiet and Centerpartiet (developed out of the Party of the Farmers) – show, this does not necessarily mean that these formations were conservative, or constituted a Conservative parliamentary block. This becomes apparent when one looks at the different positions that these parties took in questions of urban development and renewal. Stockholm was ruled by a ‘borgerlig’ coalition between 1950 and 1958, and by the Social Democrats between 1958 and 1966 and again after 1971. At national level the farmers’ party (later Centrepartiet) formed a so-called ‘red-green’ coalition between 1951 and 1957. Henningsen (1986), p. 225-286

as finansborgarråd (councillor for financial affairs) effectively dominated the Stockholm administration during much of the 1960s, the museum director Pontus Hultén to whom the idea for the Kulturhus is attributed and the architect Peter Celsing.

All three were driven by highly personal agendas, yet operated within the larger context of post-war Sweden characterised by the apparent near omnipotence of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Sweden, but also affected by being closely and critically observed by the borgerliga (i.e. conservative-liberal) opposition. The different concepts of society from which these political formations departed may have been largely absorbed by the general consensus that the welfare system provided a legitimate framework for Sweden’s future. At the same time these general cultural and political positions remained powerful undercurrents, and interfered with the debates on concrete urban proposals or the programmes of cultural institutions like the Kulturhus. Parallel to this, but certainly affected by these arguments, the design of the Kulturhus was shaped by the context of the large-scale re-planning of Stockholm’s inner city and the architectural culture of the period. All of these aspects provide the ingredients of the complicated history of which the Kulturhus is the result.
6.2 When beauty came to the city: the re-planning of central Stockholm

The development of Sergels torg and its surroundings was part of an extensive re-planning of Stockholm and the development of the city into a modern metropolitan region with a centre and a series of dependent satellite towns. The parts of this region were connected to the existing city centre by an extensive system of tunnelbanelor, underground railways, all coming together in one main railway station, T-centralen. Nearby, Sergels torg, with its department stores, large-scale offices and its layered arrangement of traffic flows would offer the concentration of the commercial and the informal public life of the city. It is in this square where the consensual arrangements of Swedish society in the 1950s and 60s seem most tangible: the belief in collective organisation offering the citizen social security, housing and education while, at the same time, embracing technological innovation, an unprecedented economic concentration and a profound rationalisation of all aspects of public and private life.

There are few European capitals that could rival the thoroughness – and the unsentimental fervour – of this re-planning, all of this in a city that has never been bombed. Against the background of the almost absolute power of the Social Democratic Party in Sweden during the 1950s and early 60s, the force with which the technocratic consensus of politicians, trade unions and business reshaped the centre of Stockholm is almost without parallel in Western Europe. The architect-historian Claes Caldenby describes this period as the ‘time of the large programmes’ with a climax in 1967–68, the ‘harvest-time for public-sector welfare that was the model of the Swedish people’s home (folkhemmet), fuelled by twenty years of uninterrupted economic growth and combined with the Social Democrats’ bid for a ‘strong society’, capable of delivering the benefits of the welfare state and, increasingly, consumer goods.28

In his account of the history of the urban renewal project Spelet om Nedre Norrmalm, Anders Gullberg refers to the unbroken power of what in retrospect appears as a conspiracy of the powerful in the post-war welfare state. Gullberg writes: ‘Towards the end of its history the urban renewal of Stockholm was a clear example of how a large, unpopular and heavily criticised project can be driven further and for a long time, also in the context of a democracy.

Its fate also shows, however, that the arrogance of power finds its limit especially when the gathering of force of various protest movements and media attention coincide with a economic downturn, affecting the public sector and private investors. In such a situation even the largest elephant can be brought down.29 Claes Caldenby has explained the vicissitudes of Stockholm’s inner city planning and the increasing opposition to large-scale planning with a crumbling faith in the combination of progressive social ideas and technological progress, writing: ‘The town plans from 1962, 1967 and 1975 together tell the story of a rising and falling belief in the future, and the sluggish responses of the planning apparatus to this and other changes in the realities of Swedish life.30 While thus being the final outcome of the citypanering (the renewal of the inner city), Sergels torg also marks the end of the period during which the faith in the realisation of the modern society accompanied by large-scale planning met with almost no opposition. It was here that the build up of a resistance to the ruthless reorganisation of the urban structure ground to a halt, terminated by the enormous concrete wall of Peter Celsing’s Kulturhus.31

The area of Nedre Norrmalm (Lower Norrmalm) lies on the mainland just north of Stockholm’s mediaeval Gamla Stan (Old Town) island. In the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the peninsula of Norrmalm became the first area to be developed with small aristocratic hotel-type palaces and modest houses for artisans and servants built on a grid. More or less dissected by the Drottninggata connecting the royal castle with the royal hunting grounds to the north of the city, Norrmalm turned into the central area of Stockholm in the second half of the nineteenth century, absorbing most of the commercial activities triggered by Sweden’s relatively late industrialisation in this period.

Around 1900 the area had become a densely populated and built-up neighbourhood of five to six storeys occupied by Sweden’s largest corporations and newspapers, but it also accommodated small businesses in basements, workshops and small hotels for salesmen and prostitutes who were attracted by the main railway station.32 The first beginnings of the citypanering, including the wholesale demolition of a considerable number of buildings in the most central areas, can be found as early as 1866 when a committee led by the lawyer Albert Lindhagen launched the plan for a boulevard of six kilometres connecting Gustaf Adolfs Torg, a formal square facing the north side of the Tessin palace, with the northern edge of the city.

This plan, essentially an act of superimposing Beaux-Arts principles on the existing topography of Stockholm and reviving a project by the royal architect Jean de la Vallée in the 1640s, was taken up in 1928 by Albert Lilenberg, the director of the municipal planning department, who proposed the southward extension of the first part of this boulevard, which had been realised as Sveavägen, causing uproar in the 1930s and 40s.33 Lack of funds during World War II halted the further realisation of the plan, but by the late 1940s a large project for the construction of Hötorg City, a series of five high slabs – town planning commissioner Yngve Larsson is said to have called them ‘five trumpet blasts’ – created the pretext for a limited extension of the boulevard. This act of large-scale development, and the building of the underground railways, established the prelude to a fierce discussion about how to reorganise the traffic system in the entire centre of Stockholm, which arrived at a key point in the area south of Hötorget City, today’s Sergels torg.

As Gullberg points out the positions in this debate were divided by the Small Programmes and the ‘bourgeois’ parties advocating a cautious approach towards demolishing large numbers of buildings in order to build the extension of the boulevard, but supporters of a radical rede-

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31 Unfortunately, as contemporary commentators predicted, the story did not have a happy ending. While the layout of Celsing’s building would have provided a pretext for retaining the historic eighteenth and nineteenth century fabric of Stockholm’s inner city, piecemeal demolition and rebuilding in the 1970s and 80s has changed this part of the city in all but the general urban plan.
32 Gullberg (1989), p.10
33 Claes Ellehaug, Jean de la Vallée, kunglig arkitekt (Lund: Signum, 2003), p.78
34 Gullberg (1989), p.11
development could also be found in all political camps. Hjalmar Mehr, a Social Democratic politician holding the crucial position of the councilor for social, financial and estate development (social-, finans- och fastighetsborgarrådet), according to Gullberg, pulled his weight to force his fellow Social Democrats behind the party line of a radical modernisation of the city centre.

This controversy was not in the first place about a more or less careful approach to the existing city, but about who should take initiative for building and exploiting on the cleared sites. Whereas some Social Democrats favoured an active role with the municipal authorities acting as developers, the ‘bourgeois’ opposition demanded that the public sector should keep to its more traditional role of providing the infrastructure for private developments. The issue was resolved with a compromise: the development of the new commercial centre was to contain both public and private developments.

In 1962 the project for the reconstruction entered a new phase when the idea for a car tunnel and extensive demolition works were laid down in Cityplan 62, a new plan for the central area around what was to become Sergels torg. Again the plan was highly controversial. Kaj Bonnier, a member of the family owning Scandinavia’s largest publishing house, gathered around himself a respectable list of writers, artists, businessmen and some architects who signed a public petition against the project. The list of companies and institutions supporting the project included most of the major banks and large corporations in Sweden, which had committed themselves to developing sites in the area.

The result, again, was a compromise: parts of the plan were to be revised in order to retain buildings and alternatives were to be developed. The opponents of the most radical consequences of the City 62 project appeared to have succeeded in preventing the municipal planning machine from realising its plans. The truce between the opponents of radical demolition and the group of politicians, civil servants and business leaders with Hjalmar Mehr at its centre was, however, fragile. It appears that Mehr used his powers to proceed with the comprehensive renewal project, playing skilfully along existing lines of conflict between the interest groups of business while sidelining the opponents inside his own party.

The centre-right opposition in the council remained deeply sceptical and in the spring of 1963 a group of 19 people signed another petition advocating a cautious approach to the urban renewal project. Apart from Hakon Ahlberg and Sven Ivar Lind, who were among the signatories of this second petition, architects generally stayed out of the controversy, careful (as Gullberg suggests) not to offend potential clients in the city administration or business. One of the main questions around which the discussion centred was a car tunnel under Norrmalm, designed to make the central area of Stockholm accessible to mass car traffic. By seemingly giving in to some of the concerns of the critics, Mehr secured a second and final compromise arrangement. The car tunnel was accepted, but alternatives would be sought for the demolition of historically significant buildings. The compromise meant that the city could press ahead with the development, the necessary expropriations and demolitions.

Against the background of sustained economic growth in the subsequent years and the projected increase of Stockholm’s population to more than two million inhabitants, Mehr and his supporters in the council did not find it difficult to convince public opinion of the inevitability of their approach, sidelinin the opponents. Relying on a team of civil servants devoted to the project and the rapidly increasing staff in the city departments, the councilor was invested with the financial and planning resources necessary to accelerate the citysanering. The only parties which at times forced Mehr to back down were agencies of the Swedish national government wishing to secure sites for the equally increasing ministerial departments and the parliament housed in a nineteenth century building near the royal palace. Eventually this constellation of conflicting interests was also to be the starting point for the organisation of a competition for the south side of Sergels torg and the initiative for the Kulturhus.

The competition for Sergels torg

In the course of 1963 and the subsequent years the council proceeded with projects for the area above ground around Sergels torg. Particularly the development of the Frymörskaren block, later part of the Kulturhus site, proved complicated. Here the council, collaborating with a consortium of two banks (Handelsbanken and Skandinaviska Banken) and a construction company, wished to develop a large international hotel. The director of the Riksbank (Swedish state bank), however, had also expressed a claim on the site for the new headquarters of his organisation. The bank’s claim being successful, the city had to retreat and the field for a complete revision of the development was open. The need to incorporate a building for the Riksbank seems also to have effectively reopened the debate about the general direction of the re-planning of the area.

The authors of the Cityplan 62 had criticised the absence, so far, of non-commercial programmes and spaces for culture and entertainment. The plan document, however, remained vague about the form in which sites for these purposes should materialise. The document merely suggested that the south side of Sergels torg, where the conflicting interests of the city and the national government encountered each other, might be a suitable site for exhibition spaces and a library.

There was also the desire, especially among the Social Democrats, to build a new theatre in Nedre Norrmalm. Already in 1950 the theatre building committee of the city (stadskollegiets teaterbyggnadskommitté) proposed that a new Stadsteater (municipal theatre) was to be built in Norrmalm, but failure to secure a site had led to the examination of proposals elsewhere in the city while the company used an existing theatre. According to Harry Schein, who as a friend of Hjalmar Mehr and one of the leading figures in the Swedish Social Democratic Party was involved in the informal debates on the party’s cultural policies, the Stadsteater was one of the major projects of the advocates of the cultural modernisation of the society.

36 Gullberg (1989), p. 15–17
37 ibid., p. 41
38 ibid., p. 20/21
39 Gullberg, p. 17
40 Gullberg (1989), 30/31
41 Kulturutskottets Slutrapport, p. 16
The idea of realising an alternative to the established *Kungliga Dramatiska Teatern*, mostly known as Dramaten, had been proposed by the Social Democrats against the outspoken resistance of Högervapnet, the conservative fraction in the council. According to Schein the theatre enjoyed considerable success at the box office, despite the critics’ complaints that the repertory was too difficult and incomprehensible for larger audience’. Having been invested with almost total power in the city after an election victory in 1958, Hjalmar Mehr and his fellow-councillors wished to push ahead with the project. As the three blocks south of Sergels torg called Frimörsaren, Skansen and Frigga were largely owned by either the city or the national government, both parties had to agree a division between the southern part of the area, allocated to the Riksbank, and the northern part to be used by the city. The competition, which was one element of the deal agreed between the city and the national government on 1 December 1963, would have to resolve the question as to how these functions should be organised and in what built form.

It took another year and a half before the competition for Sergels torg became reality. How exasperated many of the commentators in the cultural debate must have been, may become clear from the concluding passage in a review of a building outside Stockholm, the Medborgarhus in Örebro, which had been designed by Erik and Tore Ahlén. In this article Per-Olof Olsson proposes to commission the architects with the completion of Sergels torg. ‘The strong conflicts of interest between the city of Stockholm and the Swedish state have delayed the long-announced inter-nordic competition on this building of great urban and programmatic importance’. Olsson points out that the moment for a competition may have passed and that ‘a direct commission to the brothers Ahlén is … a more than acceptable alternative.’

When it was finally published, the competition announcement appeared in all major Scandinavian professional architectural magazines, inviting architects from the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and Finland) to produce ideas for the area. As the title ‘Allmän Nordisk Ideförslag om byggnads inom kvarteret Exmörsaren, Skansen och Frigga Söder om Sergels torg i Stockholm’ (General Ideas Competition for building in the Exmörsaren, Skansen and Frigga Söder blocks on Sergels torg in Stockholm) illustrates, the intention of the competition was formulated in fairly general terms, suggesting not so much one building but an urbanistic proposal for the area.

The competition text as published on page 43 lists solutions for the organisation of traffic and the question of either retaining or demolishing an eighteenth century building, the Preissiska Hus, before elaborating on the main purpose of the buildings. Referring to the predominance of commercial functions and offices in the areas realised in previous building campaigns it states the pressing need for proposals ‘designed in such a fashion that activities become more balanced and that space is given to cultural institutions, something that should be seen as self-evident in an area as centrally located as this’.

Identifying Sergels torg as ‘Stockholm’s future central square’ and stressing the effect of the proximity of the main underground station, the texts suggests that the buildings facing the new square ought to include public spaces. These are described in some detail as flexible spaces to be subdivided. About a third of the area, the text suggests, might be used for ‘parties, prize ceremonies, film performances, concerts, scenic arrangements, ballet and related activities’. Another third is dedicated to smaller exhibitions or more permanent arrangements, while it is emphasised that these spaces could operate either separately or in combination with the remaining third, which should be used for ‘study circles, teaching and lectures’.

The wording of this part of the brief appears to anticipate the concept of a building comprising many of the activities eventually to be found in the realised building. Yet, despite the expressed desire for flexibility and the reference to temporary, changing exhibitions and film performances in one space, the description of the intended use of the buildings remains notably vague.

Besides listing some public functions, the programme stresses that the building should extend to the outer boundaries of Sergels torg and that the design should show ‘the approach towards the intended disposition’, i.e. the volumetric composition and the ‘architectural and structural principle’. Apart from these generalised statements and the suggestion that the top floors of the buildings might, in a first stage, be used for administrative purposes and as a traffic control centre, the competition programme hardly communicates a comprehensive vision of the public and institutional activities that might fill them. Even the reference to the theatre, also part of the brief, has a somewhat accidental and unreal air about it. ‘The emphasis given to access levels and the system of underground service roads, as well as the recommendation to allow the plan to be cut up in different plots, suggests a compound of buildings connected on different levels comparable to the South Bank in London, with a municipal gallery and a theatre as part of the overall composition rather than its translation into one architectural entity. This, in other words, was not a competition or a programme for a single building, a Kulturhus.

The open, vague character of the brief of the competition was notable and must have been intended. In 1966, when it was published, Stockholm’s newspaper readers had been able to follow an intensive debate on various proposals for cultural institutions on and near Sergels torg. In the official competition documents none of these were mentioned – with the exception of the theatre, or ‘den mehrska teatern’ (the Mehr theatre) as the correspondent of Stockholmsstädningen chose to call it. In the same article the author expresses being puzzled by the ‘vague presentation’ of the exhibition facilities. Quoting the extensive, but unfocused wish list of the competition brief, he points out that ‘it is not even an official secret that the spaces are in fact meant to be used by Moderna Museet. It would have been better, if the buildings were designed for their purpose, instead of in this way finding proof that it is possible to squeeze the museum in (‘stoppa museet inom’).’

The author refers to a debate that had occupied the Swedish broad sheets for some time. Early in 1965 Pontus Hultén, the energetic and People’s Palaces

Stockholms Kulturhus. A department store for a new man

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successful director of *Moderna Museet*, Stockholm’s post-war museum of modern art, had launched the idea of moving the institution from its temporary home in a former navy building on the idyllic island of Skeppsholmen to Sergels torg in an article in the progressive *Dagens Nyheter*.\(^{47}\) This proposal was, however, not merely an initiative for the relocation of the museum but entailed a radically expanded concept of presenting and engaging with modern art. In this view the new museum arranged around the permanent collection would also have to offer temporary exhibitions, show films ‘connected with the modern arts’ and be used for concerts. It should be open ‘from 10 to 10’ and people could spend the day inside or pop in for the lunch break or after work. There should also be a ‘kulturellt vardagarum’ (a ‘cultural living room’, still referred to in inverted commas, which disappeared later) and a children’s museum.

With this range of activities Hultén already formulated the core of the programme of the Kulturhus as it was designed two years later.\(^{48}\) In the following months he developed a more detailed description and published this on a number of occasions in different newspaper, probably to find support across the political spectrum and in public opinion. Despite the increasing precision of this programme over the next year and a half, the first article contains all the arguments for the new type of museum Hultén envisaged, even if at this stage he does not use the term Kulturhus – at least not in the published text.

These arguments are partly related to the function of the museum itself, for example when he mentions the need for larger exhibition spaces. Mostly, however, Hultén focuses on the greater prominence of the museum as the cultural focus in the centre of the city, by ‘offering a pleasurable and festive accent in the otherwise uniform attitude of the area’. He also points out that the ‘fresh and socially underdetermined’ city centre would allow a departure from the tradition of locating museums in bourgeois neighbourhoods. In Sergels torg the museum would find itself in an environment ‘that can be everyone’s property and a classless neighbourhood’, and as such would be more ‘effective’.

Hultén’s proposal in *Dagens Nyheter* was the starting sign for a debate that involved the cultural commentators of all the major Stockholm newspapers. In the Social Democratic *Stockholms tidningar* Bengt Olvång points out that the current location is by no means inaccessible, and that, while the pedestrians might be attracted more easily to the city centre, the museum would probably lose its visitors arriving by car. In his conclusion Olvång is most outspoken: ‘The democratic idea that everybody should have the opportunity of engaging with culture, through locating (the museum) in the city centre is a chimera.’\(^{49}\)

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\(^{47}\) Pontus Hultén, ‘Moderna Museets centrum’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 17 February 1965

\(^{48}\) Wilfried Wang describes Hultén as the author of the programme of the Kulturhus in his monograph of Peter Celsing; although writing the brief was very much a collective activity, involving a specially installed committee. From the article published in February 1965 it is sufficiently clear that Hultén is the author of the basic idea and that this was embraced by Celsing a year later. Wilfried Wang, *The architecture of Peter Celsing* (edited by Olof Hultén), Stockholm 1999, p. 64

\(^{49}\) Bengt Olvång, ‘Oblyga Önksningar’, *Stockholms tidningar*, 19 February 1965

Sergels torg, showing the buildings to be demolished for the re-planning of the south side of the square (1968) and a photomontage of Peter Celsing’s competition scheme
Writing in the liberal-conservative Svenska Dagbladet a month later, Einar Forseth discards the idea of re-locating the museum in favour of a municipal ‘konsthal’, an art gallery for temporary exhibitions without a permanent collection like the Hayward Gallery, which was under construction at that moment.\(^6\) This type of institution could be free of the conventions implied by the context of a state institution like Moderna Museet. Like the correspondent of Stockholmsutställningen, Forseth was not convinced that a relocation of the museum to a more central city site was necessary or desirable.

The debate was fed by a survey of the cultural and social background of visitors of exhibitions of modern art, presented by Harald Swedner in Expressen in April 1965.\(^5\) Swedner had found that all of possible cultural offerings, exhibitions of modern art were most likely to be sought out by relatively young, well-educated and middle-class visitors. These results provided further ammunition for about every position concerning the future of Moderna Museet; some, particularly in the liberal-conservative papers, would regard the outcome of the survey as evidence that relocating the museum to the city centre would make little difference, given the specific nature of its audience. For the other side, which associated itself with progressive cultural politics and modern art, the museum could be more effective for reaching a new and larger public and would explicitly state the role of arts in democracy – in its centre. In the ‘bourgeois’ papers the reserved attitude towards a new cultural centre was also mixed with scepticism towards a large building that was presumably seen as another large megalomaniac project of the Social Democrats. Although Hultén is generally described with much respect for his dynamic curatorial policies at Moderna Museet, some of the critics extend their reservations to the museum director and his ambitions.\(^2\)

Meanwhile the brief for the competition was being written in secrecy, as one of the correspondents points out. Hultén needed to influence this debate that took place within the city administration. In a long article published in May 1965, this time in Stockholmsutställningen, he sums up all the earlier arguments for moving his museum to the new city centre and gives a more detailed description of the building that he envisages.\(^6\) This description is effectively the programme for the later Kulturhus and Hultén may have hoped that the civil servants writing the competition brief might adopt it. His calculation did not work out, but the architect of the winning scheme most certainly followed this detailed programme rather than the more vague one produced by the city in the official documents for the competition.

Apart from the director of the Riksbank and the architects Sven Markelius and Hans Erling Linklade (from Copenhagen), the competition jury included Hjalmar Mehr, other architects and functionaries. The submission date for the competition was fixed on 10 December 1965, but was soon delayed to 4 February of the following year. As might have been expected, the responses of the participating architects reflected the indecisive nature of the brief. This became clear when, on 30 June 1966, the competition results were presented to the city council and the public.

The Competition entries

In the competition the participants had been asked to produce two alternative designs, one retaining the eighteenth century Preistruck Hu that occupied a part of the site, the other assuming its demolition. Although each submission therefore consisted of two alternative designs, most entrants, including the winner of the first prize, had opted for the solution with a cleared site.

Three of the five prizewinners had translated the competition programme into a structure occupying the entire area. These projects, one by the Danish architect Henning Larsen and two by Swedish teams (Alf Engström/Gunnar Landberg/Bengt Larsson and Hans Borgström/Bengt Lindroos) were based on grids laid out across the site south of Sergels torg, subdividing the volume into square modules. This approach of first translating a programme at an urban scale into one building and then defining a modular system in order to break down the scale of the development is a common feature in architectural publications of the mid 1960s, particularly those appearing in the orbit of Team X.

The presentation of the projects in the journal Arkitektur emphasises these similarities, publishing the projects of Larsen and the Swedish teams side by side with illustrations of the 1958 Berlin Hauptstadt competition entry of the Smithsons, the designs for the Freie Universität Berlin (1963) and the Frankfurt Römerberg (1962) by Candidis, Josic and Woods, and Larsen’s own scheme for the Berlin university competition.\(^4\) Yet, whereas the projects for Frankfurt and Berlin proposed low-rise, dense structures loosely laid out over extensive sites, in the confined context of inner city Stockholm these ‘structur-alist’ solutions were necessarily tightly organised. The competition entries for Stockholm also suffered from a lack of flexibility, since the modular system allowed little space for exceptions for incorporating larger single units, for instance for the theatre. The generalised nature of the programme had been taken as an invitation for a comprehensive re-ordering of the site replacing the existing streets with an intricate system of internal passages and large covered arcades.

Peter Celsing’s proposal, which had been selected for the first prize, was utterly different from these systematic, grid-based structures.\(^6\) The architect had divided the programme into three separate recognisable volumes, the composition of these three elements defining the open spaces around the building: one cube housing the theatre was placed along Drottninggatan and another for the bank was placed at an angle derived from the two different grids in the eastern and western parts of Norrmalm which also created Brunkbergsgtore, the square immediately to the south of the site and which the bank building overlooked like a palazzo.

The composition was held together by a long, tall building with Sergels torg on its north side. It was this part that in Celsing’s scheme was introduced as a Kulturhus and which constituted the new and most distinct idea of the project. In urbanistic terms Celsing’s proposal was a radical departure form the open-ended nature of the urban plans realised

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Celsing’s team consisted of Jan Henriksson, Bertil Håkansson, Mikahl Pappadopulos and the architect himself. The sulphur Swert Lindblom who, according to Henriksson had persuaded Celsing to participate in the first place, also worked with this team. In autumn 1966, after the competition had been won and while Celsing reworked the scheme, Lindblom ended the collaboration, emphasising that his decision had nothing to do with the ongoing debate on the EGT proposal. Annica Carlson, Kulturhuset i Stockholm – en analys, diploma thesis KTH Stockholm, November 1995 (unpublished), p. 10.
in the course of the previous decade, which tended to suggest that the repetition of towers was merely the beginning of an unfinished process and that the new development would eventually take over the rest of the city as well.

In Celsing's project, the combination of a sympathetic attitude towards the existing urban fabric, in an unmistakably modern language of concrete and glass, and the proposal of an interpretation of the programme for which in this form there was neither precedent nor parallel was certainly not without risk. But, as the jury wrote in its statement, Celsing's design had also an element of pragmatism. It respected the overall outlines given in the competition programme and allowed the building campaigns for the three parts to be realised in separate stages. This was a quality which must have appealed to those jury members who like Hjalmar Mehr were committed to a speedy continuation of the *citysanering*, even if the idea of the Kulturhus itself might have seemed more of a precisely defined institutional proposal than the city council had initially bargained for. On the other hand, as the examination of the debate on the programmatic content will show, Celsing's programme for an institution of this type was by no means exclusively based on his private convictions only, but it reflected a broader debate with the leading circles of Swedish culture and politics.

The declared ambitions of the project seemed to be in tune with the unbroken optimism of this period around 1966-67, although violent police action against Vietnam demonstrations and a series of youth riots in Hötorget, some 300 metres north of the site of the future Kulturhus, in 1965 had shown that in Sweden, like other European countries, the post-war arrangements were gradually eroding.
6.3 A politician, a museum director and an architect

The breadth of the discussions in the newspapers on whether or not Stockholm needed the Kulturhus and about a relocation of Moderna Museet to the centre of the city illustrates the pivotal position of the project in the cultural debate. As a building that was at once to mitigate the monotony and commercialism of the new city centre and to provide a focus for a new concept of culture, the Kulturhus attracted remarkable attention and controversy. Literally all political parties, every columnist and presumably many Stockholmers, whose opinions have not been recorded, had an opinion about the building initiative. In this sense the Kulturhus was, even at this stage, a collective project. Yet the genesis of the initiative and its development was and remained closely connected to the individual agendas of the three main players pushing the project forward: Hjalmar Mehr, Pontus Hultén and Peter Celsing.

While Hultén and Celsing left their imprint on the programmatic character and physical form of the building, it was Mehr’s commitment and political weight that tipped the balance towards realising what might otherwise have remained a utopian project. The existing literature on the Kulturhus tends to frame the project either as a building – emphasising the role of the architect – or as a predecessor of the Centre Pompidou – stressing the role of Hultén as the originator of the concept. The episode of the competition, however, shows that neither Celsing nor Hultén operated single-handedly, and that their ideas were the outcome of their close collaboration. The role of Mehr, by comparison, seems to have been more complex. As the most powerful figure in Stockholm local politics in the first half of the 1960s, and again towards the end of the decade, he had championed the Kulturhus as the final part of the urban transformation. It was also Mehr who remained Peter Celsing’s sole ally towards the final phase of the construction and it is clear that Mehr’s vision of the modern metropolis formed the context for the Kulturhus.

Hjalmar Mehr: A ‘suspect cosmopolitan’ pulling the strings in Stockholm

Contemporary commentators seem to have few positive things to say about the man who dominated Stockholm local politics for two decades. Hjalmar Mehr’s characterisation as the quintessential ‘beton-sosse’ (Concrete socialist) informs much of what has been written on the history of his life work, the transformation of inner Stockholm. The entry on Mehr in Wikipedia, for example, introduces Mehr as ‘best known for the demolition of Stockholm’s inner city’ and his role in the so-called ‘question of the elm trees’, a particular episode which for many commentators marked the definitive end of the dominance of technocratic Social Democratic politics in the 1960s.

Hjalmar Leo Mehr (1910-1979) was the son of a journalist who had fled Tsarist Russia to avoid prosecution for his activities in the Menshevik (Social Democratic) Movement. Raised in a secular Jewish, left-wing
intellectual environment — apparently his parents once occasioned Vladimir Ilich Lenin as their visitor. He started his career in 1934 in the law firm of the Social Democratic politician Georg Branting. His internationalist views, which later caused the Swedish security service to classify him as a ‘suspect cosmopolitan’, were already firmly established.

In the 1930s Mehr supported the Republicans in the Spanish civil war and was one of the Swedish supporters of awarding the Nobel peace prize to the German dissident Carl von Ossietzky in 1936. In the post-war years he played a central role in the Socialist International and became one of the first outspoken critics of the Vietnam War in Sweden, earlier than Olof Palme if we are to believe his son.

Mehr’s introduction to Stockholm’s local administration occurred around 1936, when he joined the social services department (fattigvårdsnämnd), and in 1940 he was appointed director of the information department and later secretary of the financial department. In 1950, when the ‘bourgeois’ parties won the majority in the council the 40-year-old lawyer became leader of the opposition. As the Social Democrats took power in the council in 1958 Mehr was elected finsnsborgarråd, full-time councillor for financial affairs and effectively the leader of the council.

He was to hold this post until 1966, when the Social Democrats lost their majority, and again from 1970 to 1971. The control of the post, his capabilities as a sharp and occasionally sarcastic debater and a deep knowledge of the municipal administrative machinery allowed Mehr to press ahead with his agenda of a ‘new technical revolution’, embodied in the radical modernisation of the city. Mehr, who was often the target of violent attacks from his ‘bourgeois’ counterparts, who ‘loved to hate him’ was more widely read in the classic texts of Marx and Engels than most of his fellow party members. Described as ‘the classic internationalist’ by Austria’s chancellor Bruno Kreisky, he also considered himself an expert on metropolitan problems on a global scale.

Within Stockholm local politics, Mehr had to operate quite carefully. In contrast to the suburbs, where the Social Democrats tended to hold comfortable majorities, the electorate in Stockholm itself was more or less evenly split between the ‘bourgeois’ and left-wing parties. As a result, there were repeated changes in the government of the city leaving politicians like Mehr in a ‘curiously unreal position’. By the time a decision was becoming effective, there was a chance that a subsequent and differently composed administration could have to continue its implementation. It was within these constraints that any ‘bourgarträ’, or full-time councillor, had to operate. As the division of the responsibilities between the councillors depended on the majority of the day, councillors changed position and responsibility; after losing his majority in 1966, for example, Mehr changed from finances to real estate.

Mehr’s long tenure as councillor and his background in the local administration allowed him to operate as ‘a little monarch’ and in extremely close collaboration with the civil servants in his department. It also permitted him to use his considerable skills as a negotiator in pressing ahead with his idea of a well-functioning and smoothly administered city region.

Mehr’s skilful manipulations were by no means limited to pushing the development of the inner city. It was especially in acquiring land for the expansive satellite towns and persuading the reluctant suburban councils to participate in building the underground network that his dexterity was effective. In a study of Stockholm local politics in the post-war period Thomas Anton describes one of the many controversial moves of Mehr, involving the annexation of parts of one suburb, as being ‘in the best traditions of European spy thrillers’.

The redevelopment of the inner city was the centre piece of the larger project of transforming Stockholm into a modern metropolis. In 1960 the combination of an economic slowdown and lower interest rates offered an opportunity for accelerating the building activities that had been started under the previous ‘bourgeois’ administration. In order to achieve his aims, Mehr did not hesitate to use the rhetoric of class struggle that he had developed as a leader of the Social Democratic youth movement in the 1930s, denouncing the opponents of the large-scale demolitions as nostalgic or, worse, forces of reaction. That Mehr himself formed coalitions with some of the largest Swedish banks in order to realise the urban plans did not seem to diminish his Social Democratic credentials, although some criticism appeared in the ‘bourgeois’ press. When the proposal for moving Moderna Museet to the new centre of the city was first launched, Hjalmar Mehr immediately took it up and sought support for the idea among the city’s business leaders and journalists and he was also one of the most ardent supporters of the new Stadsteater.

For Mehr, who was known for larding his speeches with Brecht quotations in German, support for new cultural institutions free of associations with privilege, were part of a larger vision of Stockholm as a metropolis and centre of the modern society that Sweden was to become. Perhaps it would not go too far to characterise him as a late exponent of a local Swedish version of the culture of the Left in Weimar Germany: ruthlessly unsentimental, committed to progress in all its
forms, cultured and fearless when it came to realising his goals. He shared this ethos with other politicians in the Social Democratic party, notably the much younger Olof Palme who advocated far-reaching educational reforms in the 1960s, and Harry Schein, whose essay Har vi råd med kultur? (Can we afford culture?), as mentioned before, had set out the agenda for progressive cultural policy. Peter Celsing, who was also Bergengren’s client for the Filmhus (Swedish Film Institute, 1968–70), was adamant that in the late 1960s a close-knit circle of a small group of Social Democratic leaders, including Mehr and Palme (and himself in the role of the cultural conscience of the party), occupied a position of cultural dominance.

It was only towards the end of the decade that this air of omnipotence was gradually dissipating, as the opposition to Mehr’s plans for the city centre, and support for large state-sponsored institutions, was no longer confined to the ‘bourgeois’ establishment. Ideas about an ‘alternative city’ gained support among the young protest generation, part of which had reconfigured itself as a ‘New Left’ on the margins of the traditional Social Democracy. The ‘anti-nostalgiker’ Hajmlar Mehr, a strong believer in the necessity of economic modernisation in the service of social progress and hardened by two decades in local politics, failed to muster the intellectual flexibility which had served him well in his career. When the discontent about the large scale demolition and re-planning of nineteenth century Stockholm found its object of resistance in the form of a group of elms in Kungsträdgården, Mehr’s methods of controlling the council and public opinion lost their effectiveness, leaving him no option but to back out. Until this moment of defeat, however, Mehr’s capacities as a smooth, yet hard-nosed operator played an essential role in providing the conditions for pressing ahead with the Kulturhus.

The Museum director Pontus Hultén: ‘Poetry must be made by all’

In the introduction to an interview with Pontus Hultén in the art journal ArtForum, the writer and curator Hans-Ulrich Obrist quoted French artist Niki de St. Phalle saying about the man with whom she shared a long history of collaborations that he had ‘the soul of an artist, not of a museum director’. This quote, clearly that of a friend, was intended to characterise Hultén who through his long career as curator, director of a respectable museum’s pionjär har avlidit’, Pontus Hultén’, interview, Svenska Dagbladet, 11 May 1971.

A director establishes his museum

Hultén’s ambition to develop Moderna Museet into a centre of the avant-garde – a term that in the early 1960s was still used without much self-doubt – and his claim the art he presented was to question, even attack the status quo, went along with inviting artists from New York, the global arts centre after 1945, whose work was hardly shown in Europe. In 1962 Hultén organised an exhibition showing work by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Stankiewicz, and two years later the exhibition 106 former av kärlek och försvanlan (106 Forms of Love and Despair) was one of the first introductions of American Pop Art in Europe. Hultén’s activism was, however, not exclusively directed towards events and temporary exhibitions.

In order to raise awareness of the steadily increasing prices on what was becoming a global art market, the director and the Friends of the museum organised a special exhibition with the intention of raising support for acquisitions on a large scale. From 26 December 1961 to 16 February 1964 the show Onskemuseet (The Museum of our Wishes) presented works of art that were on the market and which the museum was eager to acquire, and juxtaposed these with others which one of Hultén’s predecessors had bought for relatively small amounts of money in 1930 and whose value had increased many times since then. Now, the museum director told the politicians and the public, there was a similar moment when it was just about possible to buy works of art which would be unaffordable in a near future. In the foreword of the exhibition catalogue the publisher Gerard Bonnier, who acted as chairman of the Friends, formulated the agenda of the initiative: ‘In our time of secularisation and stress the arts have become an ever more important spiritual force’, something that was seen to be reflected in the growing number of visitors.

Hultén did not quite get the eighteen million Swedish crowns he wanted, but only five. Still, Moderna Museet bought paintings by Picasso, Miró, de Chirico, Dalí, Mondriaan, and Pollock. As a relatively new institution the Stockholm museum had managed, ‘at the last minute before the global market prices for works of art approached astronomical levels’ as the director assured his audience, to establish one of the more significant collections in Europe. As Berggren observed, the initiative had from the beginning been directed by society’s economic elites, those who with experienced hands handle profitable investments’.

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The museum and its director had been successful in forming a coalition with the intellectual as well as the financial establishment in confirming its position as, arguably, the most significant cultural institution in Sweden in the early 1960s. Credit for much of this was given to Hultén, and it contributed to his position as someone who had built up an institution which represented the modern and cosmopolitan character of post-war Sweden and which, for the first time ever, established Stockholm as a major European arts centre.

The museum as a powerhouse of social events and social criticism

With Önskemuseet Hultén had shown himself not only as a competent director of his institution, but also as skilful manipulator of Swedish public opinion, who was capable of forming coalitions with the economic and political elite, while being prepared to bite the hands that fed his museum. Probably drawing on the success of the exhibition and the position of the museum, he and his deputy Carlo Derkert sought to extend the institution’s scope. In the mid 1960s Moderna Museet developed into what had already been cautiously hinted at in the Önskemuseet catalogue, where Hultén mentioned that Modern visual art relied on its close relationships with the performing arts, which in turn are held together by the unifying character of the permanence of the collection. The small building on the Skeppsholmen island, within five hundred metres from the established National Museum and within walking distance from the Östermalm district with its large turn-of-the-century bourgeois apartments, turned into a place for events, musical performances, film screenings and parties.

The innocent reader of Hultén’s passage on the permanence of the collections ‘around which the more ephemeral arts can live and develop’ would have interpreted these words as the introduction of string quartets or literary readings. The presentation of experimental atonal music, for example, was an reasonably established phenomenon in museums dedicated to contemporary art after World War II. At Moderna Museet, however, the elimination of disciplinary boundaries between creative practices took a different, more radical turn. It questioned the boundaries of what had been referred to as the fine arts and reached out to previously separate, even suspicious areas of popular entertainment.

In the conversation with Obrist, Hultén explains the reasons for opening up the museum to fields other than those conventionally presented by them, as something ‘natural’ and fulfilling a tangible need:

‘People were capable of coming to the museum every evening; they were ready to absorb everything we could show them. There were times when there was something on every night. We had many friends who were working in music, dance, and theatre, for whom the museum represented the only available space, since opera houses and theatres were out of the question – their work was viewed as too “experimental”. So interdisciplinarity came about all by itself. The museum became a meeting ground for an entire generation.’

The list of firms supporting Önskemuseet published in the catalogue includes virtually all major commercial and industrial parties of Sweden at the time, from the Bonnier’s Publishing House via building companies, newspapers, insurance companies to unlikely partners like Svenska Jästfabrik (Swedish Yeast Manufacturers) and the Marabou chocolate factory.

86 Obrist (1997), p. 77
87 Önskemuseet (1964), no. 8
88 Obrist (1964), p. 8
89 The museum of our wishes’, catalogue cover and sponsors’ page (1964)
Hultén was aware of his position as an impresario and instigator of cultural as well as political debates, noting that ‘a museum director’s first task is to create a public’, and was in close contact with prominent directors of contemporary art galleries outside Sweden, including Knud Jensen of the Louisiana Art Museum near Copenhagen and Alfred Barr of the New York Museum of Modern Art (MOMA).

One particular strong affiliation was that with Willem Sandberg, the director of the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum, who ‘kind of adopted’ the much younger Swede and with whom he embarked on a variety of collaborative projects through the early 1960s. Sandberg’s curatorial policy was similar to that of Moderna Museet. In Amsterdam, too, the museum extended its activities outside the field of the visual arts and included typographic design (Sandberg’s own specialism), architecture and design, as well as performance practices that did not find a place in theatres or concert halls. Sandberg formulated this approach in the poem NU (NOW), published in 1959, which described the museum: ‘this place of now/ where the future is at home/ it has no fixed properties/ otherwise it will become a museum soon again’. The Amsterdam museum director saw himself constrained by the museum’s accommodation in a late nineteenth century building near the Rijksmuseum, which seemed to represent everything that he wished to avoid: a symmetrical organisation, conventional exhibition rooms with ornate lay-lights and a suggestion of a presentation of art as a sequence of canonical works or schools. In 1938 Sandberg, then deputy director of the Stedelijk, undertook a rigorous refurbishment of the existing museum building, whitewashing the walls and the polychromatic ornaments and installing an abstract velum in every exhibition room.

Hultén acknowledged the role of Sandberg’s approach to the debate about the place of the museum in the context of society. In a preface to a compilation of texts and typographic designs by Sandberg, Hultén wrote:

‘Sandberg constructed a new social situation for the museum. … Sandberg’s museum sided with the artist, not the public. The old institutions had been constructed to preserve work that had been created for palaces, churches, bourgeois homes, but had been removed from their original surroundings. In that kind of museum it is natural to adopt an attitude of wait and see, they are conservative institutions defending conventional good taste. In the Stedelijk Sandberg created a climate of openness, experimentation and curiosity. He told the public that the situation of the modern artist is that of somebody working not so much in the present as in the future, a person who more than any other is creating the bases of the future world’. Sandberg and Hultén shared an ambivalent position towards the role of the museum as an institution dedicated to conserving and collecting art works. Wouter Davids observed that Sandberg repeatedly advocated a policy whereby the museum would eventually make itself redundant.

In his Réflexions disparates sur l’organisation d’un musée d’art d’aujourd’hui of 1951 Sandberg had complained about the ‘isolated existence’ of art in museums and galleries, demanding instead that the new museum should be ‘like a department store, it should be possible to see from the street what the museum has to offer/ the objects themselves invite the passerby to come in’. This isolation was to be mitigated by free guided tours outside general working hours and educational programmes for children, concerts and film performances, but above all by creating ‘surroundings/ where the vanguard feels at home/ wide/clear/ on human scale … a real centre for present life/ generous/ elastic …’. In 1954 Sandberg finally managed to have a new wing built at the Stedelijk. Facing a busy shopping street this building was a simple structure of steel and glass where temporary exhibitions could be installed and viewed from outside as well as from inside the museum. It was here that an important part of the experimental activities of the Stedelijk were organised, in a building that functioned as a showcase for the position of the museum. Sandberg described the effect of this extension: ‘the glass walls make it possible to see from the street what is going on inside: the museum no longer has a closed look, it has become open. The visitor stays in contact with life outside.’ Whether or not the glass house in Amsterdam played a role in the development of Hultén’s own ideas about the museum building in Stockholm is not recorded; that the approach at the Stedelijk was an eminently important point of reference for the Stockholm museum director, whom Wouter Davids characterised as ‘Sandberg’s most eloquent spokesman’, is, however, beyond doubt.

Movements in the Arts – the museum as workshop

Despite their often explicitly light-hearted and irreverent presentation, the events at Moderna Museet were informed by an educational and enlightening impulse and stemmed from a critical attitude towards consumer society. Many of the exhibitions were not merely showing works of art, but included a large amount of documentary material. The erudite catalogue for the exhibition Rörelse i konsten (Movement in the arts) in 1961, which was taken over by the Stedelijk Museum as Bewogen Beweging in the same year, includes an extensive discussion of art movements from cubism and Dada to Kinetic art after World War II and underpins the argument by quotations from the writings of, among others, Leibniz, Wittgenstein, Sartre and Cage.

The exhibition addressed its visitors with a monumental mobile by Alexander Calder originally made for the 1939 World War in New York, the copyright of which Hultén had secured and which was then built in a Swedish workshop. Other exhibits included Tinguely’s sculptures from metal scrap and other objects made from rubbish. The public was invited to consider whether or not this was a protest against the alienating tendencies of consumer society or just playful creative energy. In the catalogue to the exhibition Hultén, in any case, offered an explanation that went beyond the purely playful:

‘I got close to Sandberg. He came to see me in Sweden, and we got on very well. He kind of adopted me, but our friendship ended on a rather sour note. He wanted me to take over from him in Amsterdam, but my wife didn’t want to move, so I decided not to.’ Obrist (1997), p. 78


Wouter Davids, Bouwen voor de Kunst – museumarchitectuur van Centre Pompidou tot Tate Modern, (Ghent: A&S books, 2006), p. 269

Ad Petersen/ Brattingsa (1975), P. 5

Wouter Davids (2006), p. 33

Wouter Davids (2006), p. 127

Sandberg, NU (1955); quoted from Petersen/ Brattingsa (1975), p. 123

The so-called Sandberg wing was demolished in 2006 to be replaced by a new museum extension.

Sandberg, NU (1955); quoted from Petersen/ Brattingsa (1975), p. 123, p. 72

Wouter Davids (2006), p. 272

At the time the choice of rubbish material for works of art still constituted something of an affront to the concept of the arts within established bourgeois culture. Bergengren (1976), p. 168
Taking large public exhibitions as a pretext for documentary work helped establish the museum not only as a place of collecting art works, but also as an institution that could generate knowledge and which could address an extended audience. The seriousness of this approach was also evident from the policy of establishing the library and the museum workshops, the essential role of which was emphasised by Hultén. With some pride he would later remember the reconstruction of the Tätlin Tower in 1968, which was made in the museums own workshops – three years before a similar undertaking by the architects Christopher Woodward, Jeremy and Fenella Dixon for the Art in Revolution show at the Hayward Gallery in London. Hultén noted: ‘This approach to installing exhibitions began to create a phenomenal collective spirit – we could put up a new show in five days. That energy helped protect us when hard times came at the end of the ’60s. After ’68, things got rather murky – the cultural climate was a sad mixture of conservatism and fishy leftist ideologies – museums were vulnerable, but we also stood the tempest by doing more research-oriented projects.’

A similar approach characterised the 1965-66 exhibition Den inre och den yttre rymden (The Inner and the Outer Space) showing works by Malevich (sent from Amsterdam), Naum Gabo and Yves Klein. In his ‘concluding introduction’ to the catalogue Hultén explains that the intention of the exhibition was to show ‘an art which uses negation as a means of expression and whose motive is emptiness, space and spatial sensations, silence, monotony, blandness, calm, contemplation, transcendental simplicity.’ The direction of the exhibition seemed to follow more general interests among artists, particularly in Germany and North America, in the intrinsic, non-representational aspects of the material from which the art work is made. Besides the presentations of work of pre-war artists, the show also included pieces by the European artists of the Zero group and Abstract Expressionists from the US. The selection had been made not only to show a tendency towards the exploration of minimal means of expression among artists of the period, but also the Zivilisationskritik (critique of civilisation) which informed the agenda, especially of the European artists. Hultén explains that this art ‘has very little to do with the optimistic, positivist, factualistic, concrete art which originated from the Bauhaus’, but the unsentimental in its rendering of the world. In order to demonstrate the political position implied in this type of art practice Hultén makes a comparison with literature and specifically the novel Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers and the play Die Ermittlung by his friend the writer Peter Weiss which describes detestable and revolting events in the most tiring, matter-of-fact way and the result is an almost unbearable concentration of emotions. That Hultén’s interest in this art was connected to a broader position towards the role of the arts in society was clearly expressed in the last paragraph of the ‘concluding introduction’: ‘By making images that are so large, so silent and so uneventful, … the artists show an unwillingness to contribute to the decorative and extrotv ‘artistic life’ and to the commercialisation (and also a cosmopolitan cocktail atmosphere) which partly characterises modern art’s appearance.’

In 1966 Hej Stad (Hi, City!) presented the effect of the enormous predicted scale of urbanisation on human society. The exhibition had been curated by three young architects, Sture Balgård, Eva Björklund and Jörn Lindvall, who invited their audience to examine the consequences of the uncontrolled growth of the large cities, especially outside the developed countries and hugely contrasting with the planning tradition of Sweden. In order to communicate this, the museum was redesigned as a dark interior, a labyrinth, 700 square metres of black plastic foil mounted to temporary walls, against which thousands of images from magazines and newspapers, architectural drawings and documentary photography were mounted. Electronic music specially composed for the exhibition complemented the presentation of an urban world that was beyond the experiences of most Swedish visitors, raising awareness of the challenges faced by populations of what was becoming known as ‘The Third World’. Yet, as Kurt Bergengren noted: ‘the tone of the exhibition was positive: planning the metropolis was possible’.

The exhibition also exemplified the approach to combining documentation with the appeal to large audiences. One of the visitors described the experience of watching ‘Alarm’, a film made for the show:

Together we dived between black plastic strips, stumbled through a fluttering world of shadows into a bubbling shameless exhibition of building materials, found our way to a mystic entrance of a large department store for a new man.
black space. In there were all sorts of sound experiences. Suddenly we were standing here, in the middle of everything. Moving installations and plastic construction foil enclosed the room. Divided by grinding electronic vibrations in circles we found a large number of ... white and transparent screens of light beams cut short. Carousel slide projectors clicked and hummed. There were people in need and affluence. There were starving children and pop idols, Supermen and spaceships and slums, slums, slums and shiny architect's dreams. Using extremely simple means they had made an exhibition that overwhelmed us with the dramatic realities of urban development.\textsuperscript{107}

The next large exhibition at Moderna Museet, \textit{Hon, en katedral} (She, a cathedral), was a particularly spectacular event. The main feature was the statue of a woman, 27 metres long and lying on her back, conceived by Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Per Olof Ultvedt and Hultén himself. Visitors could enter the figure, take a soft drink from a vending machine placed in the belly, watch a man watching TV in the heart, and proceed to an art salon and love tunnel, and a small cinema showing Greta Garbo's first feature film.\textsuperscript{108} The art salon in the leg was furnished with ‘fake old masters'.\textsuperscript{109} Hultén described the process of conceiving and making the exhibition as a mixture of mischievous play and a tour de force as far as the production was concerned, leaving artists and staff exhausted on the day of the opening. The Stockholm critics were either unimpressed or plainly baffled; according to Hultén there was no reaction in the papers when the exhibition opened. Then, however, \textit{Time} wrote a favourable piece and everybody liked her.\textsuperscript{110} Through the summer 82 855 visitors came to see the woman and enter her fibreglass body.\textsuperscript{111}

The exhibition programme of Moderna Museet demonstrated that Hultén was both interested in and capable of attracting attention for his institution. The critics may have been unsure about the meaning of the large sculpture but the general audience clearly appreciated it. Hultén and his staff had managed to create their public, and caused a furor. Bergengren remembers the effect of the events in the museum:

‘Modernra Museet received its shape. One evening a piano was sawn into two and that was music. One summer ladies in narrow skirts climbed their bicycles which were riding engines and that was Movement in the Arts. An art critic copied a famous dada art work called \textit{The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors (The Great Glass)} and this was shown side by side with the work of Matisse and Picasso. An egg was being bought for 181 thousand Swedish crowns, causing a storm of letters to the newspapers.\textsuperscript{112

The reference to the storm in the newspapers demonstrated that Hultén’s policy of transforming the museum into a centre for critical activity and social events was not uncontroversial. As early as the autumn of 1962 a violent debate about the direction of the museum had been played out in public, on the editorial pages of the Stockholm broadsheets. Hultén was attacked for his ‘one-sided’ acquisition policies and the intellectualism of

\textsuperscript{107} Bo Grönlund, ‘OOOOOOH AAAAAAH hei stad', \textit{Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning}, 13 April 1966,
\textsuperscript{108} Bergengren (1976), p. 176
\textsuperscript{109} Obriet (1997), p. 79
\textsuperscript{110} Obriet (1997), p. 79
\textsuperscript{111} Bergengren (1976), p. 176
\textsuperscript{112} Bergengren, p. 166

Reconstruction of Vladimir Tatlin’s Monument for the Third International by Arne Holm, Ulf Linde, Eskil Nadorf, Per Olof Ultvedt, Fredi Bleuler and Hendrik Östberg. Moderna Museet (1968)
‘Hon/ She’, exhibition sculpture by Nikki de Saint Phalle in collaboration with Moderna Museet, summer 1966
projects such as the re-enactment of Duchamp’s Bride conceived by the art critic and artist Ulf Linde. For their critics Hultén and the critics and artists he had attracted towards the museum were ‘a belligerent group’113, who could be accused of ‘anarchism, of using the nihilism of values as a weapon to attack serious art and of aiming at superficial sensationalism instead of works of art with any real value.’114

The museum director offended the criticism with confidence: Bergengren describes how Hultén and Derkert welcomed visitors to the museum, and their critics in the press, ‘arms crossed and tired as if the had just got off their horses after a ride across the ranch in a TV Western’. Yet, despite this commitment to the museum as site for events, performances and happenings, Hultén was unequivocal about the crucial importance of the permanent collection if the institution was to take its educational role seriously. In the conversation with Obrist he states: ‘The collection is the backbone of an institution; it allows it to survive a difficult moment – like when the director is fired.’115 The presence of this collection in the centre of the city, visible and accessible to all, would increase the significance of the collection as a representation of memory, ensuring continuity and providing the background for temporary activities.116

The architect Peter Celsing: Individual expression and building for Folkhemmet

‘Nonetheless Celsing is in no way a ‘popular’ architect, rather he is aristocratic and exclusive’.117 This characterisation of the personal character, given in an appraisal of the architect six years after his death, on the occasion of an exhibition in the Kulturhus celebrating fifty years of modern architecture and the arts in Sweden, seems to sum up the position of the architect of the Kulturhus in the context of Stockholm’s post-war architecture.118 The author, Henrik Andersson, continues: When he was made professor at the Stockholm Polytechnic about twenty years ago, his name was above all connected to his achievement as a church architect. He had almost no contact with the large working tasks that occupied many architects at this time: housing, schools, hospitals or town planning.’ Among his fellow architects Celsing was encountered with ‘great interest and respect’, but clearly viewed as a highly individual architect in a profession which saw itself as part of the concrete collective programme of building the everyday environment of the welfare state. That this architect would become the designer of a building that was to put the crown on the building production of modern Stockholm, and in a way represented the climax of the egalitarian programme of the Swedish social democracy, must have seemed an ironic twist of fate to many of those who had devoted their professional lives to building within the collective mainstream of Swedish architecture in the mid-sixties.119

Born in 1920 into a family with a formidable history,120 Peter Celsing grew up in Östermalm, a neighbourhood that had been adopted by Stockholm’s upper and upper middle classes at the end of the nineteenth century. The family spent the summers in a second home at Drottningholm, a village – now suburb – around the summer residence of the Swedish royal family and a preferred summer retreat for architects. As Bergengren noted, Celsing grew up among objects that embodied one of the ‘golden ages’ of Swedish history.122 He was acquainted with the custodian of the royal household’s extensive store and the Drottningholm court theatre, which in the 1930s was being discovered as a unique remnant of eighteenth century court culture. At the age of 16 Celsing spent some time in the architectural office of the Royal Palace, then directed by Ivar Tengbom, and enrolled as a student at Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan (KTH, the Royal Polytechnic School in Stockholm) in 1938. As a student Celsing would just have been able to have a personal encounter with Gunnar Asplund before the latter fell terminally ill.122 Other influential teachers at KTH were Eskil Sundahl, on of the authors of Acceptors, the seminal text marking the introduction of modernist architecture in Sweden, Erik Ahlén, then one of the leading figures in KF, the cooperative movement’s architects office and his brother Tor.124 The teacher to occupy a central role in the education of Celsing was Sven-Ivar Lind who had collaborated with Asplund and took responsibility for completing projects such as the municipal archive in Stockholm, Skövde crematorium and Kviberg crematorium in Gothenburg when the architect died in 1940.

Celsing graduated from KTH in 1943. In the previous year he had travelled to Rome to study at the Swedish Institute – a fairly implausible journey given the general situation in Europe – and on his return joined the prestigious School of Architecture at the Stockholm Academy of Art while working in the offices of Ivar Tengbom and Sven-Ivar Lind, among others. In 1946 Celsing went abroad again, working for an architectural office in Beirut and visited various Middle Eastern countries, including Istanbul where one of his ancestors had been a Swedish diplomat. After his return to Stockholm he worked in the planning department of the Stockholm Traffic Board on a series of stations for the

113 Lars Gustafsson (1964), p. 75
114 Gustafsson, p. 75
115 Obrist (1997), p. 118
116 Hultén had persuaded the friends of Moderna Museet that the move was a good idea, and indeed necessary. In the Onokomens catalogue of 1983 Gerard Bonnier had already mentioned that there had been considerations ‘which further activating and important significance Moderna Museet might have if it were situated in a more accessible location in the centre of the city’, Onokemens (1965), p. 7
118 see also Claes Cadlenby, ‘The time of the Large Programmes’ (1998), p. 155
119 From 1965 half the volume of the Swedish building production had been part of the so-called ‘Million Programme’ that entailed the standardised and industrialised production of one million homes in the whole of the country. This large-scale campaign was one of the decisive factors for the structural change in the Swedish building industries in the period and the concentration of its activities in a relatively small number of very large corporations. Claes Cadlenby (1998), p. 145-47
120 In the Swedish Biographical Encyclopaedia the Celsing family have an extensive entry. In the eighteenth century two ancestors operated as royal Swedish envoys at the High Gate in Constantinople, one of Sweden’s allies (‘Turkiets äldste vän’, ‘Turkey’s oldest friend’) in its policies to retain the status of the major power in Northern Europe against Russia and Denmark. Later the family’s focus shifted towards business and early industrial production. Svenult Biografiskt Lexikon (edited by Bertil Boëthius), vol. 18, Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1999, p. 212-234
121 These biographical data are mostly taken from Claes Cadlenby, ‘Förhållanden/Conditons’ (1993), p. 43 and Bergengren (1976), p. 221-227
122 Bergengren (1976), p. 225
123 According to Carl Nyén the class of Peter Celsing had three weeks of teaching from Asplund before he fell ill. Carl Nyén, in Lars Olof Larsson, Anne-Marie Ericsson and Henrik Andersson, Peter Celsing – en bak om en arkitekt och hans verk, (Stockholm: Liber) 1980, p. 92
124 Bergengren (1976), p. 226
During much of the 1950s and early 1960s Celsing’s attention was focussed on the design of churches. These projects were part of the general building campaigns for the satellite towns and suburbs of the larger cities and offered architects an opportunity of avoiding the standardised practice that characterised other fields of the building production. Church building allowed the architect to explore a large range of crafts and techniques that had become abandoned in larger scale projects for housing or schools. For Celsing the series of churches, which he designed in these years and most of which were completed between 1958 and 1960, marked a phase of intensive artistic experiment within a defined architectural programme.

As a building task that from the outset related to tradition, both ideologically and in terms of liturgy, the construction of churches seemed to invite thoughts also on how existing or traditional typologies and building techniques could be re-invented in the context of the new settlements. The projects for churches in the Gothenburg suburb of Härlanda, Stockholm’s first large satellite town Vällingby, and Almtuna near Uppsala constitute a catalogue of architectural and structural solutions concerning, among others, the expressive qualities of the brick wall, the tectonic articulation of apertures and the space-defining effects of light. These projects also allowed Celsing to collaborate closely with artists such as the sculptor Sivert Lindblom who was later to work with him on the competition design for the Kulturhus.

The projects for the churches as well as those for a small number of renovations of older buildings in the centre of Stockholm realised in the same period afforded Celsing a large degree of control. As well as designing the layout of the spaces and their material appearance, he was in charge of drawing furniture and fittings all of which could be purpose-made for projects of this kind. His approach to architecture, while modern in its formal language, was therefore the result of circumstances that were becoming exceptional in the Swedish building production of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Concentrating on building tasks that could be seen to be somewhat outside the mainstream of the large building production of this period, Celsing appears as a representative of a specific tradition in which the architect’s role was that of
Peter Celsing, Härlanda Church, 1958
Festive rooms and geological data: the shift towards larger urban projects

Until the mid 1960s Celsing’s portfolio largely consisted of relatively small buildings in predominantly suburban environments. With a series of three important competitions for projects in the centre of Stockholm, all of which were won by Celsing, this situation changed quite suddenly. Jan Henriksson, who joined the office in 1962 and stayed on to become the principal collaborator on the Kulturhus, has described these years as an ‘intermediate period’, preparing both the architect and the office for the Kulturhus project.128 These three schemes were for a reordering of Kungsträdgården, the headquarters of one of Sweden’s major banks (Enskilda Banken) and a large office development on the southern bank of the inlet that connects the city with the Baltic. Both because of their size and position near the central sites of Stockholm – the Royal Palace, the National Museum and Opera House are all within a few hundred metres – these projects introduced new architectural themes and revealed Celsing’s thoughts about the future development of the city.

The project for Kungsträdgården was particularly crucial for the development of the extended formal repertoire that was to characterise Celsing’s later work including and arguably culminating in the Kulturhus. The church projects could be described as affirmations of the timelessness of archaic form. The competition for the popular public garden in the centre of Stockholm, situated between the Opera House and Dramaten and surrounded by the palatial buildings of companies and industrial magnates, by contrast displays and interest in Baroque planning and the relationships between urban form and their use.

In his reminiscences of his involvement the painter Sölve Olsson, who over many years produced the renderings in watercolour for Peter Celsing’s drawings, observed that the architect seemed to be at home in a tradition in which spaces in the city become stage sets for the mise-en-scène of ordinary, everyday situations. Olsson compares Celsing’s proposal for Kungsträdgården with the design of eighteenth century Venice or Paris into urban ensembles ‘indicating how one was to perform one’s role, through gestures, pronunciation and clothing’.129

Olsson also notes that ‘in this spectacle there was no space for individual improvisations, but also not for anonymity – all represented something larger than themselves’.130 Those populating the city were not just ‘users’, but also ‘collaborators’. The origins of Kungsträdgården (literally ‘the King’s garden’) as a formal garden running in north-south direction from the bank of Strömmen (the water separating Norrmalm from the old town) to the nineteenth century commercial centre and its clear geometric outline provided the blueprint for Celsing’s design, which could be described as an eighteenth century Lustgarten modelled on the Tuilleries with elements of twentieth century culture parks as found in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Lined by rows of cherry trees the public garden, in Celsing’s proposal, was to become an open air room populated by monumental sculptures of kings and a lion, a skating rink and a large fountain. Four orangeries would surround the open centre and at the southern end an extensive terrace would allow the view across the quay and Strömmen. Kurt Berggren characterised Celsing’s design as ‘the pastiche from cultural history’ and ‘a festive prelude to the archipelago designed by a Stockholmer with a feeling for traditions’.131 Presented in a series of evocative water colour sketches, the Kungsträdgården project anticipated the theme Celsing was later to develop in Kulturhus design; it was a square, accessible to a large, varied public (the garden is also the venue of the trade unions’ First of May manifestations) and formally clearly defined in order to frame its use as a festive venue.

The proposal for the office development in Stadsrådshuset, designed in 1961–65, introduced another set of references. Conceived as a rough concrete wall set against and absorbing the steep rock cliff on the southern bank, the design implied the interpretation of a considerable modern functional programme as a wall, that appears both as a series of caves, resembling those in ancient stone cemeteries, and as geological datum. This expression of a large corporate building as a structure with pre-historic overtones was utterly different from the Internationalist High Modernism of the tower blocks and slabs that were built at this time in the commercial centre of the city.132

The poetry of silent things

How is one to see Celsing’s position within Swedish architectural culture of the post-war years? A series of publications and numerous newspaper articles have made attempts to place the work of the architect. One journalist noted: ‘If Peter Celsing could have continued his work, Swedish
architecture could have had its own Ingmar Bergman’. This reference to the film and theatre director points to the position of the individual artist as an outsider, someone whose artistic integrity allows him to make contributions which surpass the limited concerns of Swedish collectivised culture.

This view is also confirmed in the monographs on Celsing’s work, which present the architect as an example for a type of professional and artistic position, which has become rare in Sweden and elsewhere: aware of traditions, yet intellectually independent and highly creative. The presentation of Celsing as an ‘artistic architect’ informs the first book, a liber amicorum published in 1980, and titled ‘A Book about an Architect and his Work’, six year after the architect’s death. It is reiterated in the second publication which was part of a series of exhibitions on ‘Five masters of the North’ organised by the Finnish architecture museum in the early 1990s – at a time when the Kulturhus was being attacked by local politicians in Stockholm.

The most recent attempt at a revaluation of Celsing’s work is the 1996 monograph by Wilfried Wang, written at the request of the editor of the architectural magazine Arkitektur. Wang’s introductory essay, titled ‘An Architecture of Inclusive Purity’, opens with a statement from Celsing’s 1960 inaugural speech as professor at KTH, titled ‘Om Rummet’ (On Space) in which he describes his aim as determining ‘cognitive elements for an environment suited to the pursuits of individual groups, and society as a whole’. This aim might explain why public buildings – churches, banks, restaurants and university buildings – occupied a major part in the portfolio of the architect, allowing him to formulate and demonstrate how architectural objects were to operate as carriers of meaning and points of (re-) cognition.

Celsing’s expose of his position opens with a description of Piero della Francesca’s fresco depicting the Flagellation of Christ in the Ducal Palace at Urbino. The scene shows the main figures arranged in the middle ground surrounded by the columns of a palace. The dimensions of the palace are unknown to the beholder, but the columns suggest that it might extend far beyond the visible section. Celsing uses this proposal of an indefinite, invisible extension as an illustration for the oppositional nature of what he calls ‘the physical and the metaphysical space’. The former is measurable and ‘quantitative’, whereas the latter remains not measurable and ‘qualitative’. This quality, Celsing suggests rather than formulates, loads the architectural spaces that can be measured with an experiential quality beyond their own boundaries: ‘We find ourselves in a force field (kraftfält), a metaphysical space’.

Celsing combines the scientific metaphor of the electric field and its effect on the bodies inside it with a reference to the mobile sculptures of Alexander Calder, one of artists with whom Hultén maintained a close relationship and whose work had been shown at Moderna Museet. The architect compares these art works with their disparate elements moving around one or more notional, but usually empty, centres with the setting of the main ceremonial and monumental buildings of Central Stockholm around the open waters of inlets of the Baltic. His evocative description of the ensemble of the Palace, Riksdag, Opera House, National Museum, Dramaten and the buildings on Skeppsholmen (including Moderna Museet) is that of an urban panorama of separate incidents and directions, openings and enclosures, with the water surface as an open middle ground across which the relationships between the buildings and their institutions are tangible. The buildings are objects with geometric qualities but, Celsins explains, ‘at the same time they are also signs, symbols, embodying the institutions’. The description of this urban landscape, which marks the epicentres of power and prestige, of royal privilege and cultural tradition, evokes the image of a stage set, the buildings operating both as set pieces and protagonists in a tableau vivant representing Sweden. The classical forms under the northern European sky expose a will to become part of a common world culture.

The reference to the representative character of these buildings forms the prologue to a discussion of modern architecture and its emphasis on function. There is an explicit criticism of the pre-war functional tradition: ‘Our obsession with the requirements of use, which almost has the status of a cult, and their functional and formal aesthetic aspects, could be said to reflect a need to compensate for what the environment lacks in the architectural definition of space’. This approach implies a reduction of architectural spaces to their measurable function and a limited understanding of their performance as environments within the wider culture. Celsing’s project can be described as a act of reintroducing memory and association, which ‘contribute to the metaphysical content of space’.

The fact that Celsing questions what he views as a narrowing of the definition of use in Functionalism does not, however, imply a departure from the modern tradition as such. On the contrary, whenever he makes an attempt to identify alternative strategies to the one-dimensionality of an architecture based on quantifiable data, the examples are from the modern tradition. In the inaugural speech it is in the work of Le Corbusier, the Villa Savoie and the church at Ronchamp that are presented as modern canons. In the prologue to a discussion of modern architecture and its emphasis on function.

The hermeneutic quality of Celsing’s exposé of his position opens with a description of Piero della Francesca’s fresco depicting the Flagellation of Christ in the Ducal Palace at Urbino. The scene shows the main figures arranged in the middle ground surrounded by the columns of a palace. The dimensions of the palace are unknown to the beholder, but the columns suggest that it might extend far beyond the visible section. Celsing uses this proposal of an indefinite, invisible extension as an illustration for the oppositional nature of what he calls ‘the physical and the metaphysical space’. The former is measurable and ‘quantitative’, whereas the latter remains not measurable and ‘qualitative’. This quality, Celsing suggests rather than formulates, loads the architectural spaces that can be measured with an experiential quality beyond their own boundaries: ‘We find ourselves in a force field (kraftfält), a metaphysical space’.
to realise buildings as Ur-gestures: a bridge as 'a leap over the depths', a hangar as ‘gesture of protective covering’, a house with an open plan facilitated by a concrete structure as 'liberation from conventions'.

This view of concrete as a material that offers the opportunity for buildings to become primary creative gestures, like those ‘of the child’s hand, his digging, shaping, patting hand’, seems to operate within the established modern paradigm of thinking architecture as unique and by definition implying a rupture with the past or, a Celsing put it, an ‘expression of our boldest dreams’.

The references to Le Corbusier’s work at Chandigarh and the chapel at Ronchamp appear to confirm this argument. Yet the selection of precisely these examples, along with the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées and the Maison Nabar Bey by Auguste Perret or the PUB department store by Erik and Tore Ahlén betray an interest in architectural design as being rooted in a longer history. Even the reading of the church at Ronchamp, which could have been interpreted as an alien unrelated to history, in Celsing’s account becomes ‘the kind of shell the Crusaders took back home with them from the Holy Land’ – a successful act of creating a historical mythology rather than an alien object without a past. Concrete, in other words, is a means to be embraced in order to establish links to tradition, without historicising; Celsing’s own design for the Kulturhus and the Filmhus (Swedish Film Institute, 1964–70) provide poignant examples for this approach.

The anonymous and the refined

In his work and in the sketches that Celsing produced during his entire career references extend to classical and baroque buildings, the domed ceilings of John Soane and Ottoman structures. While he was working on the Kulturhus Celsing also designed a house in Drottningholm for himself and his family. In this small building, an extension to an existing wooden building set in an orchard, the architect played more explicitly, and more freely, with traditional architectural elements than in the large inner city projects. With its pediment façade, the use of classical mouldings, round windows and decorative interior elements, the Drottningholm house anticipated the themes and concerns of Robert Venturi, and could be seen as an illustration of the use of ‘complexity and contradiction in architecture’, well before these terms entered the international architectural debate. Yet, even here, there is also evidence for the pleasure of using contemporary technological means in a way that altered their meaning. On the outside, for example, sheets of metal replace the traditional wooden covering, an architrave moulded from the material providing a direct historical reference.

These interests and the terms in which Celsing defined his approach in the rare statements that were published reflect his own formation as an architect trained in the 1940s. As Johan Örn has pointed out in his study of Swedish interiors, Celsing’s student period at KTH coincided with a major reassessment of the Functionalist principles of the early 1930s and a re-orientation in the work of major modern protagonists in Sweden.

Om Betongen, p. 52
ibid., p. 52
Sir John Soane’s museum in London was one of Celsing’s favourites, where he took his family and students. Email conversation with Claes Caldenby, 20 September 2009
Asplund’s Gothenburg Law Court and his last work, the Woodland Cemetery crematorium, but also Nils Einar Eriksson’s Gothenburg Konserthus displayed a renewed interest in monumental classical planning and the craftsmanship of building details. Another direction in this reassessment was the reference to vernacular traditions and ‘popular’ architecture, and an interest in anonymous and ‘everyday’ buildings.\(^{150}\) In his 1939 project for a town hall at Karlskoga the architect Sune Lindström, who in 1932 had demanded that architects should no longer view themselves as artists or ‘kulturpersoner’ (cultural persons), but as engineers, scientists or economists, used a collage of rough stucco and shingle coverings for a façade that could be described as a collage of ‘modernist’ and traditional compositional principles. In the interior mahogany furniture and reprinted French eighteenth century landscape wallpapers appeared.

The generous approach towards monumental and vernacular traditions was theoretically underpinned by the Viennese architect, Josef Frank, who had emigrated to Sweden in 1933 and advocated an attitude ‘that absorbs what is alive today; the whole spirit of this time, its sentimentality and its exaggerations, including affronts against good taste, which are at least full of vitality’.\(^{151}\) In the ‘human’ architecture, which was to replace dogmatic functionalism, there was room for a knowing, eclectic use of ornamented surfaces, set pieces inherited from older cultures to be used in the domestic and public sphere, as objects contributing to a sense of visual and physical comfort. Paradoxically, the increased interest in traditions in architecture coincided with a decisive shift towards standardisation and from crafts to industry in building practice.\(^{152}\)

Celsing’s design for his house at Drottningholm, which seems to provide the evidence for a quest for an architecture that absorbs elements of pre-modern architectural traditions, has been interpreted against the background of the wider international interest in vernacular and classical architecture in the mid 1960s. Other designs, like those for the hotel which was originally attached to the Kulturhus, seem to confirm this. Here Celsing proposed to rebuild an existing seventeenth century building with a historicist clock tower and extend the regular fenestrated façade across the new, and much taller, extension. On the other hand, the Drottningholm house may be more usefully explained from the precedents of houses of the 1940s. The roof apartment Sigurd Lewerentz designed for himself and which was published in 1948 is furnished with an array of new and old pieces of furniture and paintings. These are placed against the walls covered in untreated cheap soft wood which emphasise the ‘informal’, or ‘accidental’ character of the overall plan layout, a combination which reflects similar sensitivities in Britain in the same period and strongly advocated in the Architectural Review.\(^{153}\)

Sven-Ivar Lind’s own house on the northern outskirts of Stockholm summarised the search for a ‘real functionalism’ taking its cues from vernacular traditions. The house was set in an orchard, which the architect and his wife had planted in the years before the actual building work started. The environment, inside and outside the house, was

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152 Örn (2007), p. 31
153 Örn, p. 57

Peter Celsing, sketches for the house at Drottningholm
The family tree of a Swedish twentieth century architecture

The projects for churches and semi-public interiors may have placed Peter Celsing outside the mainstream of building production in Sweden in the 1960s, but he certainly was not alone in his interest in the way in which architectural traditions could be made productive in the invention of contemporary architectural forms and types. Claes Caldenby has shown that an interest in historical continuity or, to be more precise, the selective reference to particular architectural patterns and episodes in the architectural tradition, had characterised the work of the first generation of Swedish architects, and especially Asplund and Lewerentz who had publicly embraced Functionalism in 1930. These interests, which focused on the simple, ‘poor’ and ‘honest’ architecture of the eighteenth century, may well have been inherited from the architectural concerns of the previous generations, but also from Ragnar Östberg, whose National Romantic town hall in Stockholm was completed in the 1920s. They were passed on to the then younger architects, including Nils Tesch, with whom Celsing collaborated on the restaurant of the Stockholm Opera (Operakällaren), and Sven-Ivar Lind, the admired teacher.

Caldenby quotes the architect Jan Gezelius who had identified an ‘unconstrained tradition’ in this branch in the development of Swedish architecture, suggesting that there was a high degree of continuity between several generations of designers. In this family tree Asplund and the cooperative architects’ firm KF appear as the first generation marking the transition between National Romanticism and the Romantic Classicism (‘Swedish Grace’) of the early twentieth century, and the introduction of Functionalism in the 1930s. The second generation of the tree includes the architects Erik and Tore Ahlén, Sven Ivar Lind and Nils Tesch, leaving Celsing in the third, younger group. The three generations are united by a belief, as Gezelius puts it, in ‘poetry in things against poetry in words’. Caldenby suggests that these continuities are part of a pattern of succession, ‘in which architects are related to one another in conditions of masters and apprentices’.

Influential as all members of this tree were, none of them, with the exception of the big cooperative firm KF (which was related to the trade union movement) realised large numbers of buildings. Caldenby sums up the position of this tradition vis-à-vis the general development of Swedish architecture in the 1960s: ‘This tree is an image of a culture of a field of work mediated traditionally, to a high degree apart from the tasks of building in accordance with the large programmes’. Celsing was a late, possibly the last, branch of this tree.

Architecture as artistic practice

The accounts of collaborators published as contributions to the 1980 first monograph provide evidence for the pivotal role of intuition in Celsing’s design approach and endorse the idea of the architect as artist. Jan Henriksson mentions the ‘enormous world of imagination’ materialising in an extraordinarily large number of sketches of paintings, images or building solutions. From around 1965 Celsing extended his range of techniques, which had previously been limited to drawing in pen and pencil, and started to use watercolours for sketches depicting not so much architectural forms or spaces but life scenes. As Söve Olsson notes these sketches were more reminiscent of those made by scenographers, film or theatre directors than those usually produced by architects.

Other sketches, for example those examining façade proportions or details of light fittings, are, by contrast, extremely precise and show the architect as a craftsman in control of his material. Celsing’s sketches, made while having lunch or dinner, in the evenings or weekends, were complemented by a considerable production of models first in plaster, later in wood.

The sculptor Sivert Lindblom remembers that the models for the church tower at Vällingby, which he made for Celsing, constituted a veritable ‘feuilleton’ of at least forty study models, each examining a variation on an already established theme. Lindblom describes his collaboration with the architect as being exploited in a positive way: ‘To learn from his ability to look.’ Celsing is said to have had the capacity of finding solutions everywhere, not only in the material of architecture but ‘in the encounter of the entire reality with the imagination of man’, the approach being intuitive rather than analytical.

All three collaborators praise Celsing’s abilities of judgement, his ‘eye’ for three-dimensional effects. For the larger projects, and especially for the Kulturhus, however, the architect was not prepared to rely on this alone, and commissioned a series of full-scale models of particular solutions. Henriksson mentions that such models were made for example for the façade of the Kulturhus and the Riksbank, the ceilings of the exhibition floors and the stainless steel panels of the theatre volume.

The architectural office was housed in a building in the old town and extended into the larger former hall of a bank when in 1968 the
tight schedule for developing the Kulturhus and parliament project caused it to grow to forty people, meanwhile retaining its organisation as an atelier. None of the ‘devoted collaborators’ who worked literally continuously – days, evenings, holidays, almost the whole time’ to quote Henriksson, interpreted or materialised Celsing’s sketches had a clearly defined task: ‘there were no real boundaries for what everyone did.’ This organisation model of the architect’s office contrasted starkly with the highly developed hierarchies and specialisations that started to dominate professional practice in the late 1960s in Europe and North America. Sweden with its large public–private consortia constructing large numbers of buildings was certainly no exception to the tendency to introduce the principle of division of labour into the architect’s office.

Celsing’s practice, by contrast, retained its loose organisation around its single ‘inspirator and master’ even when the size of the commissions might have suggested something different. The thesis, as formulated by Claes Caldenby and others, that Peter Celsing was a master architect, is therefore supported by his clear resistance to adopt the managerial models introduced in this period.

Großstadtarchitektur for the open city

Although Peter Celsing’s projects show a strong interest in incorporating historical references and perhaps recreating architectural traditions, his views were certainly not those of a conservationist. A sensitive approach to existing cultural practices as well as historical urban artefacts appears for him to have been entirely compatible with the desire for change and modernisation. The journalist Lasse Westman, in an interview published in 1972, quoted Celsing describing his proposals for Central Stockholm as ‘informed by one single idea: an open architecture in an open city, where people and not architecture should form the city.’ The open city was not necessarily identical with the existing nineteenth fabric. Celsing described the narrow streets of Norrmalm as depressing and lacking in experiential qualities.

As the design for Kungsträdgården showed, Celsing was not an advocate of a conservation approach, but repeatedly intervened in debates about the future development of Stockholm with his proposal of a string of open spaces and boulevards arranged in east-west direction rather than north–south. That this implied the demolition of existing buildings and what has to be called a sanitisation of the district of the Klara Church, a densely developed popular neighbourhood occupied by small businesses, cheap hotels and the pleasure industries, was an inevitable outcome of this operation. Part of the particular type of established urban life, Celsing argued, would find a new place in the new buildings on Sergels torg, in which the ‘variety and the small, human scale’ was recreated. Others were not so sure: the author Gösta Alfén, for example, described the demolition of the Klara district as a ‘murder of a culture’ (kulturmord) and Peter Celsing as one of the ‘leading architects’ of this deed.

6.4 The Kulturhus – a new type of building for culture

According to his collaborator Jan Henriksson, Peter Celsing had initially been reluctant to join the competition for Sergels torg because of the vagueness of the brief. It was under the influence of Sivert Lindblom, a sculptor and friend of the architect, that he started to become interested in thinking about a proposal for this complicated area. Yet it must have been the conversations with Pontus Hultén on the potential of the site and the possibility of a new type of cultural institution that eventually persuaded Celsing to take the competition seriously. There are no written records of how these conversations developed into the proposal for a Kulturhus, but the accounts of those witnessing the period of the competition suggest that Hultén and Celsing became increasingly engaged in the project. It appears that the architect identified strongly with the programmatic vision of the museum director, while Hultén clearly found Celsing’s architectural ideas congenial.

Two programmatic visions: Celsing and Hultén

That the collaboration of the two men with their different professional backgrounds developed into an extraordinarily productive and close working relationship during the phase of elaborating the design is illustrated by the fact that Hultén came to see Celsing at his office almost daily. Further evidence for this is contained in the statements each wrote for the July 1967 issue of Arkitektur, which appeared when the decision to build Celsing’s project had finally be taken.

The two texts differ from each other in tone and in the way they argue for the project. Celsing concentrates on the concrete architectural form of his design against the background of the debate on the citysanering, whereas Hultén’s article makes an argument for the progressive vision of a Kulturhus as a response to developments in artistic and curatorial practice. Despite these differences both texts appear coordinated, each of them making the case for the project and the terminology describing its intentions is consistent. Celsing writes that his interest in the competition had been triggered by the opportunity to create a ‘positive aspect in modern society, concentrated in a building in the non-commercial sector’. He stresses that the building has to counter the uniformity of the commercial development of the inner city outside office hours. At the same time the Kulturhus is presented as an environment where essential qualities of the stortad (literally Großstadt, metropolis) will be found in a heightened metropolitan experience of encountering people from all walks of life. ‘What gives the stortad its value is also the wealth of opportunities for contact, freedom of expression and cultural changes, something which I think would be interesting to make the whole site reflect.’ This stream of thought reappears more explicitly in Hultén’s statement:

‘The building takes the form of a stage. With its large surface in the background it offers a parade of its internal spaces. At night it illumi-
nates the square. People and exhibited objects are visible through the glass and execute a strong attraction. Already from the outside one can have an overview of the content of the building. The main idea behind the relocation of Moderna Museet to Sergels torg is that it would allow bringing the expressions of culture closer to the large general public.

We want to offer spiritual manifestations with the same effectiveness as that employed by the commercial and materialist world. One can hardly think of a building that would be more suitable for creating a framework for such an agenda. It will be evident that from this building comes an ... outward performance (utspel) of culture that does not care about class divisions, that is directed immediately to the 'man in the street'. Providing new artistic movements, which certainly do not care about divisions between social classes, the opportunity to present themselves in an environment that is architecturally worked out in the middle of a newly created metropolis should be an active democratic approach to culture worth striving for.\footnote{K.P.G. (Pontus) Hultén, 'Celsings fondbyggnad vid Sergels torg, Arkitektur 7/1967, p.401-402}

In this passage Hultén reafirms his objectives for the Kulturhus: the presence of cultural, non-commercial activities in the centre of the city and the inclusive nature of a concept of culture embedded in Swedish social democracy. The Kulturhus is given the strategic task of halting the colonisation of all aspects of life by the logic of commerce. This view is reflected in Celsing’s statement, when he mentions the informal sociability in existing parks and underground stations which, he implies, may be absorbed by the Kulturhus, particularly in the cold winter months. It is for this reason that the Kulturhus has to be permeable, and that entrances from all sides and on the various levels of the surrounding streets are included in the design.

Both Celsing and Hultén emphasise the importance of realising a series of commercial programmes on the premises. Here there are, however, notable differences between the two visions. The architect seems to envisage a broad range of specialist boutiques continuing the line of shops along Drottninggatan, the existing shopping street, whereas Hultén is more cautious. He mentions more specifically cultural outlets such as an art information centre where visitors can be advised about buying works of art, a bookshop and a design shop. These examples are more in the nature of an extended museum shop than the continuation of the commercial pattern in parts of the new building as pictured by the architect. They also seem somewhat to be contradicting the claim for an inclusive building, addressing particularly the 'man in the street', by privileging a sector of cultural commerce almost exclusively catering for an educated, wealthy middle-class public.

This contradiction is also reflected in the references to the informal cultural activities and types of entertainment to be found the Kulturhus. Celsing here shows himself at ease with popular forms of culture and explicitly invites a large range of leisure and entertainment activities, such as the brass bands and displays of amateur art found in for example the Kungsträdgården square in the summer, whereas Hultén’s references remain within the accepted limits of the modern avant-garde. His list includes activities such as listening to recorded lectures on cubism,
Italian neo-realism or atonal music and using a jazz studio, all of these activities taken up by the progressive middle classes who had found a social and cultural home in Moderna Museet.

Hultén envisages the Kulturhus as a home for avant-garde experiment, which for him is clearly defined within the established modernist canon, but he also is adamant that the building is suitable for becoming Stockholm’s cultural living room. Yet the examples he mentions are those of ‘a new type of museum’, like Louisiana or other museums in Holland and the United States, where he was looking for directions. These were art institutions that had ‘emerged as an outcome of a practical need’ of artists seeking a new kind of venue, a husrum (home), for their activities, in this assisted by the curators. The multidisciplinary and open character of the artistic programme of the Kulturhus is presented as a development of dissolving the boundaries, so much between traditional bourgeois and popular cultures, but between ‘painting, sculpture, and, for example, stage design’. Hultén explains that ‘already forms exist between theatre performance, art dance and music performance’. He points out that this practice will mark curatorial practice in the future. ‘The “collaboration of artists” that has been the subject of many discussions since the Bauhaus period, emerges in a completely different form from what was expected, as an artistic necessity and it is realised on an entirely different scale from what anyone could have dreamt of’. As a consequence, the new museum has to provide space for these new forms of artistic practice and include ‘the music theatre, the non-commercial cinema, the happening-theatre, the new dance or the electronic theatre’. The collections are the repository from which these activities can be fuelled. ‘In the museums one finds a concentration of the accumulated ideas that in our increasingly visually inclined cultural pattern must come forward as the central material of ideas.’

This general statement about the future of museum practice is followed by a passage more directly addressing the possibilities of Celsing’s design, which Hultén describes as ‘ingenious’. The collection of Moderna Museet is presented as the backbone of the Kulturhus warranting continuity in the activities in the building and allowing visitors to ‘get to know themselves among these works of art’ in a constantly changing environment. Lectures by established artists and writers – Hultén mentions Alvar Aalto, Charles Chaplin and Marshall McLuhan – will attract a wide audience, while children will find a barnmuseum (children’s museum) where they can draw, paint or watch films. Following the example of Louisiana, special tours of the collection and exhibitions should also be offered by this department of the Kulturhus.

Hultén offers an interpretation of the architectural design of the Kulturhus as a modern reworking of archetypal forms, describing the main volume as ‘mur-hus’, a ‘wall house’, that reminds him of troglodyte houses in Central France. Unlike the inhabited pre-historic caves the new wall house presents its contents in a zone of glass, its interior rendered fully visible to the square and the city but held together by the monumental wall behind it. The combination of the solidity of concrete and the openness of the glass is presented not only as new, but also as a solution establishing the Kulturhus as a unique object, distinguishing itself from the ‘structurally and intellectually standardised’ buildings dominating modern city centres. Celsing by contrast describes the Kulturhus in more conventional terms as ‘a department store, flexible and adaptable to new situations’.

Indeed, the glass façade was reminiscent of the curtain wall enveloping the PUB department store situated nearby and built in 1960 to a design by Erik and Tore Ahlsén. In Celsing’s description the transparent façade becomes an essential element in the strategy to position the Kulturhus as different from traditional cultural institutions. ‘The façade … which actually only indicates various activities within a technically conditioned framework illustrates my attitude, which might be applied to the whole area of Nedre Norrmalm, that in the urban plan a consideration of the localisation of activities is the primary concern.’ Celsing’s view of the Kulturhus as a building fully connected to its surrounding city is illustrated by references to the open entrance situations and the visual connections to the city: ‘It was the aim of the Kulturhus to expose its activities through building up a series of levels with more or less the same freedom and opportunities for contact as the large city square has to offer and it is this ambition that has provided the structural logic of the building. The fact that it has been possible to render both the one and the other into this design perhaps testifies to the fact that the Kulturhus has spontaneously given expression to something which is not indifferent, but marked by the adventure and excitement that a new objective entails – giving the centre of the metropolis a richer content.’

How is one to read these two articles by Celsing and Hultén and what do they reveal about the working relationship between the architect and the museum director? First of all both authors made a concerted effort to influence the professional readership of Arkitektur by describing and picturing the Kulturhus as a building and as an everyday reality. Some passages of their accounts were very precise, especially where they explain how Moderna Museet was to develop into an institution that would cover a wider range of practices and activities than a conventional art gallery. It was most probably Hultén whose contribution was decisive, as he had already experimented for some years with opening up the existing Moderna Museet to new forms of arts practice.

Celsing’s statement shows that the architect had adopted this vision with enthusiasm. Compared to the abstract terms which dominate Hultén’s statement, the narrative is concrete and suggests that it was the architect who had an acute sense of how the building needed to fit into the existing city. His description of how the Kulturhus was to become a building that could attract people with different social and cultural backgrounds is vivid and concrete. Celsing explicitly embraces the large city, both in its traditional nineteenth century form and in its post-war incarnation, for its complexity, anonymity and openness. Perhaps it is this faith in the beneficial effects of human contact, the adventure and excitement of the variety of the modern metropolis that allowed the architect to develop his particular architectural approach for the Kulturhus. The
The Kulturhus first competition design: walls, backgrounds – floors, stages – glass sheets, mirrors of a city

Celsing’s design for the competition is almost literally present in the Kulturhus as it was realised. All the major elements, their organisation and material treatment, are already contained in the drawings that the architect submitted in 1966. This similarity between the first design and the final result is notable for two reasons. First, the material produced for the competition looks rudimentary and was limited to a series of plans and sections, all of which have the character of sketches, and two collages (one showing the required alternative of the Preissiska Hus being retained) showing the building on the square at night, as an eerily illuminated, almost ruinous structure of floors, a wall towering above in the background. One particular sketch, which sums up the concept of the building, shows the main elevation on the square as a music score, with the floors as its stave, the vertical supports of the back wall as bars and people reduced to small notes arranged across the sheet – the Kulturhus as the built expression of the Symphonie der Großstadt?

The sketch itself, persuasive as it proved to be as an emblematic reappropriation of the architectural and institutional concept of the Kulturhus, reveals cultural references which fitted into the cultural climate of the presentation of the architectural and institutional concept of the Kulturhus, the Kulturhus as the built expression of the wall as bars and people reduced to small notes arranged across the sheet – the Kulturhus as the built expression of the Symphonie der Großstadt?

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appears as the enormous concrete back screen in front of which the Kulturhus presents itself as a series of floors filled with people. The wall itself is actually not thick, as is visible on the plan drawings, but a series of bars set against it like giant straight buttresses renders it into a huge and deep concrete element supporting the building’s floors. The spacing of the buttresses indicates a rhythm of alternating wide and narrow bays repeating along the whole length and, as these elements extend to the top of the wall, they form part of the silhouette, appearing as crenulations and breaking the horizontality, allowing the building to weave itself into the sky above the square.

There are two incidents that break the relentless repetition of verticals. Where the wall crosses a pedestrian passage connecting Sergels torg with the alley between the bank and the theatre and leading to Brunkbergstorg, the alternation of bays, for once, is interrupted, and two wide bays follow each other establishing a joint, or a centre, between the western and eastern stretches of the wall. Towards the western end, where the building meets Drottninggatan, the wall suddenly changes direction leaving a small triangular square on its south side and the buttresses become piers merely indicating the repetition of bays and rendering the thick wall into a thin sheet of concrete cutting through the corner of the street and the square. The wall and the infinite repetition of walls along the plane turns into a definite object, its extensive nature strongly and brilliantly concentrating in an urban moment with intensity, a line terminating in a point. At the other, eastern, end, the wall merely stops where the building reaches the edge of its site. It is with these simple and effective architectural gestures that Celsing indicates a hierarchy of urban events that fully settles the building in its context and allows the building to be different from the conceptually infinite repetitious functionalist compositions of the commercial development north of Sergels torg and elsewhere.

Compared with the precision of the wall, the concrete floors supported by it appear open and unspecific. Arranged so as to allow for different floor heights, they continue along the length of the building, broken only where the passage through the building demands an interruption. The plan drawings provide rudimentary information about the intended layering of programmes and types of rooms requiring these differences in floor heights. In principle the organisation of the programme follows the description published by Hultén before the competition, suggesting that the museum director exerted his influence at this early stage of the development of the design. The lower floor of the western part of the Kulturhus contains a foyer for the theatre and is connected to the main auditorium and the studio space through underground passages. On the first floor is a series of clubs and private rooms belonging to two restaurants on the ground floor. The top floor extends along the entire length of the Kulturhus and contains a large hall with rooms for the monumental galeri, holding the permanent collection and spaces for larger public events. This hall is reached from the eastern part of the building, which is wholly occupied by Moderna Museet. Like in the other half of the building the entrance is located on the lower pedes-
The 'second' design: spaces and graphics

The decision to award Celsing the first prize had appeared unambiguous. There was, however, another scheme that had also attracted the jury's attention. This project, which had been awarded a special mention because it failed to comply with some of the competition requirements, was designed by a collaboration of Ralph Erskine, Loka Geisendorf and Anders Tengbom, three respected figures in the Swedish architectural scene. Although there is no written evidence for this the Erskine-Geisendorf-Tengbom (EGT) design must have been the object of a controversial debate in the jury room. The three designers had more or less ignored the boundaries of the competition site and had taken the opportunity for a radical re-planning of the entire area of Nedre Norrmalm, extending as far south as the water and the royal palace. In doing this EGT gave a new impulse to the old ideal of 'opening the city towards the water' that had been one of the ambitions of architects and city planners, at least since the days of the Lilienberg plan for an extension of Sveavägen into the ceremonial centre of the city and the north bank of Mälaren, Stockholm's inland water. In EGT's scheme this connection with the water was achieved by proposing a long north south square surrounded by loosely arranged structures of buildings. It is not difficult to see why this proposal would have appeared immensely attractive to architects and planners in 1966. Much more than Celsing's design, which many would have seen as both formalistic and too compliant with the city planners' ideas, the EGT scheme promised to realise the 1960s ideal of fully separated levels for pedestrians and car traffic offering the creation of a large car-free open area as a friendlier alternative to the car-dominated environment of the upper level of Sergels torg. The fact that this solution entailed a complete restructuring of the existing city blocks was accepted as inevitable, a consequence of the situation created by the large scale rebuilding of Hotorget and Sveavägen in the 1950s and 60s.

For the advocates of a smooth progress of the cityanering, and Hjalmar Mehr in particular, the EGT scheme was a public relations and planning nightmare. Its realisation would have involved lengthy and complicated expropriation procedures with an uncertain outcome as far as the occupation of the expensive new square and its surrounding buildings was concerned. It did not help that in the local election some time later the Social Democrats lost their majority and Hjalmar Mehr his position as councillor for financial affairs.

The city council prevaricated and decided to invite both Celsing and the EGT team to elaborate before their schemes in a second stage or, as Per Ahrbom had joined the competition together with his father Nils Ahrbom and Carl-Edvard Montgomery, 'to a strong enough solution addressing Sergels torg. This criticism was extended also to the ‘structuralist’ projects by Engström/Lundberg/Larsson/Tönneman, Begenstedt/Lindgren/Lindgren/Lindgren/Lindgren, and Henning Larsen. Peter Celsing’s scheme is presented by Eriksson as the most convincing, ‘more faithful to the Cityplan’s ideas than the Cityplan itself. The presentation concludes with an extensive appraisal of the qualities and shortcomings of the Erskine/Geisendorf/Tengbom project combining “in one move the visual contact between the two urban centres (the commercial one at Sergels torg and the ceremonial one with Gustav Adolfs torg and the royal palace, CG) with a solution for the traffic”. Noting the negative assessment of the EGT project by the city officials, Eriksson is adamant in his call for a longer discussion on the whole project: ‘We have now a first prize project that shows how established principles can be met on this strategic site, how the existing can be ennobled and acquire a high architectural standard. At the same time we also have a proposal that puts the whole problem in another light. One last time, before concluding for now, is the old idea taken up to establish contact with the ensemble on Strömmen (near the royal palace).’ This statement may indicate now profound discussions within the jury may have been, and it may also explain why the Stockholm council eventually decided to invite both Celsing, the clear winner, and the EGT team to rework their respective schemes at the turn of 1966/67. Olof Eriksson, ‘Sergel’s torg: rättenlagung’, presentation to Stockholm’s arkitekturforum, 5 September 1966, published as appendix to SAR:s tävlinglab, 4/1966.

Per Ahrbom had joined the competition together with his father Nils Ahrbom, his wife Anne-Marie Ahrbom and Carl-Edvard Montgomery. The team also received a special mention. Ahrbom joined Celsing's team, while the architect was reworking the scheme in 1966/67. Conversation of the author with Per Ahrbom, Stockholm, 20 April 2005.
as the designs were presented and critics who demanded that the EGT team should be offered the chance to rework the proposal into a more detailed scheme. It was particularly among architects that the proposal to ‘open up’ the city towards the water found support. Celsing’s wall and its implied acceptance of a city made up of fragments seemed to have hit a raw nerve: it entailed a departure from the paradigm of modern planning of the well-organised and controlled city as a physical organism, a body. The protection of an existing part of a city by erecting a building, from this viewpoint, impeded the realisation of openness and would create undesirable enclaves; pockets where the blood flow of the city was stopped. The opposition to Celsing’s scheme, as a violation of one of the basic tenets of modern planning, that of the well circulated ‘urban body’, was most clearly formulated in an article by Hakon Ahlberg, court architect and friend of Gunnar Asplund.\(^{179}\) Ahlberg particularly criticised the absence of a connection between Sergels torg and the newly developed square on the south side of the building, which would operate as a ‘Berlin Wall’, suggesting a brutal division of the city.\(^{180}\)

Celsing’s mentor Sigurd Lewerentz offered his support for the solution dividing the programme into a wall and two buildings. In a letter to Celsing he wrote: ‘The “Berlin Wall” is exactly the opposite of what its name suggests and testifies brilliantly to the boldness (djärvhet) and clarity of the proposal’\(^ {181}\) Lewerentz shows himself unimpressed by the arguments for a continuation of the grand north–south axis, which he describes as ‘weak in its motivation and badly executed in many of its parts’ and agrees with Celsing’s view that the nineteenth century city fabric south of Sergels torg ought to be retained as much as was still possible: ‘We have to pull ourselves together. This demolition fever has to stop’. Despite the growing discontent among the younger generation of Stockholmers, and in spite of the formation of the movement for an ‘Alternative City’, Lewerentz was one of few architects calling for a moratorium on the demolition fever has to stop’. Despite

When Peter Celsing presented his revised scheme to Stockholm’s city council in early 1967 the differences with the earlier scheme were small and concerned mostly the precision with which separate elements were articulated. The wall, the bank-courtyard and the square hall of the theatre return, but with more emphasis on their physical qualities as solid objects in the city. The greatest change in the reworked plans was the addition of a long tapered space at lower square level.

The new semi-underground space, called Kilen after its keel-shaped plan was divided into three studios, two smaller rooms and another one with a circular dance floor. Located next to the main auditorium and the lilla scen (small stage), Kilen was to offer room for small-scale performance activities and could be used as music or film studios. Proposing facilities explicitly addressing the visitors of the building as active users Celsing again extended the brief of the building. In his article Struktur för Kultur he mentions the absence in the city centre of suitable venues for young people to meet. The addition of a series of spaces for experimental activities, consequently, was the architect’s response to relieve this problem, which had been widely discussed since a series of youth riots in 1965.\(^{182}\)

The pièce de résistance of Celsing’s presentation was a wooden model showing the building in detail. Executed in plywood of various thicknesses this model, now in the Celsing archive, shows the Kulturhus with the bank and theatre as a solid structure, assembled from a series of archetypical elements.\(^{183}\) The model conveys the architect’s idea about how his building would operate as a permanent shell for the constantly changing use of the building. The façade on Sergels torg, in the first competition merely a series of glazed floors, had been re-worked into a glass screen that allowed both a view of the content of the building and reflected images of the outside world.

The model had been made by a firm specialised in wooden moulds for industrial production, for example parts of engines. Henriksson remembers that the model makers were not used to reading architectural drawings, allowing him to spend ‘possibly the most pleasant periods of my work’, together with Celsing, in the workshop.\(^{184}\) The wooden construction also formed the pretext for the inclusion of other materials and signs. Using graphics and illustrations, Celsing took the opportunity of rendering the façade into a carrier of information, thereby extending the idea of the modern glass façade as a transparent skin.

The combination in the model of rough wood partly covered with shiny aluminium sheets and black abstracted images referring to the content of the building seems to anticipate some of the presentation techniques developed by Jean Nouvel and OMA in the 1990s. In 1967, however, this merging of architecture and graphics may have been surprising in its knowing and free use of known Corbusian motives combined with elements of corporate and commercial architecture. The extent to which Celsing allowed the model to accrue references to non-architectural additions and ephemera can also be illustrated by another anecdote related by Henriksson. In order to prepare it for a television presentation to the nation, part of the wooden construction was covered in shiny foil bought in a bicycle shop – possibly and instinctively the source of the stainless steel façades as Henriksson intimates.\(^{185}\)

Models had always played an important role in Celsing’s work, both as a tool for exploring the volumetric and material qualities of a design and as a means of presenting projects to clients and a wider audience. Before the Kulturhus project, however, the architect had mainly used plaster models, which were produced in house or by model makers and which emphasised the composition of mass and void, while the surface retained a certain imperfect neutrality. Starting with the Kulturhus model, wood became the main material for making models and with this choice the models themselves seemed to convey a different set of qualities of the projected building.\(^ {186}\) The expression of sheer volume gave way to a display of the functional complexities of a building and its tectonic proposal, suggesting that Celsing was developing a strong sense of how these two should be related. In the model of the Kulturhus this is visible in the difference between the presentation of the bank and the theatre as solid structures composed of cells and larger enclosed rooms against the open shell of the part facing Sergels torg.

The model clearly showed the building as a composition, or perhaps
better collage, of two fundamentally different architectural proposals: the solid structure of walls and harks back to traditional, pre-modern European architectural models of the urban palace or block building, whereas the northern part, dedicated to the ‘open’ cultural activity and to the museum, was conceived as a series of open floor plans alternated by storeys with walls on the main structural grid. The large, modulated screen dividing the two, but belonging to the ‘modern’ part, introduced a level of ambiguity as to where the line between these two architectural proposals and their related tectonic languages should be drawn. At the same time, by alternating open floors and horizontal bands of cells in the northern part, Celsing allowed the ‘modernist’ concept of the skeleton to become structurally hybrid, interrupting the suggested neutrality of the grid not in plan but in section.

This allowance of difference in the essentially indifferent concept of the skeleton could not be explained by the functional differentiation alone; it must be viewed as a conscious attempt to represent the variety of uses and atmospheres inside the building and, in turn, as a mirror of the variety and complexity of the urban consumer culture in which the Kulturhus was meant to operate and intervene.

The deliberate, but controlled roughness of the model also allowed the proposed flexibility to be read in a different light from the technocratic ‘late modernist’ interpretation of the structuralist buildings or the well-serviced machine of the South Bank or, later, the Centre Pompidou. The model seems to present the projected building as both a building site and as a ruin, as an unfinished structure to be filled in by future use and as physical shell left over from some vague past, or even a range of pasts, present in the mediaeval reminiscences of the concrete wall, the monumentalised floors of the modernist ‘department store, or the renaissance courtyard of the bank. Each element seems to contain not one, but a series of options for being read as a new and contemporary structure or as a relic of a particular episode in the history of the city and together they establish the Kulturhus as a building facilitating an almost infinite range of unpredictable social practices in the future, exactly by suggesting that many of these may have occurred here at some point in the past. This aspect of the building was not lost on Hultén, who described the project as a geological given in his article of 1967. In one element Celsing allowed himself to make an almost literal allusion to the semi-rural architecture that had characterised large parts of Norrmalm well into the nineteenth century. On the south side of the wall where it bends northwards so as to make a small triangular square, more a niche really, on Drottninggatan, a little hut with a steep hipped roof is set against the concrete wall, making it impossible to say whether it is the wall that has violently cut into a humble peasant hut and devoured half of it, or whether the hut is the result of opportunistic squatting an available public space next to the wall.

In the ‘second competition’ design Celsing also dealt with the problem of the vertical circulation inside the building that the jury had identified as matter for reworking. Yet, while the tectonic and compositional development of the project is given much attention in the model,
the elements that would allow large numbers of people to reach the upper floors of this very public building still remain strangely unspecific. The escalators, which in the first design had occupied a somewhat awkward position in the north east corner, were now placed in the back wall, away from the view from the square. This solution left the main floor untouched and flexible, but made the escalators invisible from outside. This reluctance to use the fact that people would moving be around the building, from one floor to the other and back, is notable. After all it was the need for a good and comprehensible circulation system – the term itself being a modern concept inherited from the nineteenth century – that occupied many architects in the 1960s and had led to extensive systems of decks and bridges, lifts and escalators as part of the expressive repertoire of public buildings.

Certainly in comparison with the spectacular escalator providing the one singular identifiable element in the west façade of the Centre Pompidou, and the one which was to become the main representational feature, Celsing’s reluctance to allow the vertical circulation to become a visible and important part of the appearance of his building is noteworthy and somewhat difficult to understand. Even when a theatrical element for vertical circulation finally appeared in the scheme, the initiative seems not to have come from Celsing. According to Per Ahrbom it was Hultén, the curator of ‘Movements in art and admirer of Tinguely and Gabo, who eventually proposed the element that would allow the scene of people circulating through the Kulturhus to acquire a defined image: in one of the many conversations on the design Hultén urged Celsing to include a glazed circular staircase positioned in the eastern museum part of the building. Celsing adopted this idea and worked it into the scheme, having appropriated it for himself by making a series of exquisite, Brunelleschian hand sketches of the staircase.

To conclude this discussion of the competition design and the subsequent second design phase it seems appropriate to return to the notion of flexibility, which played a central role in Celsing’s own description of the Kulturhus. Adrian Forty notes that in the 1960s the term flexibility had become ‘an axiom of architectural criticism’, as an alternative to the generalised and abstract ‘function’ of pre-war Functionalism and its post-war successor. It seemed to deal with the contradiction ‘between the expectation … that the architect’s ultimate concern in designing buildings was with their human use and occupation, and that the reality that the architect’s involvement in a building ceased at the very moment that occupation began’. In the case of the Kulturhus the indeterminate nature of the programme, in fact a programme that was essentially based on the rejection of a fixed set of functions, meant that the building had necessarily to involve a strategy allowing for change and appropriation to an even greater extent than a ‘conventional’ building type would have required. Against the background of the current debates on the possible strategies to achieve flexibility, which tended to seek a solution by providing technical equipment and derive the architectural expression from these, Celsing’s proposal of recognisable ‘archetypical’ or ‘timeless’ features was certainly notable, especially since it was accompanied by such strong
claims about the accessibility of the building and its capacity to absorb and generate unpredicted appropriation. Celsing relied on a strategy that was entirely architectural. It involved the evocation of an atmosphere of a building that was not entirely finished, but that also offered a large degree of neutrality. This interest in the changing nature of the appropriation of buildings went together with an extraordinarily high degree of confidence, both about formal decisions and about the actual processes of occupation.

The Kulturhus and the parliament

Celsing’s presentation of the reworked project to the city council had a decisive outcome. In May 1967 the council agreed that the alternatives for a southward Corso as proposed by the EGT scheme would no longer be pursued and selected Celsing’s scheme, this time definitively. Partly, the decision had been brought about by the explicit resistance of the city’s own building department against the alternative plan, partly by the changes made by Celsing himself, particularly the opening of the passage from Sergels torg southwards. With the introduction of the opening at ground level halfway the long wall-building, the architect had reacted to the main objection made against his design.

Stockholm city council’s decision had been announced on Swedish national television and made the front pages of the daily papers. The ‘bourgeois’ majority remained, however, reluctant to commit the necessary funding to a project, which it tended to see as a difficult inheritance from the previous administration. The city’s finances being strained, the majority party seemed willing to postpone the construction for at least a few years. It was in this situation that a request from the administrative office of the Riksdag, the Swedish parliament, to consider the temporary use of the new building for its purposes came as a godsend. Celsing appears to have immediately embraced the idea, clearly calculating that in the circumstances it was the only way of retaining the project. When informed about the request one morning, he produced sketches for an alternative use of the western part of the Kulturhus and the theatre as a debating chamber and parliamentary offices on napkins over lunch. The official request had been received by the city council on 7 December 1967. Just five days later, the council and the parliamentary offices received preliminary proposals for the adaptation of the design to incorporate the Riksdag.

From then on, the adaptation of the building for the Riksdag was developed swiftly. A few months later, in 1 May 1968, the city offered to use the western part of the planned buildings for the time that it would take to adapt the nineteenth century parliament building for a one-chamber legislative body. The Riksdag accepted this offer on 30 May 1968.

On 17 June 1968 the city council decided to allow Åke Hedtjärn, the head of the building department, to realise the Kulturhus, the theatre (now temporarily dedicated to the parliament) and a hotel on the western part of the site and reserved the budget for this (165 million Swedish crowns). This decision did not include the eastern part of the Kulturhus. This decision implied among other things that most of the western part of the building would be occupied by the parliament, with the exception of some theatre workshops and a small stage with 475 seats. The remainder for cultural uses in the western part had been reduced to just 1600 m2, while in the eastern part there would be 17500 m2 for various cultural programmes. On 15 December 1969 the council decided to allow the building department to realise also the eastern part of the Kulturhus.

Precedents: Folkets Hus and Citizens Houses in Sweden

The idea for the Kulturhus was new in its scale and in its concept, but it was not without precedent. One particular tradition that might have provoked Hultén and Celsing to conceive a building offering a mixture of cultural activities was that of the Folkets hus. In Sweden the Folkets hus were also connected to the initiatives for cooperative adult education and self-improvement that had been established following the Danish model of Grundvigs Folkshøjskole. In the 1920s and 30s the architects of Kooperativa Förbundet (KF, the Cooperative Association) had been responsible for a number of Folkets hus across the country, many of which followed the model of combining a main hall for events and some smaller spaces for meetings and lectures, and occasionally a library in a functionalist composition.

In 1947 the small industrial town of Eslöv in Southern Sweden organised a competition for a ‘Medborgarhus’. The term Medborgarhus had been put forward by ‘borgerlig’ politicians as a pendant to the Folkets Hus with their strong ties to the trade union movement. Replacing the reference to ‘folket’, the people, with one to ‘medborgare’,
fellow citizens, implied a different social intention. It suggested ideological neutrality, detaching the building from the programme of the emancipation of the working classes which had informed the establishment of the Folkets Hus. The brief for the new building contained four halls of varying size, meeting and study rooms, facilities for performers and offices for the local cultural administration. The naming of the building at Eslöv had been a local compromise and was endorsed by the Social Democratic prime minister Per Albin Hansson who told his local party members: ‘If you can get the right-wingers to build a Medborgarhus, you should be happy. For the rest of your lives you’ll be spared the worry of a Folkets Hus.’

The competition was won by the young architect Hans Asplund, Gunnar Asplund’s son, who at the time was employed as a collaborator in the project for the United Nations Headquarters in New York. Asplund organised the programme in a low, single-storey-high building, a longitudinal tapered ‘funnel’ containing the halls and a four-storey office block for the offices. From a distance the compositional proposal of two taller volumes (the ‘funnel’ and the office block) above a low-rise building seemed to follow the established functionalist principle of organising different programmes in separate volumes. In the Eslöv scheme, however, the different parts were all treated in the same way, their exteriors covered in white painted concrete, allowing the different volumes to merge with each other. The funnel’s barrel roof was covered in aluminium sheets, a solution that emphasises the particular shape of the auditoria and allows them to stand out from the rest of the building.

In contrast to the subdued exterior, the interior spaces of the Medborgarhus displayed a large range of highly specific design decisions. The wrought iron grille of the southern entrance door is reminiscent of Charles Mackintosh, while the treatment of the open fireplace in the foyer evokes associations with National Romanticism. One of the walls of the foyer is lined with oak veneer, light fittings and benches being integrated into the paneling – a detail Asplund’s father had used in the chapels at the Woodland cemetery. The main feature of the foyer is a grid of beautifully crafted, smooth mushroom columns and round skylights. Much in the same way that Gunnar Asplund had exerted control over every single aspect of the making of his buildings, his son sought and managed to design the light fittings, hand rails, furniture and door handles of this building, his first major project in Sweden. When the building was opened in 1957, after a planning and construction period of almost ten years, the costs had tripled from the original estimates and a taxpayers’ watchdog journal characterised the Medborgarhus as a ‘Civic Hall de Luxe’.

The architect Lennart Holm, who reviewed the building for the journal Byggnästaren was highly critical of the design, characterising it as an environment ‘for an exclusive company of connoisseurs and discerning beholders’. The combination of exquisite materials with tailor-made and the highly idiosyncratic detailing, something for which Gunnar Asplund had been criticised in the late 1930s, was seen by Holm as entirely incompatible with the background of post-war industrialised...
building practice and the democratic impulses of the programme of the building. Holm, who was to become director of the National Planning Board responsible for the large scale building campaigns of the 1960s, viewed the demonstrative exposure of craftsmanship as an outcome of nostalgia and misguided artistic individualism, and as an affront against the needs of a developed industrialised society – this again something Hans Asplund’s father had been accused of three decades earlier.

Asplund’s utterly refined approach contrasted starkly with the socially committed working method of the brothers Erik and Tore Ahlsén, both of whom had been working with KF architects, and whose cultural centre at Årsta, one of the new suburbs of Stockholm, roughly coincided with the Eslöv project. The architects’ statement for Årsta centrum revealed the position of the Ahlséns vis-à-vis the role of the design for the local community and the creative development of its citizens. In an article explaining the intentions of the project they wrote: ‘We have understood the main purpose of the facilities to be to bring into being a place where personal contacts can be established between individuals and groups, to stimulate discussions and personal contacts. It should at once serve the interests of individual members of the community and the striving of the democratic society.’

The design and realisation of the cultural centre at Årsta took from 1945 to 1954. While building was delayed by shortages in building material, the architects engaged with various groups within the local labour movement, including adult education, tenants, artisans and housewives associations in order to examine which facilities should be housed in the centre. The programme that resulted from these investigations was extraordinarily broad. It included rooms for different sizes for leisure purposes and meetings, two theatre auditoria for local amateur groups, a library and a cinema.

The design of the low-rise building enclosing a square for 6000 people – the population of the neighbourhood – broadly followed functionalist principles. On the perimeter rows of two-storey buildings housing shops and flats follow the street grid of the urban plan. The main square occupies one corner of the site, but is set back from the street and enclosed by the low commercial and residential buildings. Only on the corner itself is an opening to the streets, and two ‘gates’ provide further connections between streets and square. The layout of the square itself could be described as an exercise in modern picturesque, with one side of the enclosing walls being inflected in order to create an opening towards the wooded hill against which the main theatre is set.

The two main public buildings (the theatre and the Forum cinema, now referred to as Folkets hus) present themselves as halls with dark tin roofs in the vernacular tradition of rural Sweden, reflecting the informality of the plan with their ‘organic’ shape. Throughout the scheme the materials and their assemblage display the contrast between controlled elegance – staircases enclosed by delicately detailed glass screens, windows set flush into marble and granite façade coverings – and explicitly rough confrontations of different structural systems and materials. At the entrance of the theatre, for example, the simple and robustly dimensioned roof...
A cultural palace for Middle Sweden: the Medborgarhus in Örebro

In 1953 the brothers Ahlsén won the competition for the reconstruction of the working-class town of Örebro. In Söder, a central area of the town, the existing low-rise wooden buildings were to be replaced by a commercial centre with mixed use slabs on top, all constructed in concrete and with a landscaped roof terrace. Erik and Tore Ahlsén established a studio in the neighbourhood and invited the local shopkeepers and inhabitants to participate in drafting the brief of the new building. The result of this consultation process was an early example of combining existing small businesses with new larger shops, one of the clients reporting that he had never had ‘such a good collaborations with architects, consultants and builders before’, Harald Aronsson, chair of the Örebro communal housing foundation and main client of the job, praised the Ahlsén brothers for their ‘ability to listen’. As the project reached completion Erik and Tore Ahlsén were commissioned with the design of the capped citizens and a youth hall. the local trade unions headquarters, rooms for the association of handicapped citizens and a youth hall, the abolition of the working-class town of Örebro. In Söder, a central area of the town, the existing low-rise wooden buildings were to be replaced by a commercial centre with mixed use slabs on top, all constructed in concrete and with a landscaped roof terrace. Erik and Tore Ahlsén established a studio in the neighbourhood and invited the local shopkeepers and inhabitants to participate in drafting the brief of the new building. The result of this consultation process was an early example of combining existing small businesses with new larger shops, one of the clients reporting that he had never had ‘such a good collaborations with architects, consultants and builders before’, Harald Aronsson, chair of the Örebro communal housing foundation and main client of the job, praised the Ahlsén brothers for their ‘ability to listen’. As the project reached completion Erik and Tore Ahlsén were commissioned with the design of the capped citizens and a youth hall.

As the project reached completion Erik and Tore Ahlsén were commissioned with the design of the Medborgarhus, a ceremonial and cultural centre for the town, incorporating the municipal theatre, the Folkets Hus with rooms for adult education and political associations, the local trade unions headquarters, rooms for the association of handicapped citizens and a youth hall. The first sketches for the building were made in 1957 and the scheme, prepared in a frenetic effort over a weekend, was presented by Erik Ahlsén with ‘great pleasure and performing talent’, to apparently immediate acclaim. This building was conceived as a single and compact urban block housing a large variety of functions – educational, cultural and commercial – around a core occupied by the two main spaces, the theatre auditorium and the youth hall.

The buildings at Örebro were the largest projects their architects had managed in their separate and joint careers since the 1930s. In contrast to the aristocratic or middle-class antecedents of Sigurd Lewerentz, Peter Celsing and other Swedish architects of the period, the Ahlsén’s background was decidedly working class or artisan and provided the basis for their life-long association with social reform movements. Erik Ahlsén (1901-88) had started his career with KF architects as a building engineer while studying architecture. It was only upon his graduation in 1933 that Ahlsén was employed at a department responsible for furniture and housing two years later. The experience of his younger brother Tore (1906-91) with the established pattern of working in private practice was more direct; he worked in Gunnar Asplund’s office from 1933 to 1936, and joined KF architects for a few years only. At the time that Erik and Tore Ahlsén worked as its employees, KF architects was Northern Europe’s largest architectural firm and had been instrumental in establishing the design methods and formal solutions of modern architecture to Sweden in the 1930s. At the same time the office was virtually embedded in the Cooperative Association, one of the country’s most important popular movements running shops, factories, banks and entertainment parks according to cooperative principles. A large part of the work of the architects was directly connected to the cooperative movement’s activities in initiating housing projects; and the sensible chairs and tables Ahlsén designed were designed for sale in the cooperative’s shops across Sweden. How deeply the architects identified with the aims of the cooperative movement becomes clear from a remark Erik Ahlsén made, much later, in 1974: ‘The cooperation’s significance was tremendous and in certain parts of the country people saw a visit from the cooperative and also from its architects office as a sign of hope in a difficult situation’. The close collaboration with the leaders of the popular movement provided the ground from which new technological solutions as well as artistic inventions drawing from tradition had to emerge. Compared with the explicit picturesqueness of the Arsta project, the Örebro Medborgarhus at first sight comes across as a crafty, but also rational illustration of Le Corbusier’s Five Points. Piéton, partly exposed and partly hidden by partitions, allow for a free development of the ground floor. The windows on the upper floors could be described as fenêtres en longueur and on the roof of the large public spaces there is a roof garden, albeit not overlooking a vast green landscape but contained in a courtyard. In reality, however, the building could not be more remote from the model of the freestanding villa with its independent internal life that had prompted the formulation of the Five Points. The Medborgarhus presents itself to its surroundings as a solid urban building, the main auditorium concealed by a rim of repetitions of smaller rooms and a façade composed of four layers, stepping forward from bottom to top. Each floor has its own façade treatment reflecting the types of rooms inside. At ground level there is a collage of different conditions: blank walls covered in red sandstone with openings for back entrances, windows for the shops along the high street, the piloth, forming an arcade for the entrance to the theatre. The first floor is present as a piano nobile with large windows behind which appear meeting rooms.
with curved internal screens. The second floor, projecting by about thirty centimetres, is occupied by hotel rooms and trade union offices; here the façade becomes a curtain wall of individual windows set into a vertical teak curtain wall panels, organised in three layers establishing a rhythmic serial theme in the apparently highly regular repetitive pattern. The third floor, finally, is treated as a large profiled cornice below the curved copper roof, the reddish sandstone placed above large glass sheets lending weightless gravitas to the building.

The courtyard type layout and the façade with its horizontal layers of serialised windows recall Le Corbusier’s much more austere La Tourette, yet the celebration of sensual pleasure seems to locate the building nearer Italian Neo-Liberty of the late 1950s and its free use of historic patterns. The critic Per Olsson likened the building to a Florentine palazzo dominating the high street of Örebro,212 an association evoked not so much by the typological solution but by the echoes of Italianate sophistication in the details.

The architects’ description of planning the building, the construction methods, sound control, thermal zoning and provision for people with handicaps position the design in the perfectionist tradition of Swedish Functionalism in which they had been trained.213 The intricate plan of the public areas is organised according to the best Functionalist principles and commercial common sense. The theatre auditorium was designed as a single box with a steeply sloping seating arrangement; ‘almost like a Brecht-theatre – directly from the stage’, as the architects later said.214 Yet the design of the Medborgarhus is blissfully free of the ‘provocative schematism’215, of which according to Olsson the pre-war Swedish avant-garde was culpable. Within the clear geometry of the block and the grid of columns the planning of the public areas is relaxed, even hybrid. Where the restaurant and the shops need extra space and exposure they are allowed to break through the perimeter of the block, where the connection to the underground theatre café has to be established a large curved flight of stairs worthy of a Hollywood film set cuts through the grid.

If the façades of the building are inventive and subtle in their play with references to urban architectures of the past and of the South, the material treatment of the spaces inside covers the full repertoire of interior effects from Moulin Rouge to Neo-brutalism. The ribbed concrete surfaces of the load-bearing walls enclosing the theatre are left exposed, as is the brickwork in the second hall devoted to a youth centre. Robust wooden floors appear in all heavily used public spaces and carpentry in untreated wood can be found in the corridors and auxiliary spaces. While these choices may have been within the vocabulary post-war modern architecture – they coincide with the explicitly rough Lutheran church halls of Sigurd Lewerentz and Peter Celsing – there are incidents of material and colour effects that draw from altogether different sources. The ceiling in the theatre foyer is treated in ‘wax-polished’ gloss paint, in the brightest red of popular theatres and music-halls, and contributes a hint of urban glamour cheerfully verging on vulgarity. Contrasting with the rough concrete walls, the shining
surfaces reflecting the light from Venetian glass crowns held up by teak and gilded metal lampposts provide a moment of visual pleasure. In the youth hall enormous steel fans equipped with light bulbs illuminate the brick walls contravening every possible association of the exposed masonry with Sunday school lessons. The restaurant with its reflecting ceiling, tartan patterned carpeting and rows of soft brown leather banquettes displays a considerable urban sophistication, reminiscent of the atmosphere of brasseries and metropolitan mid-twentieth century hotel bars.

The range of associations, from Italianate palazzo via post-war Le Corbusier, and from the popular entertainment park to exclusive urban interiors, testifies to the inventiveness of these two architects who, as Claes Caldenby noted, ‘had come to architecture along a lengthy road’,216 and who naturally seemed to combine artistic invention with the hard-nosed problem solving they felt committed to from their days in the office of the Cooperative movement. Today we may be used to a bric-a-brac aesthetic combining the rough, the shiny and the precious. In the early 1960s the solutions the Ahlénës devised here were different from what anyone had done in Sweden, at least since the war. As Claes Caldenby noted the ‘double movement’ of functionalist planning and sensual realism anticipated many of the themes later identified in Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction published in the year after the building’s inauguration.217 Yet none of the inventions is altogether new; their nature is that of fearless appropriations of images, types or tropes that had been rejected by modern progressive architects for at least two decades.

In his review of the building published on the occasion of its completion Per-Olof Olsson wrote: ‘This is a good piece of architecture, possibly the most beautiful non-religious building created in Sweden after Asplund’s court house in Gothenburg.218 The critic also praises the ‘correct’, modern expression of sandstone as cladding: ‘There are no false conceptions that heavy material must support or be supported’. As noted earlier he review is concluded with the recommendation that the Ahlén brothers should be given the commission for the Kulturhus in Stockholm to compensate for the delayed competition.219

For Caldenby, the Ahlénës ‘stand for a straight line in the development of Swedish functionalism’ incorporating the ‘intimism’ and references to tradition of the 1940s and the professionalism of the 1950s, a uniquely ‘Swedish functionalism with its roots in Swedish poverty, free of machine romanticism and academic formalism’.220 One must speculate how far this building had a direct effect on the design of the Kulturhus. Celsing had known the Ahlénës from his period as a student at the Stockholm Polytechnic KTH, where they worked as assistants in the early 1940s and there was a reference to the glass façade of their PUB department store in his 1960s inaugural speech – the only one to a Swedish contemporary building. Although there seems to have been little direct contact between the Ahlénës and Celsing, collaborators and employees moved between their offices.221 The interior architect Ella Öststrom, for example, contributed to Celsing’s design of the Operakällaren restaurant, then worked on the Medborgarhus in the Ahlénës office and finally participated in the interior design for the parliament spaces in the Kulturhus and to the Riksbank.222

At a formal level the Örebro building seems to have influenced Celsing’s design for the Kulturhus in Stockholm in its use of a recognisable urban form and the façade, possibly as a counter model for the reduced repertoire, which both he and Lewerentz had developed in the projects for churches in this period. Yet, the comparison of the two public buildings also shows significant differences: the Ahlén project has a sensual but also ‘soft’ richness, which in the Kulturhus is replaced by a robust sense of material and structure. Where the earlier building seems to be designed to please, the latter one is more of a challenge to accepted ideas about decorum.

A Kulturhus for a developing metropolis

Perhaps a footnote may be allowed after this discussion of architectural and institutional precedents for the Kulturhus. Between 1957 and 1968 the Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi designed a building for one of Latin America’s most important art museums. The Museu d’Arte de São Paulo (MASP), an institution directed by Bo Bardi’s husband Pietro M. Bardi and situated on Avenida Paulista, the city’s main avenue where South America’s financial and industrial corporations are concentrated, was probably unknown to Celsing, as it would have been to most European architects before the publication of a monograph on the architect’s work in 1993.223 The reason for mentioning it here lies in the rather astonishing similarities between the two buildings. These similarities pertain to both the formal architectural language and typology of the two buildings and to the concept of a cultural institution in the city.

At first sight, the São Paulo institution seems entirely incomparable with the Kulturhus in Stockholm. In contrast to the concept of Hultén it was a conventional museum housing a collection, which was set up to present a full overview of canonical Western art in Brazil. Inaugurated in 1968, by the British Queen, the institution was first of all to show the ability of Brazil to establish a museum on a par with European capital cities.224 If one reads Lina Bo Bardi’s statement revealing her intentions for the building, however, a different and more radical concept emerges. Suggesting, however, located on two floors in a bridge spanning an open space along the boulevard, Bo Bardi envisaged a building where the audience would go ‘to see open air exhibitions and displays, listen to music, see movies. Children too, playing in the sun, from morning to evening. And brass band concerts’.225 She also suggests that the high art inside the building might benefit from a ‘somewhat bad taste in popular music which, when faced coldly, may also be a “content”, and that both the presentation of the greatest European cultural tradition – including paintings by Titian, Tintoretto, Velasquez and Van Gogh – and Brazilian street culture should be experienced next to each other, if not together. The auditorium was realised as what Bo Bardi described as “a bare theatre, almost the farmyard professed by Antonin Artaud”.226
Watercolour sketches, coincidentally closely resembling those made by Celsing for the Kulturhus, show a circus and a fair parked directly underneath the gallery, as expressions of what, Bo Bardi explains, ‘in the past was known as “monumental”’, and should now, in a developing and optimistic city, be seen as the “collective” of “civil dignity”.

The similarity of the typological solutions for the gallery – here a wall overlooking a square and absorbing the activities in the square, there a thin bridge spanning a square and offering a space for circuses and demonstrations – is all the more striking because of the combination of rough concrete with highly considered and refined building details, which characterises both buildings. Bo Bardi, like Celsing had been trained in an architectural culture where the experimentation with classical and vernacular forms within a modern idiom existed. As student and collaborator of Gio Ponti, and acquainted with the work of the Milanese avant-garde, these combinations and an absorption rather than rejection of classical traditions seem to have come naturally and intuitively to her, as they seemed to appear for Celsing. Like him, Bo Bardi was at ease with being part of a cultural and economic establishment and advocating an essentially egalitarian programme which suggested a diffusion of cultures, and allowed herself to assimilate simple, even crude, building technology in an artistically considered architectural language.
6.5 Programmatic debates: visions of culture

The tone and the content of Celsing’s statements and the articles by Hultén in support of the proposal for a Kulturhus had been explicitly general, even visionary (or grand, depending on how one viewed the proposal). They did not, and at this stage could not, go much further than stating an intent and argue the case for a type of institution that did not exist anywhere else in exactly this form. Once the decision for building the Kulturhus had been taken a more precise definition of the programme became a necessity. At this moment the initiative, largely the brainchild of a limited group of people centred around Celsing and Hultén, was absorbed into the mechanisms of collective decision-making within local politics and the bureaucracy.

The transition from a project inspired by the ambitions of a small circle of outspoken personalities to that of a building, funded and built as part of the full realisation of folkhemmet, beyond the fulfilment of material welfare, implied the involvement of the leading politicians, civil servants, planners as well as a wide range of institutions, public pressure groups, newspapers and the general public. Since the project that expressed an ambition for a broad definition of culture in the city it was inevitable that the Kulturhus should allow the most diverging ideas about its nature and functioning, which were projected upon it.

In fact, both Celsing and Hultén had invited this in their own statements. After all, the very idea of the Kulturhus implied in its core that divisions between different creative practices and audiences should be eliminated. This claim ignored the tension between the appeal to the collective and the individual nature, not only of the practices themselves, but also of the ways in which visual performance arts are curated, presented and received. ‘The arts are a-democratic’, Harry Schein had written228, but the difficulty this created for a building that intended to incorporate a realisation of democracy in a public cultural building was not remotely problematised in the arguments for the Kulturhus.

Politics and culture: the Kulturhuskommitté

In order to proceed with the project and to obtain a programme for the building that would respond to the different demands, which so far had only been expressed informally, the city council installed a Kulturhuskommitté, that had the task of formulating a detailed brief. The committee had eleven members and included councillors and other local politicians, the ombudsman of Stockholm, lawyers, a representative of the state church (kyrkoadjunkt), educationists, a writer and two journalists. It was chaired by Morgan Abrahmsson, a former banker active in Stockholm politics and operated in two subcommittees. One of these was responsible for the detailed organisation of the theatre, the other dealt with the ‘general programme’ of the Kulturhus. Officially installed on 7 February 1968, the committee was to have its own office in the fifth and southernmost tower of the Högtorget complex that was still awaiting completion.

It is because of the activities of the committee and particularly its final report (Kulturhuskommittén Slutrappport, published in 1974) that it is possible, indeed remarkably straightforward, to reconstruct the intricate early history of the Kulturhus and the conflict between radical cultural ambitions and the realities of Swedish society. From the final report – and at times reading through the originally worded official, but also plain language – the trajectory of the Kulturhus from a project aiming at a complete rethink of the role of culture and the arts in society to a politically acceptable compromise is traceable. The task of the Kulturhuskommitté to formulate a clear argument for the brief of the project also resulted in the need for all involved parties to state their positions with a clarity they might otherwise have avoided.

Hultén was not a member of the Kulturhuskommitté but he was invited to participate in an external advisory group. Unlike the theatre committee that had the well-defined task of drafting the brief for performance spaces the ‘expertgrupp’, which included a education experts, a theatre director and several writers, was apparently installed as a think tank, possibly to counterbalance the pragmatic approach of the main programme committee. In any case, the group of experts quickly redefined its task and produced a series of three programmatic statements for the Kulturhus and set out an agenda which surpassed earlier statements in its radical demands for an open cultural activity. Perhaps the outspoken tone and the details of the description of the envisaged organisation of activities was prompted by the fear that the project might lose its innovative or progressive character. As a document describing the actual functioning of the projected building the statement in the form of three letters may well be one of the most concrete and radical manifestoes for a cultural institution in Europe after World War II.

The process of writing this document was complicated not only by the specific requirements and desires of various departments in the city administration, but by two questions in particular both of which emerged within the first year of the existence of the committee. The first issue was the use of significant parts of the buildings as temporary parliament, the second was the question of the relocation of Moderna Museet, or parts of it, to the Kulturhus, as had been proposed by both Celsing and Hultén.

With its references to the major meetings and negotiations about Moderna Museet and republishing some of the essential correspond-ence on the issue, the slutrappport of the committee allows a fairly precise account of this development to be made, even if it does not mention the drama that was part of it.229 As far as the Riksdag is concerned, the report is less helpful, since the members of the committee clearly saw the inclusion of the parliament as a fait accompli (following a directive given by the councillors in this).

The complicated tangle of conflicting interests and intentions that accompanied the process of consolidating the programme of the Kulturhus is already apparent form the very first statement written on 17 January 1968 by two members of the Kulturhuskommitté, the councillors Wilhelm Forsberg and Nils Hallerby. This document, which is
quoted in the final report as a ‘directive’ for the committee, opens with a reiteration of the general intentions and context of the new building. The drift of this passage seems to follow the agenda set out by Celsing’s *Struktur för Kultur*. It states the need for a ‘building for cultural activities that are currently under-represented in the centre of the storstad (metropolis)’. Having thus stated the metropolitan character of the museum and the need for more Social Democratic impulses emerge. First there is a reference to the audience to be served by the building, ‘a very large audience, daily occupying the city centre or intermittently visiting it, mostly for other reasons than strictly an interest in culture’. This would still seem to comply with the aim of an inclusive building as stated by Celsing and Hultén. The emphasis on the ‘ordinary’ character of the audience might, however, also be read as an admonishing note, to the effect that the Kulturhus should not be allowed to be ‘elitist’ and cater to the ambitions and interests of the art scene too exclusively.

The references to the activities of Moderna Museet – read: Hultén – are respectful, if straightforward in tone. The museum is mentioned as a focus for the activities in the future Kulturhus, as ‘an attractive environment for temporary exhibitions, art propaganda and pedagogical activities, and also experimental theatre, ballet, happenings etc.’ This affirmation of the importance of the museum is immediately followed by the cautious statement that ‘it is evident that a relocation of Moderna Museet to the Kulturhus will rely on negotiations with the government’. All this may still be interpreted as the observations one would expect from a careful politician setting out the context for the further development of the project and adding a sense of realism to the debate that had so far been dominated by the high-flying and ambitious prose of Hultén and Celsing or other representatives of the cultural scene.

The next passage, however, introduces an entirely different function to the project, mentioning the city information office which might use the building and demanding ‘the debate about the building of society should be linked to the Kulturhus’. Finally, the spaces in the house must be opened to other types of exhibitions, such as for example *Kontuhandverk*, a term that could be translated as decorative arts, but which also includes the macramé techniques notoriously popular in neighbourhood centres of the 1970s. Further reference to ‘light entertainment’ contributes to the general sense that the image of the Kulturhus as envisaged by the councillors may well have been significantly different from that of the original authors of the project.

Forsberg concludes by stating that the committee should not endeavour to arrive at a detailed programme, leaving space for flexibility, but for a carefully elaborated brief that gives and indication as to how the building was to function. The exact form in which Moderna Museet would be accommodated in the new building was by now an urgent question, since the temporary use as a parliament would have meant a serious reduction of the space available for exhibitions. However, the committee was only constituting itself, the conflict about this issue was already clear: Celsing and Hultén were still adamant that the Kulturhus was to include the museum, even if this meant compromises for other users. The negotiations about moving the museum started officially in the autumn of 1968, when representatives of the city council had a meeting with those of the national government responsible for Moderna Museet. Time was precious, as the building works were to start on 1 May 1969, to allow for the completion of the parliament’s debating chamber before the constitutional change to a one-chamber-system would be enforced. On the other hand the state was not prepared to commit itself to a quick decision about the museum, and the programme committee was put under increasing pressure to devise alternative uses should the museum not move to the Kulturhus.

**Hultén’s grand vision: The experts’ statements**

It was in this situation, when it was becoming clear that the envisaged relocation of the museum was under threat, that the ‘expert group’ stepped forward with its first statement. In this letter, which was written on 5 January 1969, the Hultén and his fellow experts start by setting out that there was ‘an agreement that the building would comprise Moderna Museet, both its permanent collection and good spaces for temporary exhibitions, the administration and workshops, a large “living room” (vardagsrum) with spaces for a children’s museum’ along with broader facilities such as a reading room, concert spaces and café or restaurants. As far as the demand of the museum was concerned the statement is also clear that, ‘according to the museum’s careful calculations’, it would have to occupy the entire eastern part of the Celsing building with its five storeys.

The passage about the eastern part of the Kulturhus is a firm and concise restatement of the position Hultén had formulated earlier. Above all it was the programme for a museum; certainly one that reflected the latest insights of progressive curatorial practice, but still fitting within generally accepted ideas about the nature of the type of public institution devoted to the presentation of art as established since the eighteenth century. In the description of the remaining areas in the Western part of the building, the proposal is fundamentally different. Here, the authors suggest, the boundaries between different activities would disappear and the entire building was to become an environment where everyone – visitors, artists and those in charge of running the institution – would cooperate in one large, all-encompassing, continuous and infinite cultural project. Boundaries between inside and outside would cease to exist. Differences between art forms were to evaporate, boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture to disappear. The distinction between artists – professional producers of art works – and audience would be eliminated. All would engage ‘in a common active artistic and social agenda’.

The description of the arrangement of this cultural activity was detailed in its indications of the spaces projected in Celsing’s design. There are references to the entrance hall opening towards the lower level of Sergels torg and Kilen with its four separate rooms, all named after the colours of their interiors. Within the given spaces, however,
the possibilities would be endless: 'A theatre group could simultaneously
perform in the square and the entrance hall, in the museum spaces or
on the roof; a discussion emerging from the square could find its
continuation in the exhibition spaces or in the arena theatre and could
be illustrated with suitable exhibition material.' In a long passage dealing
with each part of the projected building the expert group gives a detailed
description of how all these would be part of the Kulturhus project.

_Torg_, the ‘square’, the lower main entrance level is described as
an open continuation of the pedestrian level of the outside square and
as space of informal encounter where activities that originate here can
develop further in the open air and the other parts of the building. To
facilitate this ‘all kinds of materials would be made available: paper,
wood, stone, metal, water, light, sound, film, radio, and television’. The
building would offer physical protection for the sort of activities that
might happen in the open air in warmer climates, but it would also
provide a large range of technical equipment. ‘The atmosphere of the
entrance hall evoked in the statement is not only distinctly informal;
it would also be free of associations with exclusivity. Although no
permanent shop should be allowed, there would be provisions for the
physical welfare, ‘an elementary right’, for the users of the Kulturhus;
there would be ‘warm soup and sandwiches with cheese or liver pâté that
are served from booths as we know them from large railway stations.’
These booths like everything else would be improvised: ‘One could, for
example, imagine that people in the entrance ‘square’ want to make
music. In that case one has only to install microphones, loudspeaker
equipment and a stage. If someone wishes to paint or build sculptures,
the necessary material can easily be provided. If an amateur filmmaker
arrives with a film this can be shown without much difficulty.’

_Kilen_, the large keel shaped hall at the back of the entrance hall is
described as an extension of the ‘square’. Ideas and initiatives originating
from the entrance ‘square’ could be adopted and develop further in more
formalised form. For example the experts point to exhibitions that had
been organised by Moderna Museet and which had attempted at making
connections between everyday or popular phenomena and their inter-
pretation by artists. On other occasions artists could be invited to make
‘visual-acoustic spaces or environments’. Anticipating the realisation of
the Stadsteater (delayed by the plans for the temporary parliament) this
part of the Kulturhus would also attract experimental theatre groups and
film enthusiasts. The area at the back of Kilen receives special mention.
Seven metres tall, it is praised as ‘most suitable for dance performances,
light spectacles, concerts, parties and other activities that might benefit
from its conditions.’

_Huset_, the ‘house’ with the ‘living room’ introduced by Hultén, was
to be located on the first floor above the entrance hall. ‘This should be
an area which allowed the users to dedicate themselves to quieter and more
contemplative activities: ‘reading, listening to music with headphones
and in other ways, watching recorded television programmes, sitting
and drinking coffee with the view of Sergels torg and so on’. The living room
would also be connected to the museum’s children department.

Having set out the ideas for the areas dedicated to informal activi-
ties, the experts return to the museum, which on the two top floors was
to extend to the entire length of the building. In the large and tall main
hall on the second floor temporary exhibitions originating elsewhere
in or outside the building could be shown, but the space might also be
used for parties, film viewings, dance events and receptions. On the floor
above the museum’s study collection would be housed using a sophisti-
cated system of sliding screens to make a large part of Moderna Museet’s
3000 art works accessible for individual viewing and guided tours.

References to a possible outdoor sculpture garden, stage or projecting
screen on the roof, visible from the square, complete this image of the
museum presenting itself to the centre of the city.

In the entire statement the authors emphasise the ‘open, freely acces-
sible and flexible’ nature of the projected building. Offering a range of
ways of exploring creative talents and impulses and of engaging with
visual and performance arts the Kulturhus was to address ‘a latent
need for activity spaces for young people, children, old people, and
people of all sorts looking for contacts – fellow citizens in our society
who up to now have been largely ignored, as far as opportunities for
free creative activities are concerned.’ In the final passage this claim
is formulated again, this time in programmatic terms: ‘The Kulturhus must
be instrumental – as a catalyst for the active forces in society and for
critical debate. Along these lines it has to contribute to the creation of
conditions for experiment in the common experience of society (social
samlevnad) on a democratic, collective basis. It acts as a laboratory for
the development of situations of constructive encounter of individuals
and groups of people.’ To this end the Kulturhus was to be open at ‘any
time and everyone should have the opportunity to influence the atmos-
phere or the activities in the building. The real democracy that society
in its entirety wishes to provide for every single individual has to be the
point of departure in the realisation of the Kulturhus.’ How these aims
would be achieved and what type of management structure might be
installed, however, is not discussed in this first statement, except for a
general demand that the institution should be put under one administra-
tive leadership.

The expert group itself seems to have been divided about the concrete
implications of the demand for the Kulturhus to attract new audiences
and about the type of culture that should have a home in the building.
In the first statement these issues are hardly mentioned, as if the authors
were unaware of the conflicting views as to what constitutes an experi-
mental cultural activity or how the users would organise themselves in
the absence of a proposed institutional structure. One can only speculate
that Hultén, who must have had extraordinary weight among the group,
probably had a clear idea of the nature of the experiment and that this
would have been strongly influenced by his own interest in movements
of avant-garde artists, musician and writers. Like Moderna Museet
before, the Kulturhus could become a focus for experimental practices,
for happenings and events, and the location in the centre of the city
would allow for audiences not familiar with these experiments,
or
modern art in general, to be addressed. The Kulturhus, in other words, would have been a place for the encounter with new, unknown artistic practices, and the interaction envisaged by Hultén probably was of more limited nature than he wished to admit. The statement carefully avoids references to other existing cultural institutions and associations. Apart from the museum, the statement only mentions the national exhibition board which organised shows that could be displayed in Stockholm and travel to provincial towns, a practice that seems to have been comparable to the exhibitions of the Arts Council in Britain in the new Hayward Gallery. At first sight the absence of references to other institutions may not seem too strange, but in the context of Swedish cultural life, with its fine fabric of associations aiming for the education and improvement of the citizen, it entailed a clear statement: the Kulturhus was not to become another Folkets hus with evening classes and ballroom dancing events, but something entirely different and new.

In a separate statement written a fortnight after its first letter, the expert group was taken to task about its ‘dogmatic’ views by one of its members, the studieombudsman Bror Andersson.233 First of all, Andersson complained, the document had failed to include some activities that should ‘naturally’ have been included; he particularly mentions the absence of a library service and an arts-on-loan facility. More generally, however, the dissident expert was worried that the activities of the Kulturhus as proposed in the programme might be too focussed on the ‘technical, aesthetic experiment’, and therefore inaccessible for large numbers of people. Rather than catering for a small group interested in these experimental art forms, the Kulturhus should be ‘be directed towards reaching out to those groups of the population now deprived of culture (Andersson uses the term kulturfattiga folkgrupperna, literally translated the ‘people’s groups poor in culture’) in our society and turn them into interested and active participants’. Contradicting the view that the Kulturhus should be place for the free association of individuals, staying clear of the established organisations dominating the cultural life of the country, Andersson demands that the new building should be open to these and engage ‘with our whole field of popular organisations (vårt folkliga organisationliv), allowing very different organisations to experience the Kulturhus as ‘their own living room’.

Andersson’s statement illustrates the conflict of views and interests of which the Kulturhus had become a part. The conflict must have led to a discussion within the expert group, because three days later, on 25 January 1969 there is a second collective letter, this time signed by all the members of the group including Andersson, clarifying the position on a series of concrete issues. The short document does not contain many new ideas about the programme of the building but focuses on the definition of the audience, the management of the building and the relationship with other, existing organisations. Taking up Andersson’s point about reaching out to a wider audience among the groups ‘deprived of culture’ but rejecting the patronising overtone of the phrase, the experts propose to replace it by ‘those that stand outside’ (de som stå utanför). Although this change in the wording seems small, it entailed a signifi-
cant departure from the assumption, still tangible in Andersson’s letter, that culture was to be a vehicle for the emancipation of the working classes. Rather than addressing a series of underprivileged collectives, the potential audience of the Kulturhus is defined as being composed of individuals, whose defining characteristic is exactly the fact that they are not organised. The Kulturhus is to address people who have never been to an exhibition or theatre performance or made music for themselves, but essentially it is for those who usually do not ‘make themselves heard in any other way’. In order to achieve this the Kulturhus will have to collaborate with existing organisations, but ‘also it has to facilitate direct spontaneous contacts’, in a way that the organisations fail to provide. In the opinion of Hultén and his fellow-experts: ‘This is perhaps the most important and most radical translation of the notion of openness. The “square” as the open, accessible place where people of different walks of life pass by and meet each other – impossible and possible people. We hope that just about anything will emerge here spontaneously – cultural expressions of all sorts outside the established organisations and ambitions.’

The experts see some scope for involving existing agencies such as the municipal library, which had recently set up a new, accessible department called ‘Stockholmssterrassen’, an open library and reading room with ‘a low threshold’. But, despite the participation of the library, the museum or the municipal committee for public information (Reklamkomite), the Kulturhus was to be independent and free of any association with the established groups in Swedish society. Open from 10 to midnight, seven days a week, the building was to be a free haven of ideas, its administrative direction ensuring ‘the democratic nature of the activities’.

The third statement by the expert group, written on 17 March 1969, is also its most detailed and, at the same time, programmatic. At last, it seems, Hultén and his fellow-members have assembled the knowledge – and the courage? – to deal with a series of controversial issues. One by one these questions are addressed, from the relationship to other cultural institutions including Moderna Museet via the issue of entrance fees and opening hours to, finally, the direction and keeping order in the house. In the experts’ words, this is ‘a position paper which in its basis determines the autonomy of the Kulturhus and its potential for action (handlingskraft) in society.’

Stating that ‘the Kulturhus must work neither as a class-dividing nor as a commercial institution’ the experts continue to demand that the building should operate explicitly outside the commercial sector: ‘The bookshop, the cafeteria and other services should be operated by the Kulturhus without, in principle, the purpose to make a profit.’ Furthermore, the entrance to all the facilities, including cloakrooms and lavatories, should be free and the organisation should be autonomous. Staff should be trained to deal with a variety of people and ‘will have to make decisions about supporting or repressing situations of conflict, according to their own insight and ability.’

The next passage deals with the fundamental question, how this position of autonomy was to be secured. It includes, for the first time in explicit terms, a statement about the relation between programmatic policy and management structure. Rather than being a mere collection of activities, the Kulturhus is to have a main director, one person who is in charge of realising the decisions about the programme of the institution. This director will have to operate as part of a collective structure, but the range of responsibilities is to be extensive and an annual budget should be made available for acquisitions of art works. This, as the letter makes clear is ‘of the greatest importance since the collection should not be seen as a separate part in the Kulturhus.’ From this passage it could be inferred that Hultén was ready to see the contemporary collection of Moderna Museet merge with the organisation of the Kulturhus and, this in speculation, might have had ambitions for becoming its first director or intendant. The art collection is described as ‘a concentration of great experience’ and ‘a shoulder around which the development can go in a completely different direction from merely gathering material works of art’. The collection participates in developing the experimental profile of the Kulturhus: ‘We would wish to stress that the art of the twentieth century distinguishes itself from earlier periods, giving an example of a highly experimental relationship between the building and its context, a relation which is artistic and social in nature.’

The final passage of the third statement sums up the agenda of the institution in the projected building:

‘In working on the aims of the Kulturhus and its planning, we departed from the current definitions of the notion of culture. This entails that culture is not something that can be anybody’s particular property or that could be treated in a material sense. Rather it is something of which one can become a part. Culture is a process, a set of relationships that are relative and creative.’

The vision of the Kulturhus as a building where this culture would take shape in ways that went beyond any of the existing definitions of state-sponsored cultural policy makes the final statement of the experts into an extraordinary document. In the demand for a comprehensive integration of performing and visual arts with educational activities and the informal appropriation of the building by the users – ‘visitors’ would no longer be a suitable term – the letter also went much further than the extended museum which Hultén had proposed when he first launched the idea for a Kulturhus in Central Stockholm. This statement appears as the final moment in the trajectory of the Kulturhus initiative from the vision of a museum opening itself to post-war society via an architectural proposal concluding a period of modernist town planning to the radical concept of an environment where the nature of culture itself was to be questioned and redefined in a continuous experimental activity affecting the entire building and its surroundings. The text appears also to be the last published statement related to the Kulturhus in which Hultén had a hand. After years of what must have been intensive discussions and efforts to influence public opinion, Hultén may have arrived

234 The expert group’s statement, 25 January 1969, Kulturloka
erna vid Sergels torg (1973), p.54
at a concluding point from which he would and could not return: if a Swedish democratic culture was to be realised in earnest this would have to entail a complete departure from the models of cultural institutions and the practices of curatorship and management inherited from the nineteenth century. The Kulturhus would be the propaganda institute.

Demanding an environment that could host artistic experiments as well as expressions of popular culture, and celebrating the vitality and uncomplicated roughness of traditional fun parks may have been part of a conscious positioning, or posturing, on the part of the artist, who played with his double role of the social outsider and well-established public figure. Yet, Fahlström also pointed to a blind spot of progressive cultural agendas, which the expert statement had not resolved, and indeed hardly addressed. Despite the emphasis on the inclusive nature of the Kulturhus, it remained unclear how the desired freedom of expression and creativity would relate to the possibly much more banal desires of the audience. The experts had also left open how the conflicting expecta- tions of different types of audiences might be framed or balanced within a publicly funded institution. The tension between the educational or creative purposes and the lucrative aims of the institution.

Other voices: the public debate about houses for a new culture

The experts' statement was not an isolated phenomenon. It reflected discussions among artists about how their work could be effective outside the traditional boundaries of the museum or other cultural institutions. An example of these attempts to engage with the general public and to intervene actively in wider cultural and political questions is the letter by the artist Öyvind Fahlström to the Swedish Handicraft Society meeting (Slöjdförening) on 4/5 December 1967. Under the title Våra nöjen – förandringarnas rum (our entertainment – spaces of and for change) Fahlström who had been a regular contributor in Moderna Museet’s contemporary magazine, addressed the members of the handicraft society, in their majority representing well-meaning middle class women with an interest in social affairs. The artist demanded that the building of cultural centres should be replaced by establishing entertainment houses, ‘not one gigantic building but several, many entertainment houses and especially in Märsta and other places where the sausage stall is the only facility for young people.’ These buildings should reflect the temporary nature of the activities; possibly as an antidote to large projects like the Kulturhus, Fahlström proposes the use of existing buildings, mobile units and changeable spatial structures. Create constantly shifting labyrinths – so people do not know where they will go, what they will see, what will happen (the fun house (lustiga huset) in a new form). Possibly one giant room with floors/roofs that slide like shelves in a cabinet, plus partitions.’ Fahlström’s examples for how these ‘fun houses’ should allow its users to interact are fundamentally different from the emphasis on cultural and political agendas in the Kulturhus statements.

Defying possible ideas about respectability or social relevance, the artist uses his position as well-established outsider to suggest something more reminiscent of a large-scale art environment or happening than an institution. There might be ‘rooms where one moves through plastic mud or jelly’ or ‘tropical rooms with heat and light, water, tropical plants, jungle with birds’ and there could be ‘thematic events: one week about aging, one in support of cannabis legalisation.’ In a reference to Gröna Lund, one of the traditional pleasure parks, which have been popular in Stockholm and many other Swedish cities since the eighteenth century, Fahlström demands that the ‘fun houses’ should not exclude the cruder forms of popular entertainment, stressing ‘the value of fights – for the sake of contact (not just physical contact). Like the girl at Gröna Lund who lies on a shelf dressed in a bikini. You throw a ball and if you hit the shelf folds down in a flash so the girl drops helplessly into a pool.’ Elsewhere he suggests ‘Psychodramatic situations’ addressing people not catered for by cultural institutions, including ‘housewives, the deaf, athletes, children, unions, inmates’ and to ‘cultivate the risk aspect: intentionally create panic, terror and shocks (beautiful and frightening) so that a short circuit occurs’.

Fahlström’s explicit inclusion of popular, even banal, cultural expressions bear some similarity with Archigram’s fascination for manifestations of technology and consumer culture demonstrated in Michael Webb’s Leicester Square Sin Centre project (1959) or Peter Cook’s Blow Out Village (1966). Like many artists of the 1960s avant-garde Fahlström objected to the implicit boundaries which informed the cultural policies of the Social Democracy and its ‘bourgeois’ opponents and the sanitising effects of modern urban planning.

Fahlström had stated in the catalogue for the 1961 exhibition Rörelse I Konsten (Movements in Art) at Moderna Museet:

‘Art Centres are … necessary. But do they (arts centres) have to be restricted to the usual kind, which many people still find as foreign as the stock market. Not a few people are still actually reluctant to enter an art gallery, feeling that they should buy something. And what are the galleries but a kind of luxury shop – with opening hours more exclusive than either boutiques, libraries or museums, thereby openly demonstrating that they cater to a small circle of businessmen, socialites and retired people. Is it really inconceivable to realise something that it neither a church, a Sunday school nor a jeweller’s shop? Something providing both exposure and sales, open day and night, including art books, and with jazz music, debates and shows, and with instructive exhibitions of reproductions, models, details. A place where you could eat, drink, dance, talk, buy, look, listen. Such a place could surely also be made profitable and not necessarily require public support.’

235 The first of these happenings was the performance Aida at Moderna Museet on 20 October 1964. Two happenings titled Ut Millenä (1964) addressed the issue of introducing stronger beer in Sweden, the subject of a controversial discussion in the mid 1960s, followed by Fahl- ström’s hirna in the same year. Jean-François Chévrier (ed.), Öyvind Fahlström, Another Space for Painting (exhibition catalogue Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona/ Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead), Barcelona 2001, p. 350/351.


artistic agendas and the demand for openness was hardly acknowledged by Hultén and his fellow-experts. Instead they seemed to rely on the self-regulating and self-improving capacities of the audience, which would operate under the soft guidance of enlightened curators and staff.

The cultural institution as an incubator of the good society

In its explicit demand that the Kulturhus was to be conceived as a house for experimental happenings and unplanned manifestations of creativity, the expert group’s statement contains a blueprint for an institution that radically departed from existing definitions of a public building for the arts. It rejected the nineteenth century concept of culture as a clearly defined area operating outside the realm of production and reproduction, which had not been challenged by Social Democratic, reformist attempts at increasing accessibility to the arts. The cultural activity in the Kulturhus was not to abstain from questioning the political and economic arrangements of Swedish society and its combination of public welfare with developed corporate capitalism. Both culture producers and audience were explicitly invited to engage with these realities critically and combine the quest for alternatives for the organisation of society with exploring their creativity. The Kulturhus, in this view, was not merely to represent a future egalitarian society, but become a place that would have a role in its realisation.

While the experts worked on the programme statement for the Kulturhus, the curators at Moderna Museet were preparing the exhibition ‘Modellen – En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle’ (The Model – a model for a good society) which was to take place in September and October 1968. The exhibition is described as ‘an experiment in collaboration with a group of artists, psychologists and others. A construction and a variety of materials is made available for children, in a large room and outdoors. The intention was to study how the child acts in a context of total freedom and with many opportunities for children to learn constructive lessons that are now not explored by society.’ The exhibition, which is also mentioned as a reference in the first expert statement, serves as an example for the type of approach Hultén advocated for the Kulturhus and that can be described as didactic as much as experimental. The space offered to the children and, as can be inferred, the users of the Kulturhus was not freedom for its own sake. It was part of a strategy that would help people to become active participants in collective processes, without prescriptive rules but still with a firmly defined purpose.

In this perspective the ideas behind the Kulturhus appear as entirely fitting into the older Swedish traditions of self-improvement and education. Rather than advocating choice isolated from a social context these ideas are a reinterpretation of the cooperative self-help institutions to survive within the parameters of the developed consumer society of the late 1960s. Yet, as the presence of curators and psychologists indicate, this vision of a society of independent individuals is not free of the element of supervision and control that had also been at work in Swedish society since the nineteenth century and that was part of the country’s social organisation. In this light, the concept for the educational and cultural activities in the Kulturhus can be viewed as much as the continuation of an existing tradition as a radical innovation.

The users of the Kulturhus would be invited to engage with forms of art and culture that require considerable serious commitment. People from all social backgrounds would embrace experimental forms of creative production and make them their own, the public building emerging as a giant penny university or Academie de trottoir. These terms had been invented to describe the role of coffee houses in London and Paris in the process of inventing forms of discourse and behaviour which Jürgen Habermas had identified as the beginning of a modern public sphere. The Kulturhus, like these cafés, would operate as a physical framework rather than a provider of performances or exhibitions. The staff, headed by the director, would facilitate the collective activity and help the audience to educate themselves rather than being educated. In this respect, the experts’ concept of the Kulturhus could be described as the attempt to recreate the early bourgeois collective of independent free individuals engaging in enlightened discourse (but on a massive scale and extending across the entire population). The proposal for the Kulturhus involved a re-invention of the rules and codes of the public sphere. In the views of Hultén and his fellow-experts, this implied the suspension of established forms of controlling use and behaviour, except in their most rudimentary form. It was this aspect that was to become a central issue in the controversy about the programme of the Kulturhus and the conflict between the expert group and the Kulturhuskommitté.

Experts, bureaucrats and a police man – the end of a dream

The representatives of the city and the Kulturhuskommitté were not ready to accept an arrangement which effectively would have situated the territory of the Kulturhus outside the sphere of control of the police and other authorities. The committee formulated its reservations, pointing to experiences with other institutions in Central Stockholm (for example ‘Stockholmsterrassen’, the experimental branch of the municipal library) that had occasionally been invaded by youth gangs, ‘which have created inconvenience for visitors of the exhibition, interfered with exhibition material and threatened the staff and the general public.’ The absence of control staff would leave the building open to drug users and alcoholics and there was a risk that equipment might be stolen. The committee also pointed to possible problems with the numbers of visitors attracted by the free exhibitions and other activities. To substantiate these fears the secretary of the committee asked for advice from the head of Stockholm Police (Polismästaren), the order police (Ordningspoliser) and the head of the fire department, inviting their views on the proposals. The outcome of this enquiry was perhaps predictable. All three authorities expressed their concerns about the dangers to the safety of the general public which would arise from the intended openness of the building. If a clear distinction could be introduced between the visitors inside the Kulturhus and the people outside, the...
police would probably be able to handle the situation. The blurring of the boundary between the square outside and the space called ‘square’ inside (the entrance hall on the lower level) might, however, lead to dangerous situations. Large crowds gathering around happenings inside and demonstrations in Sergels torg would create unacceptable concentrations in an already densely used area, without previous knowledge of the police. Visitors leaving performances or exhibitions would add to the crowds and make crowd control even more difficult. Finally, the audience of the Kulturhus would be disturbed by the itinerant population of Sergels torg, which might seek shelter in the new building.

Although formulated in the cautious opaque language of officialdom the reports of the police and fire departments were clear in their conclusions: a building that could be entered without mechanisms to control numbers would cause a threat to the public order and safety. The reservations against the ideas of the expert group that, as became clear a few months later, existed within the Kulturhuskommitté were certainly supported by this advice. Whether the request for the reports from the police was part of an attempt to take the edge off the proposals of the expert group or whether the official committee merely fulfilled its task of providing the best possible advice to the city council, for Hultén the intentions of the secretary appear to have been unambiguous. After listening to the three statements of the policemen and fire brigade men, Hultén is reported to have slapped his file on the conference table with a big bang and stormed out of the room, apparently never to be seen again.240

Hultén’s outburst may have been a reaction to the fear that his ideas for the Kulturhus were becoming more and more controversial, a fear by no means unjustified. The press debates about the work of the Kulturhuskommitté and the statements of the expert group indicate that the museum director found himself less and less in control of the process as the Kulturhus was becoming a physical reality. In a series of articles commenting on the statements made by Hultén and the expert group these are closely read and criticised. An article in Expressen by an unknown author describes the programmatic proposals of the expert group as ‘challenging’, but the language as marred by a ‘pompous philosophy that is difficult to take’. The writer further speculates that ‘it may be possible that this cliché-ridden and dogmatic attitude from the expert group was responsible for the cool stance of the Kulturhuskommitté towards the concrete ideas for the planning of the functions in the building’.241 In the same paper Claes Brunius had attested the experts a naïve (blåögda) and unrealistic attitude and a failure to see the forces which had been affecting the development of the Kulturhus project: ‘The architect Peter Celsing produced a tailor-made (skräddarsydda) design … for Pontus Hultén. In the end Pontus Hultén was also officially introduced in the preparatory work for the programme and became an advisor for the building. In a great hurry the Kulturhus approached its completion. This was in fact brought to a halt when the parliament appeared in the picture, but all right, there would still be enough space for the activities that had been fixed right from the start as the building’s purpose. Yet, as the topping out came nearer, the danger also grew

that the prestige might be sidelined. To put it shortly: what remains of the idea of the Kulturhus is a weak living room, a representative Sunday parlour without any character, a collection of enclaves with different directions arranged under one roof’.242

It appears that the impasse of the Kulturhus split Stockholm’s public opinion along well established lines between on the one hand the supporters of Hultén and those who had been critical from the beginning. Bengt Olvång, who had always been critical of Hultén’s project could not disguise his satisfaction as the museum director had to confront the realities of the day. Olvång writes in Aftonbladet of 22 May 1969: ‘In the proposal for the programme one recognises many points from the debates about the allaktivitetshus and an alternative society. But the core would be the collections of Moderna Museet and its exhibition policies. Other activities will be subject to the arbitrary decisions of the museum. Five or six years ago this might have seemed a good idea. Then Pontus Hultén had the initiative in the cultural debate. Today this is hardly the case.’243

Olvång wrote his piece a month after the Kulturhuskommitté had published its preliminary programme advice.244 The document confirmed what Hultén would have feared. Only the committee’s proposal for the underground Kilen seemed broadly identical with the ideas of the expert group, at least at first sight. Closer reading reveals, however, that the use of this space as a venue for music performances for younger people – including spaces of pop and rock music – was changed. Expecting sound problems the Kulturhuskommitté suggested that Kilen should be accessible for all age groups. Part of the space was allocated to children’s and school theatre groups, a room for lectures and small-scale performances and some of the areas, it is suggested, might be used as meeting rooms for the staff of the Kulturhus. In the experts’ (and Hultén’s) view this part of the building had been an essential element in the sequence outdoor square – indoor square (entrance hall) – Kilen, each with its own atmosphere, but related to each other and connecting spontaneous events with the performances of professional or amateur groups in one series of spaces devoted to different forms of creativity. In the programme advice of the Kulturhuskommitté this chain was interrupted. The indoor square became a winter garden and a ‘shop window for culture’, ‘where museums can show what they have to offer – with slides, films, sound recordings and installations’. The substitution of the square with a winter garden may have appeared a small alteration. It implied, however, a fundamental departure from the ideal of a close relationship between activities inside the building and those in the square. Gone was the concept of a house where what was happening in the street would be absorbed, creatively developed and reflected inside. The space where the reciprocity of cultural production – the institution – and everyday existence – the city – would become tangible, was reduced to something resembling a lobby complete with the inevitable ingredients of moveable plant beds and show cases.

Another significant change in the programme appeared in the eastern part of the Kulturhus. Whereas the expert group had followed Hultén in

240 Per Ahlborn, 20 April 2005 quoted Camilla Sandberg, , p. 25
241 Claes Brunius, Expressen, 5 September 1968, quoted from Camilla Sandberg, , p. 25
242 Bengt Olvång, Aftonbladet, 22 May 1969, quoted from Camilla Sandberg, , p. 25
243 Kulturlokalerna vid Sergels torg (1971), 25-29
allocating the entire area to museum, the Kulturhuskommitté introduced a range of new users, which had announced interest in being present in the new building. These included the municipal library, which proposed an ‘allemansrätt’ with a large children’s corner and the city information office. Maintaining that the Kulturhus was to address a ‘variety of interests’ and should be connected with schools and adult education institutions, the committee significantly limited the area devoted to modern art. In the programme advice the museum is reduced to the two upper storeys and would share another floor with the library.

The State and the City: Moderna Museet and the Kulturhus

The difference of opinion between Hultén and the fellow experts and the Kulturhuskommitté had become evident. Much of the debate concerning the programme of the Kulturhus in the following months was devoted to the question how Moderna Museet could find a place in the new building. Celsius’s plan had departed from the assumption that all or major parts of Moderna Museet would find a home in Kulturhus. The temporary use of the building for the parliament, which he had actively supported, required that, in effect, the museum would need most of the space not occupied by the parliament, and manage even the underground spaces of Kilen.

Apparent confident about the weight of his argument, the museum director had presented the allocation of these spaces to the museum as a non-negotiable condition for an involvement of his institution. This demand was rejected by the Kulturhuskommitté, which instead had asked the museum to specify its requirements, stating that it was not prepared to accept the museum’s demands unconditionally. The answer to this request had partly been contained in the first statement of the expert group and its detailed list of activities and spaces. At the same time, the relocation plans were discussed at another level and with altogether different agendas. As Moderna Museet was not a municipal institution but owned and funded by the Swedish state, the city administration was keen to devolve some of the financial commitments for relocating the museum to the national government. Who would pay for the building of the museum became the central issue in the negotiations between the city and the state.

Minister of education Olof Palme, who was to become Swedish prime minister in October of the same year, formulated the conditions for negotiations on in a letter dated 27 August 1969. In this letter, which is written as a private document, Palme candidly sets out the problem with the relocation of Moderna Museet. In reaction to the request from the side of the city represented by Agrenius, Forsberg and Mehr, the government office (regeringskanalit) had examined the financial and practical implication of moving the museum. Palme writes: ‘From this it became clear that the increase in the cost implied in the museum’s relocation to Sergels torg is considerable if compared with those for remaining on Skeppsholmen (the existing location) ...’. He states that the relocation is in the interest of the city of Stockholm and rejects the demand that these increased costs should be taken out of the general (national Swedish) budget. Referring to the preliminary programme presented by the Kulturhuskommitté, Palme reminds the city that its own alternative plans meant that ‘just a little more than half of the building would be offered to Moderna Museet while the other spaces would be used for other exhibitions, the city information office and some sort of library service’. The museum did not need a relocation. Palme concludes that he does not wish to abort the plan for moving Moderna Museet to the Kulturhus, but is adamant that ‘the guidelines for the use of the Kulturhus do not seem to offer suitable conditions for the opening of negotiations in this question.’ He puts the ball firmly in the hands of the city, stating that ‘it is now up to the city of Stockholm to formulate a view as to how these conditions could be created.’

Palme’s intervention and his rejection of the plans of the city was not merely informed by financial arguments. The minister wished to support Hultén’s concept of the Kulturhus as a centre of experiment and artistic quality and rejected the city’s proposals to include administrative departments and various institutionalised popular associations. This was a conflict between the Social-Democratic national government and the conservative-liberal councillors, but also one between the ‘experts’ and those who advocated a ‘broad’ concept of culture. By the ‘bourgeois’ press the Kulturhus was seen as a favourite project of the New Left, and of an intellectual elite. In an article in the conservative tabloid Expressen – which had little sympathy for either Olof Palme or the ‘great 1970s show’ of the Kulturhus – the author detects a ‘fâlange’ formed by Hultén, Stolpe and the minister who presented the conflict about the direction of the new building as an ideological choice. The article ends on a sarcastic note: ‘Already a winter garden is proposed for the entrance hall, but the palms may well spread out over the establishment.’

The initiative for relocating the museum into the Kulturhus was beginning to lose its momentum. Negotiations between the representatives of the national government and the city council took place in the autumn and winter of 1969, each party operating from a position that was by then fixed. The government stood by the original demand that a relocation of Moderna Museet was only an option if the entire eastern part of the Kulturhus were made available. The city, meanwhile was committing itself to opening the building to the institutions that had been included in the programme advice of the Kulturhuskommitté. Alternatives, such as locating parts of the museum nearby were offered, but immediately rejected for being impractical. The idea that the Kulturhus should not be dominated by one user gained force as more and more parties became interested in having a share of the building. The involvement of Moderna Museet, which had been the important argument for building the Kulturhus in the first place, became an obstacle in the view of the city officials, who stated that an overwhelming presence of the museum would be in contradiction with the intention of the city to provide a ‘counter-weight against the commercial city’ and the demand that the Kulturhus should offer ‘pleasure for as many citizens as possible’.

245 Hultén specifies an area of 10000 square metres. Statement at a meeting on 11 December 1968 with the secretary of the Kulturhuskommitté, Kul- turlokalerna vid Sergels torg (1971), p. 20.


247 ibid.

248 Staffan Tjerneld/ Magnus Gerne, ‘70 talets stora show – 1 det här glashuset ska rikskan sitta och skylla’, Expressen, 4 September 1969.

The dynamics of the internal debates were increasingly turning against the entire idea of handing over the Kulturhus to the museum, possibly fuelled by resentment against the way in which Hultén had operated. The end of this episode in the history of the Kulturhus is quickly told. In a meeting in February 1970 both the city and the national government agreed that their differences could not be resolved, as long as much of the new building was used by the parliament. The question of a possible relocation of Moderna Museet to the Kulturhus was closed. A mere fortnight later the council asked the Kulturhuskommitté to draw up proposals for the use of the spaces earmarked for the museum.

For Hultén this outcome must have been a personal and professional catastrophe. But Celsing, too, had been deeply committed to the idea of a Kulturhus with a strongly articulated profile that relied on the presence of Sweden's most important modern art institution. Now this element had been removed from the programme of his project, the building had not only lost its main user, but was generally in danger of becoming a white elephant filled with whatever various local interest groups would propose. The building project was secured, but emptied of the original visionary ideas which had carried the entire initiative.

Hultén very soon left Sweden altogether when he was appointed founding director of Europe's most important new art institution at the time, the Centre Pompidou. Years later he expressed his contempt for the way in which the bureaucracy in his native country was capable of torpedoing any initiative. Interviewed by the New Yorker on the occasion of a presentation of the plans for the Centre Beaubourg (as it was then still referred to) in New York in 1974, he states: 'The trouble in Sweden is that you have very diligent bureaucrats who don't know how to be bureaucrats – they don't really understand the system. In Stockholm, you always have people telling you that you can't do this or that.' Supported by the French political elite, even after the death of Georges Pompidou, Hultén hoped to realise in Paris what had failed in Stockholm: 'not so much a museum as a sort of platform of modern sensibility, an open and non-stratified situation about modern sensibility and communication.' And in almost literally repeating his position in Stockholm, he described the art centre as 'a building where you won’t really know what you’re going to find. A building where artists will come to work with scientists, with technicians, with the kinds of tools that are too expensive or too complicated for them to have access to otherwise.' The future museum as a laboratory that had been aborted in Stockholm.

The completion of a difficult project

Since the city council had committed itself to making the Kulturhus available for the temporary Riksdag, the construction of the western part of the building was a matter of priority and works were planned with a firm deadline. In order to accelerate the construction, the conventional procedures of putting the works to tender were abandoned and Byggdare AB, a firm specialised in managing large projects, had been commissioned by the city council to act as general consultant and given the responsibility for the job. This arrangement reflected the time pressure under which the architect, the officials and the construction firms were operating, but also the need for fixing the programme of the those areas of the building that would not be occupied by the parliament.

Yet, while the eastern part of the Kulturhus was completed in 1971, in time for the parliament session after the Christmas break, proceeding with the remaining eastern section seemed to become less urgent. In 1972 building works stopped altogether, leaving the timetable for the completion of the building in its entirety undecided. The programme proposed by the Kulturhuskommitté probably did not help to establish a sense of urgency and the fact that the building seemed to be colonised by semi-official departments probably did little to increase enthusiasm for the project. Celsing himself was most anxious that the idea of the Kulturhus might dissolve, possibly abandoned altogether. In a conversation with the journalist Lars Westman he admitted to his desperation. 'They will make the house into a bingo parlour', he is quoted, suggesting that by this time the relationship between the architect and the city officials had become intensely difficult.

Hjalmar Mehr’s fall and the end of the City plan

The attitude of city officials to the project was probably also affected by the economic and political circumstances which had profoundly changed since the competition. In the period between 1967 and 1971 the city’s economic situation had become difficult. Large deficits and high interest rates turned into obstacles for the city project. After a period in opposition, in 1970 the Social Democrats regained power in the town hall with Hjalmar Mehr at their top, who reiterated his support for pressing ahead with the expansive city development, even when economic difficulties suggested a pause. Mehr’s position was shared by many of the city’s large corporations, but met with increasing criticism from activists, journalists and other opinion makers.

In spring 1971 this conflict came to a head. The transport board had prepared plans for a large underground station under Kungsträdgården, an eighteenth century formal garden some three-hundred metres east of Sergels torg. In order to build the station a group of elm trees would have to be cut down. Different departments inside the city administration were at odds with each other about the need for this action, and opponents of the scheme found out about the plan. Eventually groups of activists gathered around the trees and prevented the police from...

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252 ‘Riksdagsprovisoriet’, Arkitekter, 6/1971, p. 3-10

253 Unpublished manuscript of a conversation of Celsing with the journalist Lars Westman, undated, Celsing archive
destroying them in a night action. Realising that cutting down the trees would cause a serious public disturbance, the police retreated; for the first time the latent discontent with the direction of the citysanering gained a decisive victory as alternative plans for the underground station were seriously developed. Hjalmar Mehr was genuinely appalled by the direction that the affair had taken, maintaining that nobody had the right to prevent a decision that had been taken democratically. The elm tree incident had become a matter of principle for him, as it had for his opponents. The activists, however, were widely supported by public opinion and Mehr's inflexible stance was quickly becoming a liability for his own party. In September 1971 he was offered the ceremonial post of landsbäring of Stockholm and left the city council, depriving the Kulturhus of its most ardent supporter among the city's political leaders. By a year later Åke Hedtjärn, who had been the leading civil servant in the citysanering and who acted as Celsing's client, left the city's building department, too. By this time the demand for offices and retail spaces had reached a low point and Albert Aronson, Mehr's successor, favoured the development of the suburban centres rather than the inner city.

As the largest public building initiative that was to complete the ambitious city plan, and as Mehr's project, the Kulturhus occupied a central position in the controversial debate about the city. Rather than being seen as a necessary counterweight to the commercialisation of the city centre, it was now criticised as a project epitomising the effects of modern planning. And, in contrast to the debate surrounding the competition, the critics were no longer exclusively from the moderate conservative side, but included activists for whom the events in Kungsträdgården had been a decisive moment. As a large institution the Kulturhus would do nothing, it was argued, to make cultural activities available for people living in the city's neighbourhoods and particularly in the satellite towns that had been constructed in the previous decade. On the contrary, the size of the new building would only contribute to a further centralisation and institutionalisation of culture. The Kulturhus, in this view, would be a citadel of official culture.

The criticism also focussed on Celsing's design, which was increasingly associated with the city's re-planning and the large-scale demolition. The fact that it had been Celsing who had originally proposed cutting down the elm trees did not help; at this stage nobody was interested in his reasons for this solution – creating a traffic-free open terrace towards the water – as the traffic board had adopted the removal of the trees to find place for a road. The sustained support for the Kulturhus by Hjalmar Mehr, too, was probably a mixed blessing and may only have aggravated the situation for Celsing, as it seemed to confirm the suspicions that the building was above all another outcome of the gigantomania of the men who were destroying Stockholm. Lasse Westman, who interviewed Celsing in 1972, noted that the criticism had an effect on the architect, who felt attacked from various sides, left and right: 'Peter Celsing is not bitter, but he thinks he has been a little misinterpreted. By the old bureaucracy. By the new men.'

An alternative art space in Stockholm

When Celsing and Hultén proposed the Kulturhus in 1965–66, the idea that new cultural initiatives would inevitably lead to a new building was still largely unchallenged. The increased interest in the qualities of existing cities, and especially the nineteenth century fabric, provided the underpinning for the alternative plans with the aim to re-use buildings and ensembles rather than demolishing them. Former cast iron warehouses in the Soho district of Manhattan were turned into 'alternative art spaces' and former industrial buildings were appropriated as theatre performances, studios, workshops and galleries. The use of the Round House, a former engine shed in North London, for theatre performances and later music concerts was a prominent example for this development. As Centre 42, an initiative of the author Arnold Wesker, the Round House was dedicated to developing multidisciplinary festivals and events touring factory floors, schools and pubs in British industrial cities. Wesker's ideal of a laboratory for an alternative culture, incorporating the experiences of the working classes, and the collaboration of artists from different disciplines – literature, theatre, visual arts – found a temporary focus in the Victorian industrial building, which was free of connotations of state-sponsored cultural provision and its overtones of educating the working classes. It was conceived as an alternative to the cultural policies of the British state.

Stockholm had its own Round House in the form of a former gasholder. In the summer of 1966 the head of the city's monumental buildings department (städsantikvar) had made an attempt to list this structure, situated on the edge of the nineteenth century working class neighbourhood of Sabbatsberg, and prevent its demolition. Instead of pulling down the gasholder he suggested using it as a venue for pop concerts and dance events. The round building with a diameter of 48 metres and a height of 34 metres was proposed as a large centre for youth culture. Bergengren writes: 'Suddenly there was an enormous building in the middle of the city. It had stood there for thirteen years without anyone thinking of using it.' The gas holder, in other words, suddenly appeared as suitable shell for the 'Allaktivitetshus', which was at the same time proposed in Sergels torg.

In February 1968 a group of teachers and students of architecture presented a proposal for the gasholder in the municipal museum. This scheme entailed using the existing structure as a climate shell around an arena, 'an open space for all sorts of performances; a screen construction for a labyrinth, circular floors on several levels surrounding a service tower in the middle; an all year skating rink; an image and music circus; a public bath for the entertainers.' Calculations showed that the remodelling would cost around 8.6 million Swedish crowns.

The majority party in the city council, which at the time was dominated by the 'borgerlig' parties, were reluctant to support the proposal for a public building dedicated to non-institutional culture. The fact that the initiative coincided with the planning of the Kulturhus, which had also been presented as an 'Allaktivitetshus', may not have
helped the case for keeping the gasholder. In February 1970 the council voted with a majority of three votes for the demolition of the old building.\textsuperscript{261} The ‘glasklocka’ was demolished, but the affair also showed that the idea that an environment for cultural expression and production might better be served by re-using existing buildings rather than building new ones, had become firmly established. By implication, the initiative for the new Kulturhus now appeared to be associated with the official culture which it had been intended to challenge.

Images of a house for all: Peter Celsing’s sketches

It may have been the need to counter the critics and the lack of enthusiasm surrounding the project that prompted Celsing to produce a large number of sketches for the interior of the building. There had been hand-coloured perspective drawings of the project from the earliest stage of the competition. Now, however, the architect almost frenetically churned them out. Most of these sketches are not dated, although it is likely that they were made in 1971 or 1972. Together they are an extraordinary collection of evocative images of how people would occupy the building. Using ink and watercolour Celsing showed the Kulturhus as a series of spaces filled with art exhibitions, people eating in restaurants or enjoying variety performances.

One of the sketches depicts a scene in the variety theatre proposed for the underground hall referred to as Kilen. Seated in an amphitheatre hewn into the floor, the audience watch a comedian showing off on a catwalk or stage overlooking the green hall, a smaller figure following him in voluntarily or possible dragged along. Although the figures are drawn roughly, their outline filled in with coarse brush strokes of bright colours, red dots indicating an exaggerated mouth, it is clear that the scene refers to some sort of popular entertainment or farce; the poses and enlarged body language of the performers seem to derive from slapstick comedy or commedia dell’arte. The style of the drawing could be described as both naïve and expressionistic, and suitable for depicting an atmosphere of robust, traditional and popular entertainment of the sort audiences might have known from urban pleasure parks or theatres.

Another image, more abstract and aesthetically controlled than the first, allows a view into the auditorium of a cinema. Only about a third of the seats are occupied by people drawn in silhouette. The surrounding surfaces are painted in bright blue (gouache), round white and blue panels suspended from the ceiling appear as clouds in an eerie Nordic nightscape. Here the tasteful handling of colour lends the auditorium an air of artistic sophistication more suited to an art house cinema than a popular dream palace. (Throughout the twentieth century Swedish cinema interiors played with the tension between elements of high culture and the popular nature of mass entertainment. In the Skandia cinema, which is only a few block north of the Kulturhus, its architect Gunnar Asplund employed a highly theatrical language borrowing from Pompeian interiors filled with small murals based on episodes from Swedish folk tales.)
All the sketches seem to have in common is that they show groups of people in various formations and types of gatherings. Another sketch of Kilen, this time dominated by bright red walls reflecting in the faces features the audience as a crowd of anonymous individuals shown in profile and utterly absorbed by the procession around a large wooden horse (of which we see only the back) moved along the catwalk, while behind them waiters positioned like monumental sculptures hold round trays as signs of urban professional hospitality. A drawing of the dance club shows the floor, almost empty except for two couples who are engaged in intimate dancing, oblivious of their surroundings. The sketch of the Kilen restaurant features a series of niches and booths occupied by people enjoying not only the food, but also the combination of privacy and public display created by the physical arrangement of small spaces within the large hall. How the activities inside the house would spill out into the open air – one of the recurrent themes in Hultén’s and Celsing’s written statements – is visualised in a drawing of the outdoor stage which the architect proposed should be positioned at the lower level of Sergels torg, just outside the entrance hall to Kilen. Here we see two trumpet players and a drummer performing for an audience of passers-by gathered around the stage. In the sketches Celsing shows himself as an architect who is capable of envisaging and evoking situations and spaces, and as an accomplished designer of interiors. Employing minimal gestures he visualises the architectural effects – colour, light and shadow, reflecting and absorbing surfaces – that he has at his disposal for creating a range of different interiors. The sketches contain not only a representation of the physical and atmospheric qualities of a room in or around the building but also a scene, a recognisable social event. All of them depict groups of people assembled in a variety of forms, as formal audiences, as crowds or as individuals moving around.

The overall impression conveyed by the images is one of an intensively populated and used building, a kind of microcosm of the city. Scenes that are known from popular urban institutions, such as luna parks, squares, theatres or beer gardens, have been taken and relocated in the building, which clearly appears as a public environment open to everyone. In this sense Celsing’s sketches seem to provide the evidence for the concept of an institution that is open to a large range of audiences as was proposed by the expert group. In the pictorial arrangement the illustrations resemble mass-produced prints of urban interiors of the nineteenth century, while the colourful and abstract rendition of everyday situations recalls pre World War II posters promoting seaside resorts, fairs or popular spas.

The emphasis on popular entertainment, however, also invests the sketches with a slightly nostalgic, even melancholic air. They seem to advocate a type of ordinary culture that might still have existed in Sweden in the 1950s and early 60s, but that was certainly disappearing at the time that Celsing made them, to be replaced by other, more commercial forms of entertainment – possibly including the bingo parlours he was afraid might take over the Kulturhus. In this light the architect’s visualisations are as much an expression of his memories of
a simple, honest and traditional culture of ordinary people as an acute rendering of what popular cultural expressions was to entail in the context of the developed consumer society that Sweden had become by the late 1960s.

This old-world air invests Celsing’s vision of the spaces in the building with an endearing quality, but it also creates a significant distance from the ideas of the expert group. There is no illustration that would depict a scene from a ‘high art’ event or performance, neither do the audiences shown in the images engage with what is performed in other than conventional fashions. People are shown as crowds passively watching a play or listening to a band or as a mass of anonymous individuals witnessing the procession of the wooden horse. All of these scenes are hardly examples of the kind of interaction earlier envisaged by the experts. This may be explained by the fact that the architect focused on those areas in Kulturhus where the future use was most vague; many of the sketches are for Kilen, the underground space for which a management concept was being discussed with ‘Folkparkerna’, a group in charge of entertainment parks.263 Maybe Celsing was just realistic about the nature of the cultural interests of the majority of Stockholmers. In any case the basic assumptions about the relationships between performers or artists and members of the audience remained unchallenged, even if the sketches express a desire of openness and for including the mundane or popular.

The completion of a *Grand Projet Suédois*

While Celsing was trying to show that the Kulturhus would not be a white elephant or a large municipal institution, but an accessible public building, the construction of the western part proceeded and on 11 January 1971 the Swedish Riksdag had its first sessions to Sergels torg.264 The construction works on the eastern part were resumed after building stopped in 1972 and in autumn 1974 the entire project was finished. Peter Celsing did not witness the completion of the building, which he described as ‘my Kulturhus’. In the summer of 1973 he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and died in February 1974.265 While Celsing’s health was deteriorating, Per Ahlbom who had worked with him, supervised the progress and the completion of the scheme.

Given these circumstances the execution of the project is remarkably consistent. The Kulturhus as realised is much like the design that had been presented eight years before and most of the details of the design bear Celsing’s signature. This is visible in the combination of rough concrete, glass and steel with shiny surfaces and the expressive use of colours in the interior or the relief effect achieved in the solution for the suspended ceiling on the upper floors of the building. An illustrative example of Celsing’s unconventional juxtapositions of rough constructions and highly finished surfaces are the stainless steel panels on the façade of what was now to become the parliament’s debating chamber, contrasting starkly with the in situ concrete of the large wall of the Kulturhus. Per Ahlbom recalls that Celsing had taken up the idea from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) which took up domicile in Stockholm between 1979 and autumn 1986. The theatre finally moved to Sergels torg in 1990, after a complete refurbishment by Per Ahlbom. Per Ahlbom, 20 April 2005

263 The concrete use for Kilen remained a difficult question for a long time. When the Kulturhus was inaugurated in 1974, it was used as a storage space. At one stage, probably in 1970 or 1971, Kilen had been proposed as dance venue managed by Folkparkerna and next to this a revue café was anticipated with an outdoor stage, which is shown in the sketches. Anna Sjödahl, ‘Kulturhuset – om bakgrunden’, *KR medlemsblad* 6/1974, p. 12-13

264 The use of the Kulturhus as temporary parliament would last until 1979. It had been agreed that the cultural activities, would then extend into the whole building and that, finally, the theatre would move into its long-awaited new house. The cultural institutions eventually would have to wait another seven years, as the Swedish government decided to offer the spaces vacated by the parliament to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) which took up domicile in Stockholm between 1979 and autumn 1986. The theatre finally moved to Sergels torg in 1990, after a complete refurbishment by Per Ahlbom. Per Ahlbom, 20 April 2005

265 Per Ahlbom, Stockholm, 20 April 2005
American train carriages and commissioned an architect working in his office to take photographs of these on a trip to the United States. A series of sketches in the Celsing archive show that the architect experimented with different solutions for the modulation and detailing of this façade, all of which emphasise the industrial nature of the cladding that seems inevitably to invert the monumentalism of the steel and glass façade on Sergel’s torg and the concrete wall at the back.

As far as the programme was concerned, the project had mostly lost the innovative character of the initial period. The exhibition spaces, deprived of the prospect of being used by Moderna Museet, were designed and built according to Celsing’s specifications but lacked the definition which the museum would have given them. Instead, a large area would be occupied by the city’s information department, which could hardly be expected to establish a policy of critical activity.

Following Hultén, Celsing had strongly advocated installing a general director, an ‘animateur’ as he called it, who was to position the Kulturhus as a new institution and provide a face towards the outside world. This, like the other aspects of the programme, survived only in diluted form. There was, however, one relatively small part of the building, where some of the initial impulsion of the project survived. Having been approached by Celsing and the Kulturhuskommitté the municipal library decided to open a new experimental department at Sergel’s torg. This department offered its users access to books, magazines and newspapers that could be consulted without a pass or some other form of commitment. People could enter informally and stay for as long as the facility was open. Providing international newspapers (this in a period when these were often difficult to obtain) but also music (this in a period when these were often difficult to obtain) but also music tapes the library realised is declared aim of addressing new users.

In the Kulturhus this activity found a place next to the entrance at the lower level of the square, separated only by large sheets of glass. When the western part of the Kulturhus was opened in 1971, this facility, called ‘Läsesalongen’ (The Reading Saloon) was an instant success and it became the single most popular destination in the new building. In the almost two decades that Läsesalongen operated here it retained its role as an environment for parents to introduce their children to reading, for adolescents to be initiated in culture and politics, for a growing community of refugees to gain access to newspapers and for the elderly to spend time and read or meet other people. In its small way Läsesalongen seemed to realise what had been the intention of the whole Kulturhus: a space one could inhabit, discover the world and oneself.

The inauguration of the Kulturhus

When the western part of the Kulturhus was opened in 1971 Läsesalongen was the only permanent cultural activity in the building. The upper floors contained libraries and restaurants for the parliamentarians. A British review, which was published a few months after opening the parliament building, mentions a restaurant, part of which was open to the public, part used as an MP’s dining room. This blurring of bounda-

ries between the parliament and areas accessible to the general public was intended. Peter Celsing is reported to have engineered the open transitions between parliamentary and cultural activities expressing the hope that both might interact. The photographs illustrating the article seem to confirm this view of the building where the boundaries between the official and the public, and between the ceremonial and informal, are non-existent. Children crouching on the floor and listening to music or recorded plays are shown next to the canteen open to the public and the debating chamber of the parliament. Across the building the interior finishes were characterised by similar juxtapositions of rough and shiny, monochromatic and expressively colourful, suppressing the difference between Läsesalongens children’s department and the ceremonial spaces of the parliament.

In his column titled ‘The House of Equality’ for Dagens Nyheter the paper’s diarist Jan Olov Olsson, aka Jolo, described the scene: there were young young men, who ‘a few metres outside, near the underground station might attract the misgivings and aggressions of law-abiding nine-to-fivers’, checking out books on car brands; students reading books on African socialism; ‘a man in a long coat and too much hair water helping a woman with three shopping bags with her headphones – they had not known each other’. Above, ‘less than three minutes from here’, those wishing to could have walked into the parliament and would have found themselves in the debating chamber, ‘later to go down the escalator … and sit among the crowd and watch Greek immigrant children lay a jigsaw puzzle on the floor’, people reading up on the evening’s television programme or grammar school boys discussing their future. Jolo’s description finishes:

‘Capitalists, New generations.
Old generations. Socialists.
Mechanics. Decision makers.
Sleeping. Reading. Writing.
Music Club (almost), Café.
What a mélange. What a house.
Go there. We are in the future.
It works.’

The temporary nature of the parliament had allowed Celsing to combine the formal and the informal in the appearance of the lobbies and chamber. The provisional character of the arrangement in the western part of the building presumably also suited the politicians in a period of controversial debates about the legitimacy of the institutions. The move from the nineteenth century Riksdag building next to the Royal Castle to the new centre of the city was carried out with expedition. The opening in 1971 of the parliament does not seem to have attracted much attention or controversy. On the contrary, the building was hailed as ‘new attraction for Stockholm’ and as a ‘architectural fanfare’ and received the prestigious Kasper Salin prize in 1972.
The eastern part of the building was opened three-and-a-half years later as Kulturhus proper and had a more mixed reception. The journalist Lars Westman, writing for the magazine *Fi*, reported about the inauguration of the building, which after ‘after seven sorrows and eight unhappy turns’ was opened with a public act and in the presence of the king.272 Westman describes his experience of the opening ceremony. Finding himself seated among the very bureaucrats ‘who had driven Celsing to desperation’ he describes the lukewarm reactions of the audience to Hjalmar Mehr’s speech. Westman writes; ‘The applause was a little muted, almost dispersed. There had been too many conflicts for a large applause to come from this audience.’ The scene illustrates the isolated position of Mehr three years after his promotion to the ceremonial post of *landshövding* – and that of Celsing in the final period of his work on the building: ‘Towards the end Hjalmar Mehr was the only politician with whom Peter Celsing could talk about the Kulturhus.’

The author’s sarcastic description of the scene – the audience listening politely to the speeches, Mehr’s defence of what Westman ironically calls the ‘great beautiful city regulation’ and his reference to the Kulturhus as a ‘crown on the work’ – all this is set against a genuine admiration for the new building, which is described as ‘actually fantastic, with enormous possibilities’. According to Westman Celsing had seen the house as part of a city where people would sit in the open air on benches providing warmth in winter, and beehives and birds nests in the summer. The architect had shared the faith of the leading Social Democratic politicians in technology at the service of man, but had been appalled when looking down from the roof of the building while under construction. ‘Who could have known that it would be like this here?’ Celsing asked as he was looking down from the roof top onto the dense traffic in the streets of the city and the square in front of the building. Possibly, Westman concludes, it was because of this discrepancy between the ideal of a society humanised by technology and the reality of the completed city planning that the audience’s applause was muted at the opening event. ‘Nobody had known that it would be like this here’, he writes, and all had been implied in some way or another. Westman’s own verdict on the Kulturhus remains, however, positive and he assures his readers that the Kulturhus may at last redeem the city and compensate for what the new city fails to realise.

**An impossible gallery?**

Much of the public debate surrounding the new cultural centre was centred around the question of the entrance fees for visiting the gallery. In an article in *Konstnärens Riksorganisationens Meddelblad*, the newsletter of the Swedish association of artists, the author Bertil Englert reports that on the first days after the opening about half the visitors had stopped at the entrance of the gallery, put off by the entrance fee. In the gallery’s guest book Englert found evidence for his suspicion that this refusal to pay for entering a part of the Kulturhus was a serious obstacle for the public’s acceptance of the offerings of the new building. One can

only guess why the Stockholm public objected so strongly to paying for a gallery visit. After all entrance fees were a common phenomenon in Sweden. Established institutions like the National Museum, Moderna Museet or Liljevachs Konsthall, a small public gallery, had charged their audiences for decades and the arrangements at the Kulturhus were by no means extraordinary. The resentment against the fee, therefore, had to be explained with the expectations that had been raised and particularly the arguments about the public nature of the Kulturhus in the statements of Hultén and the expert group. The debate about the Kulturhus, which had occupied writers and journalists in the Stockholm media for years, had evidently had some effect; the potential visitors clearly felt entitled to visiting the Kulturhus without paying.

There may, however, have been another reason for the public’s strong feeling about the entrance fee (and, co-incidentally a smoking ban).273 As the Kulturhus opened its doors, it was hardly clear what type of gallery this would be and what type of exhibition would be offered. A considerable part of the public was used, and had grown to like, the established art institutions. Particularly Liljevachs Konsthall, a modest art pavilion with a series of top-lit galleries, built in 1916 from the bequest of the industrialist Carl Frederik Liljevach and situated on the edge of one of Stockholm’s more privileged neighbourhoods could rely on a faithful public who enjoyed its shows on painting and sculpture, followed by a civilised lunch in the adjacent courtyard garden. It was clear that the Kulturhus could hardly be expected to offer a comparable art experience. Neither the location, nor the gallery spaces themselves were suited to compete with the beautifully constructed combination of carefully displayed works and a semi-suburban setting. Nor were the exhibition spaces in the Kulturhus a large-scale hall equipped with the latest technology of the type Mies had realised in 1968 for the Neue Nationalgalerie in West-Berlin, or a machine like the Hayward Gallery on the South Bank in London.

The long and thin exhibition floors, the large amount of light and the constant presence of the urban view, all these introduced serious limitations on the use of the galleries. In his review in the artists’ newsletter Bertil Englert was explicit in his criticism, describing the gallery with its expressive ceiling as a ‘circus tent of plasterwork and concrete, suspended from the roof into the middle of the space … which sweeps away all possibilities of light, distance and space’.274 The impossibility of establishing the gallery as a neutral space for the contemplative study of art works, according to Englert, is further enhanced by the low ceiling height. ‘Large scale works can certainly be exposed in the three light wells, but this (again) does now allow any overview, … and the view of Sergels torg overpowers everything.’ The only solution to this predicament, Englert suggests, is to build a conventional gallery within the gallery, which, he adds, ‘has already been done, resulting in a kind of labyrinth without the opportunity of gaining an overview – a light shaft here and series of spotlights there.’276

The solution for the gallery apparently also divided public opinion. Englert, who had interviewed artists as well as examining the views of

272 Lars Westmann, *Vad skall ni göra med mitt Kulturhus?* (What will you do with my Kulturhus?), *Aftonbladet*, 36 October 1974, p. 42/43

273 ‘Our authorities are well prepared. One know what one waits for. Rules are formulated, guards well-trained. A smoking ban is imposed. This will be a respectable house of culture.’ Boos Gustafson, *Aftonbladet*, 21 December 1970


Kulturhus plans as published in 1971. The axonometric drawing is probably also from this period.
visitors of the Kulturhus, wrote: ‘Most artists I spoke to expressed themselves negatively, while the general public reacts positively.’ Englert’s difficulties in imaging the use of the exhibition spaces reflect the indecisive nature of the programme of the Kulturhus as an institution showing art. Was the building to develop into the kind of laboratory for artistic creativity, the giant workshop Hultén had envisaged, or was it to become a municipal Kunsthalle, a container for large temporary exhibitions? What kind of art work was to be shown and would curators or artists be allowed to make adjustments in the existing building? How were curators productively to use the new facilities for staging exhibitions that could reach the large audiences that had always been envisaged. Would the direction of the exhibition programme be didactic and experimental following the example of Moderna Museet or select its exhibitions for their public appeal, or should it rather reflect the achievements of the local art scene?

The debates about the artistic and cultural direction of the Kulturhus were hardly exceptional, but reflected the general discussion about the role of art institutions and museums in the mid 1970s. Other institutions, both established nineteenth century galleries and recently built art centres, found themselves similarly challenged, as critics announced the ‘death of the museum’ and artists started to discover abandoned industrial buildings for site specific installations and warehouses as alternative art spaces. The situation of the Kulturhus was, however, complicated by the fact that the building had been conceived, at least by its architect and its ‘inventor’ Pontus Hultén, as a physical framework for exactly those activities and approaches subsumed under the term alternative culture and developed outside the institutions which, for the moment, rejected being re-institutionalised.

Another complicating factor was of a more local nature. Along with the fundamental questioning of political and cultural institutions one of the undercurrents of Social Democracy, a latent contempt for culture as a bourgeois hobby irrelevant to ‘ordinary people’ made itself felt. The Kulturhus became an object onto which the resentment against the supposedly elitist character of culture could be projected. From this perspective the term culture itself had acquired negative connotations, as a bourgeois hobby irrelevant to ‘ordinary people’ made itself felt.

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Programming an empty shell

The episode of the proposed name change and the reaction against it is illustrative of the situation of the building and the institution. From a standing start and lacking precedents the staff at the Kulturhus had devised a programme of exhibitions and events that would establish the contested institution as a serious addition to the city’s cultural scene. Success or failure obviously depended on quality and critical acclaim for the programme. At the same time the Kulturhus also needed to distinguish itself from other institutions, museums and venues. Against the background of the recurrent demand that the house needed to address the expectations and experiences of audiences that were not accustomed to visiting museums or theatres a coherent and critically substantial programme must have been difficult. In 1981: Beate Sydhoff, who was responsible for Stockholm’s cultural administration, complained that the largest floor was entirely taken up by the city’s information department, while the Kulturhus had to ‘refrain from exhibitions because there is no space for them’.

Rather than being run by a single director, as Celsing and Hultén had demanded, the institution was effectively managed by individual heads of departments each of whom was responsible for one particular section – the exhibitions, the library or the performance spaces – and who formed a collective managing the house, but did not all resort under a single directing board. Its management structure might easily have turned the Kulturhus into the ‘tenement barracks for institutions’ that the critic Kurt Bergengren expected it to become in 1970.

The antecedents gave no reason for optimism. Kilen, the space Celsing had sketched as a lively music-hall fill with stages and restaurant, for instance, had been used as storage space. Yet, as even a superficial examination of the programme of the Kulturhus in 1974 and the following years shows, these circumstances did not prevent the house from opening itself up to aspects of contemporary culture no other institution had taken up. Indeed, it seems, that the difficulties surrounding the Kulturhus at its start infected the curators with a powerful sense of resistance. The first season of the exhibition programme, admittedly, included shows seeking to lure large audiences into the building (Henry Moore, 1975; Vincent van Gogh, 1977; Edvard Munch, 1978; Constructivist Art, 1978) and there was the odd exposition of crafts (Textiles, 1975; Chairs, 1975). In other shows the curators made an effort to present relatively unknown work to an audience not accustomed to contemporary art (Four artists from Germany, 1974; Swedish Prism – images from 1970s Sweden, 1974; Polish Art, 1975; Robert Jacobsen, Bibi Lowell, Robert Motherwell, all in 1976; Joseph Beuys, 1977). Possibly the most impressive and demanding projects was a series of critical shows exploring the relationship between society and creative production and reflecting twentieth century Swedish politics and culture.

It was in these exhibitions that the Kulturhus seemed to continue the programme of Moderna Museet in the Hultén period. Culture here was presented as a complex phenomenon, as part of everyday material culture and as a field where visions of society found their expression. With exhibitions on the position of women in Western society (Kvinnfolk, 1975) and on the role of the media in modern consumer societies (Var och Undvara, 1978) the Kulturhus extended its scope far beyond what public galleries had conventionally addressed. In 1977 a large exhibition

277 Henrik Löfgren (ed.), De första trettio åren, Stockholm: Kulturförvaltningen, 2004
278 “Vi vill ha högt i tak”, Poppius Bladet, 13 April 1981
279 Kurt Bergengren, Aftonbladet, 15 May 1970
project attempted a critical overview of development of Swedish culture and society in the modern period. *Sverige i tiden* (Sweden over time) included smaller shows examining the relationship between technology and society (*teknik och sambände*), the role of movements for social reform on Swedish urban politics (*arbetslösa och stadens fädere*) or the function of design in establishing an egalitarian culture (*skönhet för alla*). These exhibitions were presented in a building part of which had assumed a place not only in the physical centre of Stockholm but that, as temporary parliament, also appeared as the stage set for national politics on the television screen and in illustrated magazines. As the anteroom of power, Sergels torg turned into a venue for political rallies and demonstrations, the Kulturhus appearing as a *décor* for whatever attracted media attention, whether protest against nuclear power, American imperial politics or homemade discontent. In this privileged position, the programme at the Kulturhus was by definition invested with a sense of importance. Whatever found its way onto the floors overlooking Sergels torg entered the cultural and political debates, dominated as they were by progressive leaders of public opinion.

The house thus not only realised some of the ideas which the programme statements of the late 1960s had formulated, it also fitted in with the direction formulated in the *Ny Kulturpolitik* (New Cultural Policy), which was set out in 1974. Indeed, it could be said that the Kulturhus, though its opening merely coincided with accepting the white paper as official state policy, singularly embodied the drift away from traditional bourgeois culture and its institutions towards less exclusive ones. The programme of performances at Kilen, which seems to have had an even more difficult start than the gallery, represented a similarly developed interest in exploring crossovers between political activism, education, entertainment, ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. Starting in 1973 Kilen was used as a venue for festivals of African music (1975) and progressive culture from Chile (1977), as well as a stage for experimental dance, theatre and music (*Trisha Brown Dance Company, 1979; Meredith Brown, 1980, Tadeusz Kantor (1979) or Wolf Biermann (in 1979 still a dissident singer-poet in the GDR) and a alternative festival of popular hits (*alternativt Schlagerfestival, 1975*). In 1979 the first new piece of music commissioned by the Kulturhuset, *Sisyfos sjunger* (*Sisiphus sings or Songs of Sisiphus*) by Svend Aagvist-Johannsen, was performed in Kilen.

The list of exhibitions and performances illustrates that the Kulturhus in the first decade of its existence succeeded in establishing itself as a new focus in Sweden’s cultural scene, attracting not only a large number of visitors, but also younger audiences than other institutions. In 1984 Anders Clåson noted that ‘the Kulturhus is the only real experiment where the ideas of 1974 and the New Cultural Policy have proved themselves. And survived.’
The Kulturhus as cultural experiment and as building

The complicated history of the genesis of the Kulturhus shows the building to have emerged as a corollary of a large urban redevelopment project, then as a focus of debates on a new role and definition of culture in a developed consumer society, subsequently as a project subjected to changing sets of political calculations and claims and finally as a building inviting both emotional attachment and sustained opposition. The conclusion to this examination of the Kulturhus addresses several aspects: the status of the initiative as a new type of cultural institution, the architectural proposal and the relevance of this precedent for contemporary debates on culture and society. The significance of the Kulturhus from the perspective of the development of cultural centres as responses to the debates on the role of culture and their effects on cultural politics (discussed in chapter 3) resides in the fact that the process of formulating its brief was, as I hope to have shown in the discussion of the various programmes devised for the building, intimately connected with this debate, as it developed in its particular form in 1960s Sweden.

That the most developed, most radical, perhaps most visionary version of this brief, the proposals of the expert group led by Pontus Hultén, failed to be adopted and that what was realised instead is a considerably diluted form of this concept does not, I would like to argue, diminish the historical importance of the attempt as such. Nor does this failure to realise the Kulturhus as a centre of experimenting with the core and the edges of what is covered by the term culture take away that the result of these debates is a building which has survived those who conceived it and which deserves to be judged on its architectural merits. This remains the case, even though, again, unsympathetic alterations made subsequent to the original completion have deprived the building, especially its interior, of many of its original features. The third aspect, that of the importance of the Kulturhus for a discussion of the role of culture in general, and the relevance of this experience for contemporary discussions about society and culture relates to the general argument of the thesis. I will return to this in the following chapter.

As a conclusion to this case study I will, however, formulate some points about how this examination of the Kulturhus – beyond being a study of a historical phenomenon resulting in a building of interest – might be useful for these current debates about the need for a common culture, about the value of experiences of collectivity, or about the need for public venues where the different constituencies living in cities like Stockholm are addressed. In order to avoid anticipating the general conclusions one can make after a study of the cultural centres in general and from the comparison of the two case studies, the observations will for the moment be limited to the situation in Stockholm and the reality of the Kulturhus as a building not only for the encounter with forms of cultural expression but also with people, a building in which the abstract notion of the civic society could become a concrete reality, and to some degree already has.

The Kulturhus as institutional experiment

When discussing the role of the Kulturhus within the context of the development of cultural institutions and curatorial concepts in the 1960s and in more general terms in the debates about the definition of culture, one has to face the reality of the very partial realisation of the original concept. The institutional form which was chosen by the Stockholm politicians in 1971 is not much different from numerous municipal cultural centres in Sweden and elsewhere. The provision of a gallery for temporary exhibitions combined with a reading room and a series of information facilities and selected shops did not in itself constitute a major innovation as far as cultural institutions were concerned. This needs to be said, even if many of the events and facilities in the building were set up to retain the direction from which the Kulturhus had originally been developed.

The position of the Kulturhus within a larger (recent) history of developing new institutional concepts for an increasingly unstable phenomenon – culture – becomes, however, a different one if one allows the documents of the expert group to be included in the examination. These texts, the statement of Hultén and his collaborators, and the institutional concept emerging from them, in my view establish the Kulturhus as a unique experiment that was both utopian and anticipated later developments in curatorial and arts practice.

The ideas of Hultén and his circle were not unique. As the study of the debate on the definition of culture shows, for example in the writings of Raymond Williams or the protagonists of the French Action Culturelle under André Malraux, Hultén was not alone in demanding an extended definition of what should be understood as culture. His experiments at Moderna Museet, however daring the may have been and viewed at the time, were certainly noteworthy. As we have seen, other museums like Willem Sandberg’s Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam were moving in a similar direction and the Fun Palace of Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price would have been an equally challenging institutional concept as the Kulturhus, had it been realised.

The singularity of the Kulturhus in the form that Hultén envisaged resides in the fact that here a statement about the role of culture in a developed consumer society of the welfare state type was linked to the claim that the redefinition entailed in it was to occupy a central position, both physically in the centre of a capital city and ideologically, as a necessary precondition for the following step in achieving a modern egalitarian Sweden. This concept, which drove Hultén’s experiments at Moderna Museet, is taken as the point of departure for writing the programme of this institution. Its formulation relies on a remarkable degree of confidence, but also on an analysis, however intuitively formulated, of the opportunities and limitations of cultural institutions addressing new audiences.

Hultén continued in this line as the director of the Centre Pompidou and is acknowledged as one of the main innovators of curatorial practice in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, it was with the statements...
for the Kulturhus and his direct involvement in the early stages of its architectural design, in the intimate collaboration with the architect Peter Celsing, that these ideas became elements of a larger, more consistent vision of the cultural institution as an incubator for a society of independent citizens capable of negotiating the diffuse challenges of consumer culture, of a culture related to political action.

Hultén’s definition of culture entailed a structural departure from what in the documents is generally referred to as ‘bourgeois culture’, defined by exclusivity and a lack of commitment to addressing social and political issues. In this, again, he was not alone: the analysis that cultural or creative production would need to be operating and be presented in ways that could be understood by audiences not accustomed to visiting a museum or a theatre permeates the whole discourse on the role of culture in post-war society and cultural policy, from Gaullist France to Jenny Lee’s Policy for the Arts of 1965 and the Swedish New Cultural Policies of 1973.

Hultén’s own success in drawing new (and younger) audiences into Moderna Museet, and his ability to capture the attention of national public opinion over a sustained period, however, showed in concrete terms, for everyone to see, what this concept of cultural production as a form of directly intervening in larger debates – cultural, educational and political – and in everyday arrangements would mean. This is reflected in his status as a public figure in Sweden in the 1960s and allowed him to put the Kulturhus on the agenda as something of a national project, the next step in the comprehensive democratisation of society.

Having said this, a close reading of the statements of Hultén and the expert group also reveals a set of unresolved questions. Some of these were pragmatic and concerned the problem of how to allow an institution like the Kulturhus to work effectively without putting in place the mechanisms of control generally found in institutional buildings or the public sphere in general. What was to happen if the users or collaborators seriously challenged the absence of authority and control? The expert group’s statement was notably unclear about this, and reading the documents one cannot help thinking that Hultén himself did not really envisage the possibility of offences of public order. The politician asking questions about this may have had undisclosed motives, but demanding an answer was not entirely unjustified. The problems with drugs traders just outside the building in the 1970s and 1980s, to some degree proved them right and one is led to suspect that the experts’ demand that the Kulturhus should not be policed was informed by a naïve view of the society which was invited to adopt the building as its living room.

The second set of questions is more fundamental and relates directly to the definition of culture itself. As the reading of Hultén’s articles and the experts’ statements shows, the apparently open definition of culture was in reality more limited than the tone of the documents suggested. All the examples given for new forms of cultural expression – the French films, exhibitions of Constructivist and Pop Art, atonal music or political theatre performances – were perhaps new and experimental: popular culture they were not. Despite the repeatedly stated claim that the Kulturhus was to
Sergels torg and the Kulturhus (2001)
Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Stockholm, Kulturhus (2006)
Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Kulturhus
(2006)
Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Kulturhus (2008)
Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Kulturhus, Stadsteater (2008)
Christoph Grafe

People’s Palaces

Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Kulturhus (2008)
Stockholms Kulturhus

A department store for a new man

Kulturhus
(2008)
address the youth, those who were not addressed by either traditional bourgeois cultural institutions or the organised popular movements, ‘those who stand outside’, the criteria for what would be allowed in the building were not stated. Who would act as arbiter of whether a particular form of expression had a place in the Kulturhus or not?

Hultén did not answer this question and one can only guess about the possible boundaries by reading between the lines of the statements. If one does, the museum director’s deep – and entirely understandable – unease about the limiting effects of the products of the cultural industry, its commercialism favouring banality and the affirmation of existing social arrangements, comes through the documents about how culture was supposed to help people find their own creative impulses. In this view Hultén was not alone. As Claes Arvidsson has observed, a common distrust in the destructive effects of commercialism was common to most cultural commentators and politicians in Sweden at the time and united the New Left with its ‘bourgeois’ adversaries. The emphasis on the importance of a permanent art collection, which is reiterated in many of Hultén’s statements is revealing in this light. The rejection of an educational or didactic approach, which positions Hultén near the agenda of the French Action Culturelle under Malraux and in opposition to the natural impulses of the Swedish Social Democrats, could be attacked as implicitly elitist, exactly because they were not clearly formulated. The consequence of this gap in the argumentation of Hultén and the expert statements became visible when the city council of Stockholm claimed part of the building for its information department and a variety of other organisations made their respective claims.

I would suggest that the fact that Hultén operated from a set of assumptions about what cultural experiment entailed, only some of which he disclosed, increased the vulnerability of his project. Initially the opponents of the Kulturhus had been representatives of ‘bourgeois culture’ (mostly newspaper critics) and their political allies, and these Hultén was able to fend off, possibly also because he knew himself supported by influential politicians like Palme and the progressive cultural establishment. The observation of one newspaper critic, Bengt Olvang, that in 1964 or 1965 Hultén ‘had the initiative in the cultural debate’ and had lost it by the end of the decade, confirms this. As opposition to the ways in which culture was provided for, and following which agenda it was provided at all, became more radical, Hultén found himself attacked from both the Left and and Right.

The observation, in the interview with Obrist, that after 1968 the cultural climate in Sweden was ‘a sad mixture of conservatism and fishy leftist ideologies’ leaving museums vulnerable, points to the fact that, despite the claims to a greater openness, Hultén essentially relied on the role traditionally bestowed on cultural institutions and the mechanisms of bourgeois culture the exhibitions professed to question. Bergengren, with his fine sense of humour, pointed to this when noting that in spite of Hultén’s definition of art as a latent attack on the established order, the complete overhaul of the social arrangements seems never to have been imminent nor seriously intended.
Instead, Moderna Museet had established intimate relationships with the cultural and economic elite, connections on which both the museum and its director relied throughout the entire decade, and also when the relocation to Sergels torg and the installation of the Kulturhus were presented as a full departure from the tradition of the museum as an exclusive institution. Hultén, in other words, operated firmly within the ideological framework of the modern avant-gardes, supporting revolutionary change while allowing themselves to be gradually absorbed into the cultural industry and the arts market. In the latter he had proved himself as a knowing and prescient player and it was this capacity on which his authority was to a large extent based. How exactly the concept of the Kulturhus would have fitted into this system, however, remained largely undiscussed and unresolved.

The Kulturhus as a building

The contradictions inherent in Hultén’s position can be found also in Peter Celsing’s ideas for the project. In his case they seemed to be even more obvious. Looking at his upbringing and portfolio Celsing appears an unlikely architect for this project that was intended to challenge exactly the culture he could be seen to represent. On the other hand we find recurrent statements of a desire for a society of the ‘new man’ and Celsing’s collaborator Jan Henriksson noted specifically that the architect was sincerely and deeply engaged with the young people who had protested with (some mild) violence against the absence of proper venues for youth culture in the centre of the city.

Celsing’s own statements and the sketches (made at a time when Hultén was no longer involved in the project) testify to a catholic attitude towards culture, including some of its popular, banal and commercial aspects. In these sketches the architect shows the building as full of activities that tested the boundaries of cultural institutions. Celsing, communicating in images rather than words, seems to have been prepared to go further than Hultén, who as we have seen had protested with (some mild) violence against the absence of proper venues for youth culture in the centre of the city.

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Since Wang does not give a source for this statement, it is impossible to judge whether it is an apt description of Celsing’s attitudes towards Swedish society or one based on the interpretation of his buildings. The interviews with Celsing published while the Kulturhus was under construction suggest the opposite. They imply a fairly active affirmation of social change. On the other hand, at any time in his career, also during the period in which he was intimately involved in the realising what others saw as the flagship of Sweden’s ‘red colouring’ Celsing remained a polite, urbane and competent partner for his clients, including notably the board of directors of the Riksbank, which was part of the larger project on Sergels torg.

This attitude was probably – one might say naturally, were it not for the polarised climate in Sweden in this period – part of the professional ethos of an architect working from ‘artistic ideas as point of departure’, as Jan Henriksson put it.

In other words: for the architect Celsing, whose relations with clients were often based on personal friendship, the natural position was an un-political one, even if the project he was engaged in was fraught with political associations. The result of Celsing’s effort is a building, about which the architect himself has said little beyond the article Struktur für Kultur discussed earlier and what he said to journalists. Celsing was not a writer. It is therefore the building itself, even in its much altered form, which one has to look to when trying to assess the significance of the architectural proposal.

The architectural qualities of the Kulturhus, I would suggest, can be discussed along three lines. First it provided a particular solution to a perennial problem of urban planning, the possible termination of the north-south axis created in the nineteenth century and the 1930s, and to the development of a large-scale commercial centre in the 1950s. Second the solution of arranging the programme on a series of shallow, long floors, and the location of the theatre in separate volume (a shrewd decision allowing the use for the temporary parliament) o...
Kulturhus the involvement of public committees ‘influenced the development of working methods in Celsing’s office that placed pressures on his typically artisanal approach’. One can have doubts about this reading of Celsing as an artisanal architect, a kind of failed Gunnar Asplund. In his precise and insightful analysis of the approaches of Celsing’s teacher Sven-Ivar Lind, the Ahlén brothers and Celsing, Johan Örn suggests the contrary. In his view all three, despite their being indebted to Asplund, used standard building components voluntarily and explicitly, not out of a sense of necessity, but from an interest in the ‘commonsplace’ culture of industrial post-war society. In the Kulturhus Celsing replaced the reliance on the expressive qualities of traditional building techniques, notably brick masonry, which he and Lewerentz had developed, with a tactical and, I would argue, effective use of advanced construction techniques and building materials. In the following I will pursue these three lines of analysis.

The urbanistic proposal

Urbanistically the solution to place a long, tall wall on the south side of Sergels torg was a suitable gesture, since it one and for all put an end to the idée fixe that somehow Stockholm was incomplete without its continuous north–south axis. The proposal, with its origins in a sketch of Jean de la Vallée made in the seventeenth century, was one of those ideas that, once uttered, start leading a life of their own. Extending the axis south would have destroyed what still remained of the eighteenth and nineteenth century fabric of this part of inner Stockholm. That this happened anyway is perhaps more than a sad footnote, but it can be concluded that Celsing’s solution would have offered an opportunity to retain this area of the city, for everyone to pull themselves together, as Sigurd Lewerentz had suggested. The wall solution, from this perspective was not only adequate, it constituted also a major act of resistance to the deeply engrained disdain for the existing city, among city planners and politicians like Hjalmar Mehr, as well as among architects. Against the veiled and outspoken support for the alternative EGT proposal to ‘open up’ the city towards the water, Celsing defied his colleagues and rejected the idea of the healthy city with unblocked arteries, a trope of Beaux-Arts and modern planning unconsciously lingering on in the debate.[299]

Programme: Typology, Spatial redundancy and Flexibility

The decision to divide the programme into three separate volumes was a direct consequence of the urbanistic proposal. For the exhibition floors, or the Kulturhus proper which Celsing and Hultén envisaged as Moderna Museet in a new, non-institutional form, this solution was extremely problematic. Critics from the arts pointed to this at the time[300] and curators or exhibition designers have to be inventive to create visual silence and concentration if the work on display require such an environment. In this, incidentally, the Kulturhus resembles Lina Bo Bardi’s Sao Paulo museum, where the original solution for mounting paintings on panels suspended from the ceiling by rods has also been left. In both buildings the solution to the problem, as critics predicted for Stockholm, has been to insert temporary white walls, thereby undermining the intended effect of the visual relationships with the outside world. In the Kulturhus the position of elevators, in 1958, in the middle of the main floors also reduced the available floor area very seriously.

Why then did Hultén agree with this solution? One explanation may be that he followed the opinion of his mentor Willem Sandberg, who had advocated side lighting as ideal for a museum of contemporary art and had brought this into practice in the new wing for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[301] There may, however, be another reason. As the examination of the exhibition programme of Moderna Museet in the period preceding the design of the Kulturhus has shown, the museum’s experiments rarely focussed on merely showing works of art as such. The ‘documentary’ approach, as Obrist calls it, of thematic exhibitions with often spectacular designs – the painted woman which the visitor queued to enter, for example – may have given him reason for supporting Celsing’s solution for the arrangement of the exhibition floors. In this light the typological solution would still most suitable be for the type of documentary approach that Moderna Museet pioneered in the early 1960s.

In Struktur för Kultur Celsing described the Kulturhus as ‘flexible and adaptable for new situations’.[302] The association of the term flexibility with situations that could not be foreseen by an architect or a patron at the time that a building was designed plays a prominent role in the architectural discourse of the 1960s. As Adrian Forty has argued the term ‘offered hope of redeeming functionalism from determinist excess by introducing time, and the unknown’.[303] Forty quotes Walter Gropius, who had stated in 1954 that buildings should be ‘receptables for the flow of life which they have to serve’ and a ‘background fit to absorb the dynamic features of our modern life’. [304]

Programme: Typology, Spatial redundancy and Flexibility

The decision to divide the programme into three separate volumes was a direct consequence of the urbanistic proposal. For the exhibition floors, or the Kulturhus proper which Celsing and Hultén envisaged as Moderna Museet in a new, non-institutional form, this solution was extremely problematic. Critics from the arts pointed to this at the time[300] and curators or exhibition designers have to be inventive to create visual silence and concentration if the work on display require such an environment. In this, incidentally, the Kulturhus resembles Lina Bo Bardi’s Sao Paulo museum, where the original solution for mounting paintings on panels suspended from the ceiling by rods has also been left. In both buildings the solution to the problem, as critics predicted for Stockholm, has been to insert temporary white walls, thereby undermining the intended effect of the visual relationships with the outside world. In the Kulturhus the position of elevators, in 1958, in the middle of the main floors also reduced the available floor area very seriously.

Why then did Hultén agree with this solution? One explanation may be that he followed the opinion of his mentor Willem Sandberg, who had advocated side lighting as ideal for a museum of contemporary art and had brought this into practice in the new wing for the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.[301] There may, however, be another reason. As the examination of the exhibition programme of Moderna Museet in the period preceding the design of the Kulturhus has shown, the museum’s experiments rarely focussed on merely showing works of art as such. The ‘documentary’ approach, as Obrist calls it, of thematic exhibitions with often spectacular designs – the painted woman which the visitor queued to enter, for example – may have given him reason for supporting Celsing’s solution for the arrangement of the exhibition floors. In this light the typological solution would still most suitable be for the type of documentary approach that Moderna Museet pioneered in the early 1960s.

In Struktur för Kultur Celsing described the Kulturhus as ‘flexible and adaptable for new situations’.[302] The association of the term flexibility with situations that could not be foreseen by an architect or a patron at the time that a building was designed plays a prominent role in the architectural discourse of the 1960s. As Adrian Forty has argued the term ‘offered hope of redeeming functionalism from determinist excess by introducing time, and the unknown’.[303] Forty quotes Walter Gropius, who had stated in 1954 that buildings should be ‘receptables for the flow of life which they have to serve’ and a ‘background fit to absorb the dynamic features of our modern life’. [304]

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If these are given decent proportions of dimensions in relation to each other, a warp emerges. The passion in this project lies in giving a form, in which life can change over time.

Celsing adds: ‘But with recognisable warp I also mean that the different parts of the city should be given different characters.

It is not entirely clear to me whether Celsing here proposed the idea of an object that leaves a strong imprint on its surroundings, or an essentially open-ended thing, a thread, that is designed to connect to other lines or channels in the city. Perhaps the ambiguity was intended: it suggested a search for buildings as geometrically defined, finite, data, yet it was also open for an interpretation of the city as an open structure. Celsing’s recurring references to the city as a collection of ‘power stations, traffic, people’ seems to support this understanding, but the architectural conception of the Kulturhus and other projects designed around the same time, particularly the Filmhus, seems to imply something different.

The structuralist proposals submitted by other architects for the Kulturhus competition directly reflected a concern for translating the programme into a seemingly open, unspecific layout based on a module that could be repeated to fill the site. Celsing’s design, by contrast implied something significantly different. Rather than subdividing the programme and reorganising it in clusters, his building was a series of formally defined objects. The flexibility offered by this arrangement was not the result of a rejection of form in favour of serving temporary arrangements, but of the permanence and geometric simplicity. Each of the three parts of the design – the courtyard building, the large central hall and the open standard floors of the Kulturhus modelled on the modern department store – had an existing architectural convention as its origin. This layout went along with monumentalising the defining spatial features such as the long wall and the perimeter of the hall, and the allowance of a degree of tolerance in the central spaces.

In his discussion of the appearance of the term flexibility in the post-war architectural discourse Adrian Forty distinguishes three strategies to achieve this aim in architecture: Redundancy, Flexibility by Technical Means and Flexibility as a Political Strategy. The statements of Hultén and his expert group suggested the third: the building was to be ‘appropriated’, to apply the term used by Henri Lefebvre, its use implying acts that could be seen as political and a critique of the dominant forces in the city. The provision of a series of large floors to be divided by temporary equipment might be seen as an application of flexibility through technical means. Ultimately, however, the conception of the Kulturhus relied on its realisation as a building that was large enough to absorb a variety of uses. This was most evident in the re-use of the theatre building, which could be re-designed to accommodate the parliament, simply because it was big enough, or possibly too big, for its intended use. This spatial redundancy which, as Forty points out is ‘a characteristic of many pre-modern buildings’, seems to be more important for Celsing’s interpretation of flexibility than the technical equipment for dividing or rearranging the interior spaces.

The association of Celsing’s gesture – the long wall – with Nicodemus Tessin’s north façade of the royal palace has been made. Both buildings effectively respond to each other in marking a barrier in east west direction.
In this light the Kulturhus could be seen to demonstrate the autonomy of form beyond function, or perhaps better before function. As has been observed by both Caldenby and Wang, this approach is surprisingly similar to what Aldo Rossi seemed to advocate in the book L’architettura della città, published in 1966. Using the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua as an example, a building not dissimilar in its functional organisation, form and position on a square to the Kulturhus, Rossi observed the ‘multiplicity of functions that a building of this type can contain over time and how these functions are entirely independent of the form’.131

In the introduction to the Portuguese edition of the book, published in 1977 but written in 1971, Rossi formulated this more succinctly: ‘the presence of form, of architecture, predominates over questions of functional organisation’.136 This strategy of establishing form, as response to the urban context of the building, its geological and morphological history, was exactly what Celsing had done in Stockholm. Besides this, his insistence on the effect of the build object on the character of its surroundings, and the character buildings could generate for different parts of a city resonates with similar observations by Rossi, who wrote: ‘... the city is seen as a whole constituted of many pieces complete in themselves, and the distinctive characteristic of each city, and thus of the urban aesthetic, is the dynamic that is created between its different areas and elements and among its parts.’138

Materiality and cultural expression: Critique of ‘modernism’?
Celsing’s use of materials stemmed from different and contrasting architectural traditions. It included late Corbusian elements in the use of exposed concrete, references to American industrial objects in the steel panels, National Romanticism’s rusticated basalt stones and copper on the adjacent national bank. This variety testifies to a highly developed and, at the same time, independent approach to architecture as a language of representation and as physical construction. None of the materials, none of the often theatrical interior effects constitutes an isolated event, nor does the entire ensemble appear as an eclectic catalogue of architectural solutions. Rather, it seems, Celsing’s project is informed by an interest in employing an enlarged repertoire in a search for layered architectural meaning and a synthesis of apparently contradicting gestures.

There is no evidence that the Swedish architect was more acquainted with Robert Venturi’s book Complexity and Contradiction (which also appeared in 1966)137 than he was with Rossi’s book. The natural reference, apparent in Celsing’s own writings but more so in the anecdotal evidence of his collaborators, to the urban architecture of Italy seems to justify a comparison and the liberal use of historical references in the design for the Villa at Drottningholm explicitly invites it. Both Wang and Caldenby refer to the architectural programme of Venturi in their discussions of Celsing’s work in the late 1960s, without, however, providing evidence for a possible direct influence.138

Although the author does not mention Complexity and Contradiction, it is an article by Ulf Linde published in the first monograph from 1980 that offers a reading of Celsing’s buildings, and particularly the Kulturhus, which has something in common with Venturi’s writings. The article is a discussion of Celsing’s façades.139 Linde, an art critic and gallery director, whose book Spejare marked the beginnings of the cultural debate in the early 1960s,140 opens with the statement about the reduced importance of the meaning of façades in late twentieth century architecture: ‘when all particularities have been well arranged to their function, the façade usually produced itself, as a by-product generated without motive’.132 Celsing, the author suggests, was aware of the essential function of façades, not as carriers of meaning through the use of decoration or other applied signs, but through their capacity to contain narratives. These narratives were not necessarily those of the grand history of architecture, they could also relate how some building material had arrived at a particular site, how it had been put together and how it was given a new meaning through in its context. The fashion in which this was done, rather than displayed, was not didactic. It implied a subtle balance between seeking contrast and enforcing unity, like the ‘almost identical colour, the almost identical quality, form ...’ of wet and dry sand in a heap.133

Linde quotes Celsing who had emphasised that ‘memory and association contribute to the metaphysical content of space’, and illustrates this by pointing to architectural operations in the work of Celsing: the pier between two bell holes in the tower at Härlanda Church, both separating them and yet being absorbed in the aperture; the vertical seams between the glass panes in the façade of the Kulturhus, which are ‘so articulated and insistent’ that they almost cease being seams and become mullions; the series of strongly accentuated concrete walls on the rooftop, also in the Kulturhus, which compresses the façade and lends it monumentality. Linde compares it with the way that Michelangelo introduced a heavy cornice to define the scale of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome.

The use of proportion to create this compression, or concentration as Celsing described it, is accompanied by employing materials addressing the viewer through their specific physicality and through their cultural connotations. Linde mentions the marble doorframe of the lifts in the Kulturhus, set in between the stainless steel lift doors and the rough concrete surface of the walls. ‘An aesthetising perversion from a functional point of view ... But then it occurred to me that the marble perhaps and for all this “functioned” – it protected the edge of the concrete although it is more brittle than concrete, but through a kind of psychological persuasion’.134 According to Linde, Celsing showed himself in these examples as an architector, while being formed by the tradition of functionalism and retaining a belief in its validity, went far beyond the underlying ideas on honesty to material and functional expression. His response, Linde suggests, is one not of ‘either-or’, but one that synthesises disparate elements into a composition, and through this process requires the beholder to take notice of his or her surroundings without crying for attention.135 Wilfried Wang has argued that ‘Celsing’s work was occupied with a critique of mythologised modern architecture’.136 If there was such
a project of critique, it was most certainly not one that was revealed in writings or speeches, in which Celsing invariably put himself in a modern tradition, with extensive reference to the work of Le Corbusier. Neither is the connection with the explicit critique of modern architecture, which was voiced in Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction* all that obvious. Yet, as Linde’s perceptive analysis of Celsing’s work shows, there are certain resonances in the particular synthesis of architectural gestures employed in the Kulturhus and the ‘both-and’ strategy advocated by Venturi.236 When compared with the production of other architects in this period, which Charles Jencks was to describe as ‘Late-Modernism’237, the enjoyment and playful use of proportion and contrasts in materials lends this building a distinct position. Above all, however, the Kulturhus is the work of a mature architect relying on a sense of traditions, classical and modern, and his own confident judgement.

Turks playing chess in a laboratory for experimental culture – what the Kulturhus could be for contemporary Stockholm

It may be interesting to compare the Kulturhus in Stockholm with the Parisian Centre Pompidou, which was opened three years after the final inauguration of the house on Sergels torg, Pontus Hultén operating as its first director, and from where delegations were sent to Sweden to examine the precedent.238 The link is established also in literature on the Centre Pompidou itself, Bernadette Dufrêne as the ‘prefiguration of Beaubourg’.239 In his essay on Celsing, Wilfried Wang includes a comparison between the two cultural centres, which in his assessment is to the disadvantage of the Stockholm building. The Kulturhus, Wang writes, ‘lacked the initiating and sustaining energy, so evident in the French counterpart, that might have consolidated its international cultural importance …’.240 Wang specifically noted the absences in the Kulturhus of the ‘panem-et-circensis strategy’ which had made the project of Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers in Paris into an instant success with the international press and the tourist industry. ‘The cultural centre (Kulturhus) is unable to project the corollary Piscator-like multiplicity of events’241 and in daylight the large glass wall hides rather than exposes what is happening inside.

Wang may not be incorrect in his observation about the absence of the visual effect of transparency as it had been intended by the architect and his refusal to dramatise the circulation around the building. Nor is Wang alone in this judgement: the architectural critic Peder Alton described the circulation as ‘a catastrophe from the beginning’.242 Wang’s assessment ignores, however, the very different circumstances of the genesis of the two buildings and their institutional realities. In contrast to the Centre Pompidou, the Kulturhus, after all, had been conceived as a cultural centre for Stockholm, and one that was to be locally embedded and paid for. The very essence of the institutional concept of the Kulturhus, that of a ‘cultural living room’ for the city, sets it apart from the intentions and the operations of the Centre Pompidou as a national institution attracting hundreds of thousands of foreign tourists each year and exporting exhibitions or events across the globe.243 Both the intentions and the scope of the Kulturhus were of different nature from the outset. Even in Hultén’s vision, and with Moderna Museet being absorbed in the Kulturhus, the building was presented as a focus for a local and national audience, perhaps as a laboratory for social change in Sweden, or as a showroom for the achievements of the country, but not as the monument to the modernity of (French) culture or as a tourist destination like the Centre Pompidou.244

This role of the Kulturhus, and its essentially municipal context, was perhaps what Kurt Bengtsgren had in mind when he feared it would end up as a ‘tenement building for culture’.245 The examination of the period during which a programme for the newly realised building was considered and the various attempts at increasing the impact of local, and essentially institutionalised initiatives shows that the concept of a cultural centre engaging with a local context is not necessarily without problems. As an institution, which, as Stockholm politicians keep demanding, addresses local citizens and allows them to view the building as genuinely theirs,246 the Kulturhus has often had to negotiate different requirements and expectations. As the episode of the introduction of escalators illustrates, these requirements are at times contradictory: while facilitating access and perhaps making the use of the building easier for the occasional visitor moving across the floors like browsing in a catalogue, it has essentially broken the exhibition floors into small units unsuitable for any larger and more complex presentation.

The role of the Kulturhus as a department store for culture, or as its director Uwe Bødewadt wrote in a brochure in 2006, as ‘the Seven Eleven of culture’,247 may have seemed new, ‘progressive’ or even ‘revolutionary’ in the late 1960s. Against the background of an almost total instrumentalisation of cultural production for either social engineering or city branding or making a city available for the tourist industries – or all of them together – the concept has rather lost its critical meaning as an

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236 Venturi (1966), p. 30-38
238 Conversations of the author with Uwe Badeward, Henrik Lidgren and Elizabeth Wenman, Kulturhuset, 6/7 November 2006
240 Wang (1996), p. 64
241 note 18
242 Statements about the local function of architecture are used in the many brochures and newspaper articles. The emphasis on the character of the institution as belonging to Stockholmers and therefore should be open to local associations was possibly strongest in the 1980s. In his foreword to the publication
243 ‘Seven-Eleven’ is a chain of 24-hour convenience shops spread across Stockholm. Uwe Bødewadt, ‘Kulturhuset – Kulturtidningen 71/2006
244 People’s Palaces
attack on the bastions of exclusive bourgeois culture. Culture in this view has a function of making ‘cities and regions attractive’, as the annual cultural report of Stockholm put it in 2006—rather than helping human beings to develop their creative or critical capacities. Already in 1961, in Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, Jürgen Habermas noted the erosion of the cultural self-definition of the well-trained middle classes in a mass society—the death of the Bildungsbürger.

A survey commissioned by the Kulturhus and carried out in the spring of 2006 seems to confirm this view of culture as something that may be taken in, enjoyed and consumed without commitment. The report formulated its overriding question as: ‘how can we encourage people “to consume more culture.”’ This formulation might be taken to suggest that the question, which drove Hultén when proposing the institution and Celsing in his design, namely how the encounter with creative production might contribute to social and cultural changes, seems no longer to be asked, neither by the politicians, nor by the critics and perhaps not even by the ‘cultural workers’.

The survey of the audience’s attitudes, too, could be interpreted along these lines. One of the interviewees describes the Kulturhus as ‘one of my fixed points in Stockholm’, together with the nearby food court at Hötorget, the exhibitions being the ‘cream on the mash’. The motivations for paying the Kulturhus a visit seem occasionally to be slight: ‘There is often no particular reason for coming here, but one walks in and has cup of coffee or has a look what is on offer’ and a large percentage of users of the building cannot remember the last exhibition they have seen.

In some remarks the Kulturhus is depicted as the cultural equivalent of an Ikea store where the children feel at home and enjoy themselves for a few hours.

The success of the building with a younger audience, when compared with older institutions like the National Museum, Dramaten or the Stadsteater, is also a mixed one. Up to 46% of the younger visitors interviewed for the survey answered that for them it was the cafes and restaurants, which made the Kulturhus into a useful destination. The habitus of the chess tables, many of them in their fifties and sixties with an immigrant background and coming in from the suburbs to meet their friends, rarely enter an exhibition, let alone attend a performance.

By contrast, the audiences of the Stadsteater, which was reopened in 1999 after a thorough refurbishment by Celsing’s former collaborator Per Ahlbom, appear to correspond with those of other theatres in Stockholm and elsewhere. On average older, presumably wealthier than the visitors of the exhibitions or the café, they seem to be reasonably similar to those of, for example, Dramaten, even if the repertoire ranging from musicals to classical or modern drama is, perhaps, more varied than both the subsidised theatre with a royal status and the private stages offering predominantly popular entertainment respectively.

From the survey carried out in 2006 it would appear that the idea of the Kulturhus as a building addressing different constituencies and social segments of Stockholm society is predominantly one of leading separate lives in one set of spaces at one address. This may be a limited proposal, but on the other hand many of the remarks of the interviewees also suggest that the visitors, who are generally very positive about the Kulturhus, also feel an extraordinarily strong sense of ownership of the building. It is this understanding, of a building that is genuinely open to all, without difference and without judgement, which is the greatest potential of the institution and the building. This proposal is not without problems; the exhibition guards note that the spaces attract visitors who come to drink, have a nap or even engage in sexual activities, rather than watching the displays. Yet, despite or because of all these forms of behaviour not generally associated with visiting an art building, the Kulturhus encourages its visitors to explore unknown areas of culture. This is clearly supported by the survey, which shows that many of the visitors, when explicitly prompted, remember that they have, in fact, visited parts of the building and seen exhibitions which they had not intended to take in.

More than thirty years after being opened and after its chequered history, the Kulturhus still is as much a cultural living room as a cultural institution. Celsing’s and Hultén’s interpretation of this term may have been different when they first coined it. Despite the internal contradictions of its concept and in spite of various political pressures, the building has sustained this role. If the Kulturhus can claim a unique status, this may well be exactly because of its capacity of offering a place for people, who would otherwise not enter a cultural institution. As one five-year-old interviewee said when being interviewed by the newspaper Dagens Nyheter on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the building: ‘When we came to Sweden we could not afford to go to a café and took our food with us’, adding that it was a matter of self-evidence to come to the Kulturhus, a ‘fantastic, wonderful house’, ‘where so many different things happen’.

From this perspective, the Kulturhus seems a successful example for the ‘interaction between different cultural tradi- tions’, responding to the ‘intention to encourage all publicly financed cultural institutions … to reflect and incorporate the ethnic and cultural diversity that you find in Sweden today’, which the official cultural report published by the city of Stockholm emphasised.
All of this can be attacked as a hopeful declaration of intent, and criticised as yet another instrumentalisation of cultural facilities as part of a programme of social engineering. The reference to the redeeming potential of culture in the cultural report represents a type of bureaucratic literature, in which the arts and other forms of creative activity are invested with considerable capacities to transform societies. This tenet, one which in various forms has informed cultural policies from their very beginnings in philanthropic activities in the nineteenth century, is rarely tested and may not survive a critical scrutiny.356 Today, as the authors of study of cultural and social segregation at the Royal Polytechnic School KTH have noted, ‘celebrations of cultural variety and ethnic diversity seem to be the rule rather than the exception in surveys of the post-modern city.’356

The fact that the Kulturhus is visited by almost three million people each year, compared to the just over five million visitors to the Centre Pompidou in Paris – a city region five times as big as that of Stockholm – makes clear that the building provides a destination of considerable importance within the city. Although the statistical data give only superficial information on the social and cultural backgrounds of the visitors,355 and despite the anecdotal character of surveys and newspaper articles, it is obvious from any visit to the building that the range of people attracted by it is extraordinary. Situated near the Central Station and all major department stores, banks and shops, the Kulturhus is something of a prime place of arrival for many of the inhabitants of the outskirts with their extensive social housing estates, who occasionally form tribal associations defined by underground lines into the city.354

The Kulturhus draws together audiences from a city which, as the KTH researchers state, ‘has long pursued a social welfare policy emphasising justice, solidarity, and equity’ and has, at the same time, witnessed an increasing segregation of its population.355 As the traditional city core of Stockholm has become inaccessible as a living environment for most of the exclusive playground and living environment of the affluent middle class, the Kulturhus has retained its status as social focus for inhabitants of the ring of satellite towns.356 This is, I argue by means of conclusion, the greatest capital of the Kulturhus: as an institution it does not change any of the conditions which are reflected in the separation of different cultural groups across the city. It appears, however, to achieve temporary coexistences, however loosely, of parallel cultures, who by the mere fact that they are represented in a confined space, will have to acknowledge each other’s existence. From this perspective it could be seen as an example for those ‘other spaces’ described by Michel Foucault, ‘… which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realised utopia, in which all real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned …’.357

The politician Hjalmar Mehr saw the Kulturhus as the crown completing his life work, the modern re-planning of Stockholm. For him the building was a monument to the collective ideal of a society, as well as a laboratory for experimentation. Ironically, and despite misgivings about the ruthless destruction of some of the most varied nineteenth century quarters of the city, it is exactly the fact that the Kulturhus represents the ‘anti-nostalgic’ ideas of the ‘suspect cosmopolitan’ Mehr, but also the anarchistic belief in creativity of its originator Pontus Hultén and ‘the feeling for traditions’ of its architect Peter Celsing, that it can be the ‘other space’ in a city that is in danger of turning into the exclusive playground and living environment of the affluent middle class. The Kulturhus is a department store. Its commodities are things that are valuable, and vulnerable.
Chapter 7

Conclusions

Two European buildings and welfare state culture
In the detailed histories of the two cultural centres in London and Stockholm it has been shown how different impulses, from the redevelopment of an inner city area to a variety of divergent and occasionally incompatible ideas about the role of culture as an agent for moral improvement, self-expression and social critique, affected the initiatives, the definition of the programme and the architectural designs. In both cities there was a complicated relationship between politicians and arts administrators, planners and architects, and the artists who used the buildings for their exhibitions or performances. Each centre was also shown to be the product of particular architectural cultures and personalities operating within them. Yet, however significant the effect of local circumstances and the two national contexts may have been, both buildings have a shared origin in being conceived as part of the systems of state-sponsored cultural provision that were established as part of the post-war welfare states in Britain and Sweden. Although these systems evolved from the particular local political and cultural constellations of each country, the examination of the cultural policies and the calculations or attitudes that informed them shows similarities in the directions which these policies took after 1945 and into the 1960s. A comparative analysis of both buildings, I would argue, is possible and illuminating.

The combined histories of the South Bank and the Kulturhus roughly cover three decades after 1945. This time span not only corresponds with the period during which the post-war welfare state was established and reached its apotheosis in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It also coincides with a period of almost continuous economic growth, even if this expansion was less marked in Britain than in most north-west European countries including Sweden. With some caution this period can be described as relatively continuous, its social arrangements and cultural tendencies having been established after World War II, even if they had been to some degree been prepared during the 1930s and in Britain relied on the centralised planning of the war economy. Against the background of the gradual improvement of economic circumstances, in real terms or in the perception of large sectors of the population, the agenda of the dominant forces in Sweden and Britain and its proposal of a gradual increase in social equality in exchange for stable relations between capital and labour provided the context for state initiatives in the field of culture. This consensus – fragile, fabricated or even ‘anxious’ though it may have been – affected the cultural debates that materialised in the cultural centres and their institutional concepts. Its effect are also tangible in the architectural propositions, the designers being either literally part of the apparatus of state planning (the London County Council’s architect’s department) or explicitly aligning themselves with the collective agenda (as could be said about Peter Celsing).

Comparing the two initiatives implies situating them, firstly, in the trajectory of post-war cultural discourses and policies and, secondly, in the context of the revisions of modern architecture that characterised, in different ways, architectural cultures across Western Europe after 1945.
7.1 Consensus, crisis and radical critique: three moments

The initiatives for the building campaigns in London and Stockholm can be dated, with some precision, to 1948–50, 1958–60 and 1966–68. Taking account of the disjunctions between the political and cultural debates in the two countries, it is still possible, as the study of these debates has shown, to identify these three moments and representing periods of transitions within the longer history of welfare state provision of culture. Both in Sweden and Britain cultural policies in the immediate post-war years relied on the assumption that it was the task of an enlightened state to provide culture. The definition of this term as ‘cultural heritage’, for example in the 1945 election manifesto of the British Labour Party but similarly framed in Sweden, implied that this operation was primarily concerned with access to a quite strictly circumscribed part of cultural production. Being confronted with outstanding works of art would not only help the individual to develop and possibly elevate him– or herself. Access to the canonised cultural heritage, a privilege now made accessible to a largely increased section of the population, was also framed within the process of establishing or renewing the bond between the state and its citizens. The ‘democratisation’ of access to culture, and the elimination of its status as a privilege of the leisure class, perhaps necessarily implied an emphasis on excellence. After all, the gift of the enlightened state to its citizens would only retain its value, so long as it did not present a diluted form of the great cultural tradition. At the South Bank the connection of a concert hall devoted to classical music with a gratuitously large public lobby and an almost Baroque spatiality was essential in giving credibility to the claim that a formerly exclusive culture was now no longer a privilege, but an entitlement.

A questioning of the cultural tradition, or an active critical participation was not intended. Under the surface there may have remained unresolved tensions between the advocates of artistic excellence – ‘few, but roses’ as the British Arts Council described it – and those who regarded culture as an agent of empowering the deprived working class. In consequence, the vision of the Festival Hall as a large festive container for forms of established culture and a public monument – an ‘acropolis’ of the welfare state in the vision of the London County Council’s architect Robert Matthew – is a formidable and engaging illustration of the objective of cultural policy to increase access to the ‘fine arts’. At this stage, and well into the 1950s, the distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures and the assumption of a cultural heritage rooted in tradition and only to be adjusted by arbiters with expert status remained in place, as far as official cultural policies were concerned. Art administrators and politicians like Isaac Hayward, the leader of the LCC, legitimated their support for cultural institutions with the argument that it was the task of the its agencies to create the conditions for artistic excellence and access to it. The French Action Culturelle, too, despite its roots in pre-World War II radical politics and the audacious rhetoric of its inventor André Malraux, was essentially developed along these lines. The reconfiguration of the cultural institutions in France had the objective of disseminating the grand tradition, extending it to include the modern avant-gardes, to its conclusion.

The general impulse to support artistic excellence and provide institutional an physical infrastructure for it also dominated the arguments for building the second phase of the South Bank, the buildings which would become known as Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery. Initially proposed either as a replacement for buildings destroyed during the war (in the case of the concert halls) or as additions (the gallery being proposed as London’s equivalent of the Orangerie in Paris), neither the politicians nor the administrators felt a strong need to construct a broader argument setting out a programmatic vision. Rather, the new buildings were to complement the Festival Hall and continue in the same mould. There were, however, subtle shifts in the arguments, which suggest that the moment of post 1945 optimism, which informed the building of the Festival Hall, was no longer quite so pervasive a sentiment. The apparent pragmatism, which permeates the documents and reports from which the initiative to extend the South Bank emerged, neither reiterated the idealistic references to the great social overhaul which seemed possible in 1945 nor were the buildings proposed as part of a national cultural renaissance (although these ideas survived among a minority). The ‘zone of silence’ surrounding the initiative for the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery may be explained by the fact that by the mid 1950s both the politicians and the administrators could rely on consolidated systems of state patronage for the arts and urban planning.

However, the reluctance to present the new buildings as part of a larger vision of culture and democracy – occasional references to the idea of a ‘metropolitan arts centre’ remaining exceptional rhetorical outbursts – also seems to point to deeper changes in the cultural climate towards the end of the decade and in the early 1960s. As the examination of cultural debates in the 1950s has shown, the belief that the end of World War II marked a historic moment of progressive change was replaced by an atmosphere of cultural pessimism affecting British culture, and similarly seems to have had its impact in Sweden. In the late 1950s the work of academics such as Raymond Williams in Britain and Jürgen Habermas in Germany provided the starting point for a radical critique of the workings of democracy and the role of culture within it. With the emergence of a ‘New Left’ – earlier in Britain, later in Sweden – ‘culture’ acquired a central position in the critical analysis of consumer society questioning the working consensus of official cultural policies of the British and Swedish welfare state. At the same time artists, architects and art critics, particularly those in the Independent Group in London, challenged the assumptions of the modernist cultural establishment dominating the system of state-sponsored cultural patronage after 1945. All these activities did, however, not amount to a coherent intellectual debate. The socio-political and cultural arguments of the New Left and the a-politically artistic ones of the Independent Group were not
connected and to some degree contradicted each other. Neither is there any evidence that they had a direct influence on the debates about the development of the South Bank and its institutions.

If the shift in the general cultural climate and the questioning of the consensus underpinning post 1945 cultural politics had an effect on the institutional concepts for the buildings on the South Bank, it is an indirect and largely negative one. The generally more pessimistic attitudes of larger sections of the public and the challenges brought forward by both the New Left and the self-styled artistic avant-garde may be reflected in the absence of a statement of intent or of a vision for the South Bank, not just as a compound of buildings, but as a new type of cultural institution for an emerging consumer society. From this perspective, the silence and the fact that essentially the ideological vacuum was filled by technocratic solutions, can be explained as a response to a crisis of values. The disjunctions and fissures between different practices and discourses which are apparent in the history of the genesis of the institutional concept and the architectural design confirm this analysis. Both the institutional concept of the South Bank in the early 1960s and the design of the buildings would then appear to be the product of a moment of transition between the post 1945 proposal of ‘democratised’ access to the cultural heritage and the demands for a democratic culture in the new decade.

The institutional arrangement of the South Bank could be characterised as unresolved, given that the compound of separate concert halls and galleries was presented as a cultural centre, while there was no suggestion of a synergy of the parts. Stockholms Kulturhus, by contrast, is the result of a highly consistent vision of a centre in which culture and social experiment were explicitly connected and merged. The contrast between the South Bank and the Stockholm building may be sufficiently explained by the differences between British laissez-faire traditions and the highly directed political debates or realities in Sweden. My examination of the cultural debates as they developed in Sweden and Britain during the 1960s, showed, however, a remarkable degree of consistency and interplay between the two countries. The fact that the Kulturhus developed out of a public debate, and the absence of such a debate in London, therefore, reflects the dynamics of the discourses on culture between 1960 and 1966, and the social and cultural transformations affecting much of Western Europe in this period. The Swedish ‘cultural dialogue’ of the first years of the decade, a levée en masse of intellectuals, academics, administrators and politicians directed at the full realisation of a socially egalitarian society, produced an atmosphere of opportunities which Pontus Hultén, the inventor of the Kulturhus, could seize upon in proposing his idea for a cultural centre.

The result of the cultural debate and Hultén’s expedient making use of it was an extraordinary institutional proposal in its content and proposed organisation. Reflecting surveys of cultural participation, both in Sweden and those of Pierre Bourdieu in France, showing that the systems of state-sponsored cultural provision by no means reached all social groups equally, the Kulturhus proposed the elimination of all obstacles, symbolic as well as functional, that allegedly in reality prevented people not accustomed to visiting galleries or theatres from entering. Set up as an explicitly interdisciplinary institution, with a modern art gallery as its ‘backbone’ (to quote Hultén), the Kulturhus was to present culture not as a range of autonomous practices, but as one phenomenon encompassing all types of intellectual and creative activity. Surrounded by department stores, banks or corporate headquarters and overlooking a square that was to develop into a modern agora, the physical centres of political action in the public sphere, the Kulturhus epitomised the claim of cultural producers that their activity was not operating in an ideal, autonomous area, but explicitly intervened in political and economic questions. Finally the Kulturhus combined these ideas of culture as a force of critique with the promise that distinctions between professionals and amateurs, or between producers and audiences, would become blurred, suggesting that ultimately they would cease to exist altogether.

Hultén’s concept of the Kulturhus did not quite survive the intervention of the bureaucracies whose support would have been necessary for its realisation. However, if the vision of a Kulturhus without boundaries which the museum director was proposing had been realised, other, deeper fault lines in the project would probably have emerged. As the analysis of the statements of Hultén and his supporters shows, the vision of the Kulturhus ultimately relied on a series of contradictory assumptions – suggesting total freedom, yet operating from the belief systems of post-war modernist avant-gardes. Hultén’s work as a successful first director of the Centre Pompidou and his skills as a populariser attracting large and occasionally new audiences to presentations of modern of contemporary art illustrate this largely undiscovered element in his agenda. Even so, the Stockholm project constitutes a unique attempt at renegotiating the role of culture in a developed consumer society, which ultimately might have involved a radical questioning of the definitions of productive and creative labour and the value of the cultural industries. Hultén did not explicitly state that revolutionary overhaul of the political and economic arrangements of society was seriously intended. The proposal of a building where fundamental rules of relations of power would be suspended did, however, imply the proposal of culture as an agent of critique, stepping out of its traditional territory and radically questioning the political and economic model of the Swedish welfare state. That such a proposal should have been seriously considered and materialised in a building project invests the Kulturhus with a historically unique status among the many cultural centres of the 1960s in Western Europe.
In the introduction to this study I observed that interpretations of the nature and purpose of cultural centres were, from the outset, fairly underdetermined and that the absence of a clear-cut definition both programmatic and architectural concepts developed for the new institutions. As objects shaped by fluid ideas about what was going to happen in them, cultural centres adopted very different forms, from the interactive machine of Joan Littlewood’s aborted Fun Palace project to the monumental Beaux-Art inspired palaces in the case of some of the French Maisons de la Culture. With all its possibilities the cultural centre remained an object for competing visions of society and of cities, a sort of dust onto which ideas could be projected, but never attained a precisely focused image.

Within the catalogue of formal solutions invented for a rather open programme, the buildings on the South Bank and in Stockholm represent particular and local architectural responses. The design ideas and decisions about their organisation and appearance can only be explained by examining their context of urban planning and the architectural cultures from which they emerged. At the same time all three building projects, the Festival Hall, the 1960s Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery and the Kulturhus, were conceived and are perceived as modern (or ‘modernist’) buildings. In all three cases the architects developed their designs from an understanding that it was formulated within a history of applying modern architectural concepts for a public building. All three are also linked to agendas of revising these ideas, developing separately in England and Sweden and within the broader history of modern architecture in post-1945 Europe — even if this connection may not be explicitly formulated in equal measure.

The earliest of the three buildings, the Festival Hall, has consistently been presented as a ‘triumph’ of modern architectural ideas in a country that played no role of significance in the heroic period before World War II. Both at the time of its realisation and its later reception the Festival Hall appeared as a belated, even nostalgic exercise in applying Continental modern architectural principles for a building type and in a country where these had not been tried before. That this happened at a time of hardship and on an unprecedented scale merely enhanced the status of the building as a unique heroic endeavour. Meanwhile the deployment of durable materials and the inventive detailing also reflected the debate on a New Monumentality as it had been opened in the late 1930s and introduced Scandinavian ideas of a ‘softer’, less dogmatic (and thus more ‘English’) modernism in the early 1950s. In its seemingly effortless combination of straightforward functionalist planning, spatial openness and material richness, the Festival Hall approached to the concept of the culture as a ‘people’s palace’ as was possible in the circumstance, and it has largely retained this status.

How this design developed, and who was responsible for the major strategic decisions has been focus of historiographic activity. The buildings on the South Bank are largely the product of the particular and exceptional organisational arrangement of London’s post-war administration and planning. The architect’s department of the London County Council was fully embedded in the bureaucratic apparatus of a very large local authority. Whereas in the case of the Festival Hall speculations about the attribution are connected to clear-cut decisions, Robert Matthew and Leslie Martin, the circumstances of the design of the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Hayward Gallery seem even less clear. One particular critical commentator described the building as a product of ‘shop floor democracy’. This may be an exaggeration but the fact remains that none of the members of the team relied on a defined position within the professional culture. The absence of a singular designer personality that could claim ultimate responsibility for the outcome – team leader Norman Englebach probably being the most legitimate contender – is significant. It has resulted in attempts to claim the project as an early example of Archigram-architecture. This version proposed by the three members of the team who joined the group after leaving the LCC, and one eagerly adopted by Reyner Banham and Charles Jencks, positions the design within the history of critical revisions of modern architecture in England at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s. Warren Chalk’s construction of lineage from the 1958 Hauptstadt Berlin project of Alison and Peter Smithson suggest that we have to understand the design as the iconoclastic exercise of the ‘next generation after the next generation’ in absorbing the ideas of the post-war avant-garde of English architects, as well as those of the Japanese metabolists. In this version 1960s buildings on the South Bank are an early realised example of either a ‘building as a city’ or a small megastructure, or perhaps a very solidified proto-Plug-in-city.

In Norman Englebach’s account the design process appears as a series of pragmatic operations within a well-oiled administrative organisation and its embedded architect’s department. The discrepancy between his version and that of Chalk (and endorsed by Reyner Banham) implied oppositional claims of authorship. Neither of these claims is, however, fully convincing. The silence that had surrounded the initiative for the construction of new South Bank buildings in the late 1950s and continued to exist during the construction process went together with the absence of a single author who would have been capable of generating a comprehensive design idea and a persuasive argumentation for the rather particular architectural solutions in the project. The design reflects this state of affairs in its emphasis on advanced technology and the imbalance between the highly determined access system, the under-dimensioned public foyers and the technologically-advanced functional spaces of the concert halls and the galleries. There is an element of indecision in the design between modesty – breaking up the parts so as not to compete with the Festival Hall – and impertinence – the suggesting that this building is the core of a system of walkways and spaces that might in due course spread out over the city and cover it.

The alloy of ambitions, formal gestures and technological solutions in the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall could be seen to
represent a curiously precise response to the societal context – Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s – and a moment of transition in British post-war culture. In this it reflects both the professionalism of those who like Norman Engeback were formed by the collective cultural of post-war planning bureaucracies and the preoccupations of the Archigram generation that was to have a dominant influence on international architectural media culture in the 1960s. These competing influences or ambitions have their bearing and appear in the planning and detailing, but there is no attempt at a synthesis or an economy of means which a more mature architect-author might have achieved. Yet the fragmentary nature of the design, its technocratic frankness as well as its audacious image-making, invest it with the strange beauty of a ruin that has an air of never having been fully completed (although, technically speaking, it was) and at the same time can evoke feelings of nostalgia for a period during which a belief in social and technological progress was – probably just about – tenable.

Its appearance of a conglomerate of concrete objects and decks, combined with their apparent impenetrability (physical and in terms of communicating their purpose), has had a damaging effect on the reception of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall. What had been conceived as a state-of-art cultural centre offering flexibility and excellent conditions for a wide range of performance and exhibition practices, acquired the status of an unwelcome reminder of the deficiencies of modern planning and, more generally, of the project of the British welfare state. The fact that the way in which this centre was to express the role of culture had remained unformulated and the absence of a recognisable architectural representation of collective purpose (this in obvious contrast to the Festival Hall) account for the notable vulnerability of a building of forbidding solidity. Perhaps it is not surprising that arguments for the retention of the Hayward Gallery and Queen Elizabeth Hall, against this background, are often framed in purely defensive terms, making the case for the conservation of the building as a historical monument. Yet it is precisely because of its muddled history and the conflicting messages that the 1960s buildings on the South Bank can be much more than a relic of a now distant past. Never furnished with a programmatic statement, let alone a manifesto, these buildings and their unresolved contradictions and incomplete formal gestures create unpredicted and unpredictable opportunities for arts practices that devise their strategies of signification out of their physical environment. The Hayward Gallery, but also the concert halls, are both a working machine and a quarry in which an archaeology of undisclosed ideas about a future society from a particular moment in British post-war history can materialise. Durable and vulnerable, overfull of inventions and intentions, yet ultimately ambiguous, the buildings are not waiting for one, but a multitude of retro-active manifestoes, interpretations and violations.

The position of the Kulturhus in this comparison of buildings is marked by the particular involvement of an architect-artist in what emerges as the most explicitly collectivist programmatic conception of the case studies. Peter Celsing’s interest in – and deep intuitive knowledge of – the historical development of Stockholm and its architectural or urbanistic traditions is marked by the sensibilities of the first generation of modern architects in Sweden, and particularly Gunnar Asplund, Sven-Ivar Lind and Sigurd Lewerentz, who participated in the ‘functionalist breakthrough’ of the 1910s, but retained an innate understanding of the formal refinement of Nordic Classicism. Celsing’s cultural position, which had elements of conservatism as well as an enthusiasm for the progressive changes affecting Swedish society in the 1960s, was sufficiently complex to allow him to align himself with the ideas for a radically new Kulturhus, as proposed by Pontus Hultén and to rework these into an architectural proposal.

The Kulturhus is the product of the encounter of two personalities with strong convictions and established social and cultural positions, and of an engagement between them that is rather unique in the European architecture of the 1960s. The fact that Celsing was both open to Hultén’s cultural agenda, and managed to integrate it in his own interest in anchoring modern architectural projects in longer traditions, invests the Kulturhus with a particular richness embodying both the shift of Swedish society towards a radical egalitarianism and a subtle resistance to the elimination of historical urban relationships and associations. It is this particular contribution of an architect, whose maturity and formal confidence as a designer allowed him to collaborate productively with Hultén and artists from other disciplines, that elevates the Kulturhus from being a manifestation of egalitarianism in Swedish culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The building, therefore, is not merely a radical institutional concept assisting the ‘march towards a just society’, but an urban artefact. It represents a moment of social and cultural experiment, yet it also makes connections to the past, using its city as a repository of urban precedents and establishing associations with existing buildings. In absorbing different images, from a department store or palace to a prehistoric wall or a living room (all these references being offered by the architect and critic(s)) the Kulturhus evokes not only a multiplicity of meanings. It also reveals itself as a building that has retained its original significance as a social condenser for an egalitarian culture and as a monument that, at the same time, detaches itself from this purpose. As such the Kulturhus emerges as a rare example of a building that succeeds in retaining its position as an enduring collective monument, produced by what was probably the most developed European welfare state at the time of its construction.
Chapter 3

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The character of the entrance ‘square’ as a meeting place and a street is essential. At the same time this space provides warmth and a roof above the head in the winter. The provision of food is an elementary right – warm soup and sandwiches with cheese or liver pâté that are served from booths as we know them from large railway stations. Magazines and newspapers, pocket books and posters will be available, presented, sold and disappear again. No permanent shop or other fixed arrangement should be allowed.

One could, for example, imagine that people in the entrance ‘square’ want to make music. In that case one has only to install microphones, loudspeaker equipment and a stage. If someone wishes to paint or build sculptures, the necessary material can easily be provided. If an amateur film maker arrives with a film this can be shown without much difficulty in the entrance ‘square’ or somewhere in the viewing space in Kilen.

Kilen has two entrances from the entrance ‘square’. The flexibility of the functions also applies in its four subdivisions. Ideas and initiatives (Anregungen) originating from the entrance ‘square’ can move inside and develop further in more specialised and professional form. Exhibitions such as the show Sköna stund (‘Happy hours’) by the national exhibition board and large art installation like HÖN (‘They’) and Modellen (‘The model’) in Moderna Museet can be presented here. Invited artists will be able to make visual-acoustic spaces or environments.

The Arenal is suitable for many forms of performance activities (including electronic image and sound performances). It must be stressed that not only the Arenal, but the entire Kulturhus including the entrance ‘square’, the rest of Kilen and the museum areas should be accessible to the experimental theatre groups which will come to existence in and around the (projected) Municipal Theatre.

A modern control room for film projection – including all forms of 35 mm projection – will have to be installed. The most suitable place for this is in the area between the ‘yellow space’ and the ‘blue space’, both of which can serve as alternative viewing rooms. 8 mm film, however, can be shown in many areas of the building.

The back space in Kilen has a very special character. It is almost seven metres tall and is referred to as ‘Gredelin’. As a consequence of its spatial characteristics this space is most suitable for dance performances, light spectacles, concerts, parties and other activities that might benefit from its conditions.

We would like to stress that the entrance ‘square’ and Kilen through their respective direct connections offer very good possibilities for encounter. They will satisfy a latent need for activity spaces for young people, children, old people, and people of all sorts looking for contacts. Fellow citizens in our society who up to now have been largely ignored, as far as opportunities for free creative activities are concerned.

HUSIT, the museum areas. On the first floor above the entrance level there should be areas which, while being easily accessible, allow the user to dedicate himself to quieter and more contemplative activities: reading, listening to music with headphones and in other ways, watching recorded television programmes, sitting and drinking coffee with the view of Sergels Torg and so on. Compared to the entrance ‘square’ this space is a somewhat quieter ‘living room’ (vardagsrum) with ample opportunity for study and entertainment of different sorts. Here there is also the children’s department where the experiences from the exhibition ‘The model’ in Moderna Museet could be useful.

The tall space two stories up in the building will be the main exhibition area of the museum. Here we will find the largest and most important art shows which can either originate in the ‘square’ and Kilen, or can be brought from elsewhere to the Kulturhus. These may be exhibitions of photography, urbanism, painting, decorative arts, architecture or sculpture.

In this space as in the whole Kulturhus a close and active collaboration with other institutions such as the photo museum, the architecture museum, municipal theatre, the national board for exhibitions
Phalle's Jardin located on these floors. The museum staff offers a constantly renewed programme of painting, sculpture, drawing and graphic art works should be accessible on sliding screens. The art works are organised pedagogically, chronologically or in 'schools'. Here teachers take their pupils and the museum guides can give introductions and lectures.

On the two top floors the museum's collection of painting, sculpture, drawing and graphic arts both by Swedish and foreign artists will be exhibited. As has been the case up to now, these collections need to be frequently reorganised and exhibited. As has been the case up to now, these collections need to be frequently reorganised in order to offer a constantly renewed picture of the content of the collection to the public. The museum staff offices will also be located on these floors.

On the roof of the building large sculptures such as, for example, Tinguely’s and Saint Phalle's Jardin Phantastique (check title!) could be installed, but it will also be possible to play theatre with giant puppets for an audience in Sergel’s Torg or to project light spectacles on the wall at the back.

In the glass studio on the roof a winter garden can be created that could be a reading room, a music studio or a workshop for public events. There, too, an exhibition for the lower floors of the building can be prepared, all this depending on demand and the time of the year.

In a way that is comparable to the ‘square’ and Kilen, the goal is to create as broad a range of uses as possible, continuing and developing the experiences of Moderna Museet in its 30 years of existence in the temporary building on Skeppsholmen (the island where the museum had been operating since the 1940s, CG).

The Kulturhus must be instrumental – as a catalyst for the active forces in society and for critical debate. Along these lines it has to contribute to the creation of situations of constructive encounter of individuals and groups of people.

In its basic character the Kulturhus shall be open, freely accessible and flexible. It shall not be closed for anybody, any time and everyone should have the opportunity to influence the atmosphere or the activities in the building. The real democracy that society in its entirety wishes to provide for every single individual has to be the point of departure in the realisation of the Kulturhus. This should become the basis for how people come and live together.

In order to realise the activities as sketched out in this document, it is our conviction that it is an absolute condition that the Kulturhus should be put under one single administrative direction.

Stockholm, 5 January 1969

Carlo Derkert
K.G.P. (Pontus) Hultén
P. Lind
Pär Stolpe
Anna Lena Thorsell
cc.
Roland Pålsson, head of department
Wilhelm Forsberg, borgarrådet
Olle Gnospelius, kyrkoadjunkt (representative of the Swedish State Church)
Ryno Vigelad, studiedirektör
Jan-Erik Wikström, publisher
Professor Peter Celsing

(Translation Christoph Grafe)

The intention of the Kulturhus will be to reach the groups of the population now deprived of culture (kulturfattiga folkgrupperna). If we change this term and replace it with ‘those that stand outside’ (de som står utanför), which we believe to be a better wording, then this is really one the main tasks (of the building, CG). As we see it, this would imply to reach out to all those standing outside organisations, all those who have not dared to go into exhibitions and theatre performances, who have been reluctant to make music or paint or make themselves known in any other way. It goes without saying that the Kulturhus will collaborate with all sorts of different institutions and organisations – but also it has to facilitate direct spontaneous contacts. This is perhaps the most important and most radical translation of the notion of openness. The ‘square’ as the open, accessible place where people of different walks of life pass by and meet each other – impossible and possible people. We hope that just about anything will emerge here spontaneously – cultural expressions of all sorts outside the established organisations and ambitions.

With respect to the participation of the municipal library, we think that the activities at present developed in Stockholmsterrassen should have a place in the building. The work of the library needs to be linked to the other activities in the Kulturhus. If the municipal committee for public information (Reklamkomité) wishes to present projects or initiatives for discussion about, say, future urban renewal plans, these should also find a place in the house.

We believe to have given much attention to facilities which are mentioned in the original programme. We would, however, not like to dedicate specific spaces exclusively for defined categories.

As far as opening hours are concerned we propose that the Kulturhus should be open between 10.00 in the morning an midnight, seven days a week. The order in the house should be kept by Kulturhus staff, who act as guardians and engage in the activities of house and assist the public. It should be clear that the overall administrative direction of Kulturhus is responsible for the democratic nature of the activities in the building, and that no specific groups dominate.

Stockholm, 25 January 1969

Bror Andersson
Carlo Derkert
K.G.P. (Pontus) Hultén
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(Translation: Christoph Grafe)
Conclusion

In working on the aims of the Kulturhus and its planning, we departed from the current definitions of the notion of culture. This entails that culture is not something that can be anybody’s particular property or that could be treated in a material sense. Rather it something of you can become a part. Culture is a process, a set of relationships that are relative and creative.

Stockholm 17 March 1969

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(This letter was handed over to the committee while Hultén was abroad)

(Translation: Christoph Grafe)
This thesis is an examination of a building type and a type of institution. In the aftermath of World War II and, particularly in the period from 1945 to 1979, the ‘cultural centre’ became one of the main ingredients of state intervention in the field of culture in many European countries. In Eastern Europe cultural centres or cultural houses were, at least in many cases, part of a concept of an socially ‘embedded’ culture of the working class, and therefore often (but not always) associated with existing factories or workers organisations. By contrast, the appearance of buildings housing various forms of cultural expression in those countries which found themselves in the western part of the continent, and especially those which were early adopters of the welfare state model, was particularly marked, since it raised a series of questions about the nature and the role of culture vis-à-vis civil society, existing social distinctions and the commercial cultural industries.

Rather than attempting a catalogue and discussion of all cultural centres in Western Europe, the thesis focuses on two particular building projects, the South Bank in London and the Kulturhus in Stockholm. It examines the individual histories of the conception and realisation of these buildings, which were planned and built between the late 1940s and the early 1970s, and entails an analysis of their designs. In order to locate the two cases it was also necessary to examine the general conditions which explain their existence and which might offer a framework for understanding them as institutions and as architectural objects.

Chapter 2 considers the emergence of cultural policies in the twentieth century and the creation of an extensive institutional infrastructure for state-sponsored cultural provision after 1945. Since the two case studies are situated in Britain and Sweden, it was appropriate to limit the discussion of the ‘invention’ of cultural politics and their policies to these countries. As debates about culture and society in modern Europe are not defined only by national boundaries and often are indebted to longer histories of ideas, this chapter examines discussions on the purpose of culture as they appeared in the late eighteenth century and developed throughout the subsequent century. Having set out the ideas behind the identification of culture as one of the core responsibilities of the post-war welfare state in Britain and Sweden, Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the fundamental shift in the objectives of cultural policies and the interpenetration of politics and culture in the late 1960s.

Chapter 3 focuses on the way in which ‘culture’ might be understood in relation to ideas about democracy, a connection that was invariably established in post-war discourses on the objectives of cultural policies. Particularly in the 1960s these objectives of a democratisation and modernisation of society, and the role of culture within this process, became increasingly linked and interpreted as essential in the development of a critical public debate. This chapter examines the conditions informing this process using Jürgen Habermas’s 1962 study of the public sphere and a series of critical reactions to it, as a theoretical framework for understanding both how this sphere of debate constituted itself historically and which role was played by various concepts of culture in this development. The following three chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) contain a close examination of the South Bank and the Kulturhus, each discussing their origin in large-scale urban reconstruction projects, the process of formulating their programmes and the debates surrounding their realisation. Discussions of the main actors, local politicians or art administrators and the architects operating from within their particular architectural cultures are included to provide an understanding of the ideas informing the design. Each case study concludes with examinations of the realities of day-to-day use after the building had been completed and the critical reception of the projects.

Chapter 7 asks the question as to whether the cultural centres were successful in realising increased access to culture. In the 1960s
a fundamental critique of the realities of developed capitalist societies informed much of the debates on culture, raising the question if the cultural centres as institutional concepts associated with these debates could be credibly absorbed into a system of state-sponsored cultural provision. Invested with a fair degree of Utopian excitement, the cultural centres were intended to realise a new, and more inclusive culture. The question remains if this new concept of culture was successful in bringing about the intended social modernisation, or if the cultural centres, along with other social changes in the 1960s, were merely paving the way for an understanding of culture that has given up not only its association with social privilege, but also the demand of a minimal commitment to seriousness and intensity. Is it possible to find traces of the idealistic agenda which informed the initiatives for the cultural centres, despite the pressures to make culture more 'commercially viable'? In other words: how do the cultural centres operate today, within a dominant cultural industry and against the background of the gradual erosion of the institutional infrastructure of the post-war welfare state and the optimistic social vision that once informed it?

Curriculum Vitae

Christoph Grafe was born in 1964 in Bremen. After his maturity exams he worked as an intern in a cabinetmakers and interior design workshop in Wespswede, which continues the Arts-and-Crafts tradition established in the early 1900s in this artists’ colony near Bremen. A conscientious objector, he subsequently worked as a teaching assistant in a school for children with severe physical and mental challenges in Bremen.

Grafe enrolled as a student of architecture at TU Delft in 1986. During his studies he worked as a student assistant with Bernard Leupen. First experiences as a writer and editor included the publication Hoe modern is de Nederlandse architectuur? (1989) and Design and Analysis (1993/1996). After graduating at Delft in 1993 with his project ‘Pantheon of the Low Countries’ (honourable mention in Archiprix 1994) he worked as an architect with Cees Dam and Partners in Amsterdam on projects for, among others, an inner city mixed-use building in ‘t Hague and a theatre at Tiel, the Netherlands. In 1998 he received an individual scholarship from the Amsterdam Funds for Arts and Architecture and studied in the Histories and Theories Programme at the Architectural Association School in London. Grafe joined the chair of Architectural Design/ Interiors in 1999 and was appointed Associate Professor in 2000. From 2005 to 2009 he served on the advisory committee on architecture of The Netherlands Architecture Fund and on the jury of the Gouden Piramide 2005, the Dutch state prize for excellent architectural patronage. His publications on modern and contemporary architecture, including a monthly column on architectural culture in the British magazine Building Design (Backspace 2001/2003), have appeared in a variety of European architectural magazines. Since 1992 he has been a member of the editorial board of the architectural journal OASE. In 2006 he joined the editorial board of the Journal of Architecture, published on behalf of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Recent research and publishing initiatives include a series of books on public interiors, conceived in collaboration with Routledge publishers in London. The first volume, co-edited with Franziska Bollerey and titled Cafés and Bar – the architecture of public display appeared in 2007.

de hoofdacteurs, lokale politici, conservatoren, museumdirecteuren, beleidsmakers enerzijds en architecten anderzijds die vanuit een specifieke architectonische cultuur opererden en ontstaat zo een gezuiverd beeld van de ideeëvorming voor elk van de projecten. Elk van de drie hoofdstukken eindigt met een analyse van de realiteit van de gebouwen na hun oplevering en van de receptie door het professionele en het ‘leken’-publiek.

In Hoofdstuk 7 wordt de vraag aan de orde gesteld, of deze cultuurcentra zijn geslaagd in hun doelstelling van een bredere toegang tot cultuur. In de jaren zestig was een fundamentele kritiek op de realiteit in een ontwikkelde kapitalistische maatschappij van grote invloed op culturele debatten. Dit roept de vraag op hoe de cultuurcentra omgingen met de gespannen verhouding tussen een radicale kritiek en hun positie binnen het beleid van overheden. Als gebouwen waarin zich een utopisch verlangen manifesteerden werden de cultuurcentra ingezet in de realisering van een nieuwe, en meer ‘inclusive’ cultuur. De vraag blijft of het veranderde cultuurbegrip werkelijk de beoogde modernisering van de samenleving ten volle konden brengen, of dat de cultuurcentra net als andere maatschappelijke veranderingen in de jaren zestig, enkel de weg bereidden voor een cultuur die niet alleen vrij is van associaties met privilege, maar geen inspanning of intensiteit meer vereist. Is het mogelijk om vandaag sporen van de idealistische agenda’s terug te vinden die ooit een belangrijk onderdeel van de initiatieven voor de bouw van cultuurcentra waren, terwijl de druk om cultuur ‘commercieel vatbaar’ te maken steeds verder wordt opgevoerd? Met andere woorden: hoe kunnen cultuurcentra in de huidige situatie opereren, als deel van de dominante cultuurindustrie en tegen de achtergrond van de voortschrijdende afbrokkeling van de institutionele infrastructuur van de naoorlogse verzorgingsstaat en de optimistische maatschap-pijvisie waarop deze was gebaseerd?

Curriculum vitae

Christoph Grafe werd geboren in Bremen in 1964. Na zijn eindexamen werkte hij als sta-