

Stuart Burch

### **Introducing Mr Moderna Museet: Pontus Hultén and Sweden's Museum of Modern Art**

Time: 1:30pm, Friday 30 May 2008

Place: Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Jean Tinguely's *Fiesta Bar* is lined with liquor bottles. Tasty-looking snacks by Claes Oldenburg are available for visual consumption. People hungry for knowledge can read from an extensive library. The even more inquisitive are able to salve their curiosity by nosing through some postcards sent by On Kawara. Those wishing to exercise their bodies rather than their minds can follow Andy Warhol's handy *Dance Diagram* and foxtrot around the gallery. There is, alas, no musical accompaniment. Indeed, time seems to stand still, like the motionless hands of Ed Kienholz's clock. Suddenly the silence is broken when someone presses an inviting red button, bringing Tinguely's *Fiesta Bar* into life. The metal clanking of this kinetic sculpture harmonises with the click and whirl of a more technologically advanced mechanism. The latter, operated by touchscreen computer, makes it possible for visitors to select a painting from a menu of available works and watch as it glides across the ceiling before slowly coming to rest in the middle of the gallery. Emblazoned on the work I decided to pick were written the familiar words: 'In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes.'

\*

Someone who has been famous for considerably longer than fifteen minutes is Pontus Hultén. His renown certainly rivals and arguably even eclipses that of Moderna Museet, the museum he once led. In many respects the late Pontus Hultén *is* Moderna Museet. The entwined lives of the museum and the man make them ideal candidates for discussion in a book entitled *Museums and Biographies*. The case study set out in this particular chapter testifies to the pervasive influence that certain individuals are able to exert over public collections – both during their lifetime and

after. The posthumous presence of past protagonists are timely reminders that museal biographies are processed and renegotiated in the present.

The necessity of scrutinising linkages between the biographies of people, the histories of institutions and the provenance of objects is well illustrated by Sweden's national collection of modern and contemporary art. Its holdings of works by Kawara, Kienholz, Oldenburg, Tinguely, Warhol and many other canonical artists of the twentieth century were swelled when, shortly before his death, Pontus Hultén chose to bequeath almost his entire personal collection to his former place of work. The storage and display of this gift will be explored in the following essay. So too will the ethical dilemmas and interpretive challenges that it raises. Both aspects coalesce around one, crucial demand that Hultén made before he felt able to part with his possessions. Yes, Moderna Museet would be given the artworks in perpetuity – but only if measures could be taken guaranteeing that they would remain at all times accessible to the public. Hence the whirling, clicking mechanically-powered gallery that was inaugurated at the heart of the museum on 30 May 2008. This technological innovation did more than simply fulfil the stipulation set down by the donor. It succeeded in consolidating Hultén's reputation as a cultural aristocrat. This was a status that he held in life and, thanks to his bequest, now also in death.

There can be no better place to begin a discussion of culture and aristocracy than Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, first published in French in 1979 and translated into English five years later. Its opening chapter is entitled 'The Aristocracy of Culture'. In the following section I will give a selective account of this essay before going on to adapt it as a means of 'Introducing Mr Moderna Museet'.

### **The Game of Distinction**

'Aesthetic stances', Bourdieu (1984, 57) tells us, 'are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept'. As such, those in a position to shape any 'system of aesthetic principles' are in receipt of considerable authority. An important marker of cultural competence and pedigree is 'acquisition', the conditions of which 'function like a sort of "trade-mark"' (ibid, 65). The gold standard of legitimacy is 'to possess things from the past' such as 'accumulated, crystallized history' or 'paintings and collections' and pass them on. To achieve this 'is to master time' (ibid, 71).

With this in mind, '[e]very group tends to set up the means of perpetuating itself beyond the finite individuals in whom it is incarnated' (ibid, 72). This is achieved by establishing 'a whole set of mechanisms, such as delegation, representation and symbolization, which confer ubiquity and eternity' (ibid). Portraits, statues, monuments and memorials are all mechanisms that strive to immortalise a person, define their image and secure their legacy. Periodic ceremonies and commemorative anniversaries enable the living to pay homage to the dead and, in so doing, ensure that the dead attain that most coveted of goals: 'eternal life' (ibid). This 'magic stronger than death' (Hultén and Tinguely 1987) also benefits the living by cementing their particular succession claims. This bodes well not only for the likelihood of their own individual perpetuation but also the continuance of the group with which they identify and the shared values it espouses.

Bourdieu (1984, 76) is therefore surely correct to argue that '[e]very material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance'. The value of the former is self-evident to the inheritors because it is they who '[possess] the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded' (ibid, 2). Those that fit within this structure have both the legitimacy and the competence to assert their rightful lineage and thereby shape 'taste'.

This is why the meaning of an artwork is neither inherent nor self-contained. It is instead determined by 'the system of objects in which it is placed' (ibid, 88). And that system is dynastic, hierarchical and based on material and cultural inheritance. It follows, therefore, that works of art 'always owe part of their value to the value of the chooser... [and] the manner of the choosing' (ibid, 91).

All this, however, raises an imponderable question:

The paradox of the imposition of legitimacy is that it makes it impossible ever to determine whether the dominant feature appears as distinguished or noble because it is dominant – ie because it has the privilege of defining, by its very existence, what is noble or distinguished as being exactly what itself is... – or whether it is only because it is dominant that it appears as endowed with these qualities and uniquely entitled to define them (ibid, 92).

Yet we should not be unduly troubled by this uncertainty. It is, after all, simply part of

that 'game of distinction' that Bourdieu (ibid, 57) charts so brilliantly.

Those with an interest in this 'game' – be they spectators or participants – make regular pilgrimages to that most refined of sporting arenas: the museum. For it is the 'social space' of the museum where 'competence is produced and... given its price' (ibid, 88). Moderna Museet is just such a 'social space'. Its claims to 'strong inherited cultural capital' (ibid, 89) have been bolstered considerably thanks to the generosity of its former director. But who was Pontus Hultén? What prompted him to transfer his art collection to a museum rather than bequeath it to his son and grandson? And what does any of this have to do with Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*?

### **Sandberg, Stedelijk and Succession**

Karl Gunnar 'Pontus' Hultén was 82 years old and in ill-health when he eventually died on 25 October 2006. In the preceding year he decided to gift the vast majority of his art collection to Sweden's museum of modern and contemporary art, Moderna Museet. This amounted to approximately 700 paintings, sculptures, films and posters together with an extensive library, all of which he had built up over the course of a long and very distinguished career as both curator and director of some of the world's most prestigious art institutions including Centre Pompidou in Paris; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; Palazzo Grassi in Venice; Bonn's Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland; and the Jean Tinguely Museum in Basle.

The exhibitions that Hultén had helped devise at these and other institutions forged his reputation as a dynamic innovator who sought continually to break down barriers in pursuit of 'open' museums, accessible to all (Centre Pompidou 2004). His name became synonymous with notions of 'art in motion'. Indeed, *Movement in Art – Rörelse i Konsten* – was the title of a pivotal show that can, for the purposes of this chapter, serve as a succinct means of introducing Hultén's museological biography.

*Movement in Art* dates from 1961, two years before the 34-year old Hultén would be formally appointed director of Moderna Museet. Featuring well over 200 works by artists from nineteen countries, it was an early example of Hultén's 'legacy [of] complex, thematic exhibitions' (Muchnic 2006). It was split into two halves, one being a historical survey spanning the years from the turn of the twentieth century until the 1930s, the other focused on contemporary artists whose work dealt in some way with

movement: artists such as Jean Tinguely (1925-91) whose kinetic sculpture *Fiesta Bar* was mentioned at the start of this chapter. Some pieces were made specifically for the show. One such was a 'happening' by Allan Kaprow (1927-2006). This consisted of a specially constructed room in which visitors were invited to paint on cardboard boxes hanging from the ceiling. The idea was to study the results to discern if there were any marked national differences between the museum-going public of Holland, Sweden and Denmark (Granath and Nieckels 1983, 80, 144 and 148).

These locations were chosen because *Movement in Art* actually opened, not in Stockholm, but at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam where it was given the title, *Bewogen Beweging*. Only then did it travel to Moderna Museet before coming to a close at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art outside Copenhagen. Hultén later explained that this rather unusual decision was made in the belief that the 'unprepared' (*oförberedda*) Swedish public would be more receptive to such an overtly ambitious exhibition if it were first legitimised by 'what was probably the world's best museum for modern art' (Granath and Nieckels 1983, 36). For whereas Moderna Museet had only been formally instituted in May 1958 with the comparatively untried Hultén as its provisional leader, the Stedelijk had been a prominent feature of the Dutch capital since 1895 and was led by the far older and well established Willem Sandberg (1897-1984). He had taken charge after the Second World War and remained its director until his retirement in 1963. Shortly before his departure a host of artists with whom Sandberg had had dealings presented him with artworks. Sandberg in turn gifted seventy of these 'tokens of friendship and esteem' to the Stedelijk (Daniels nd; Stedelijk nd).

A further token of friendship and esteem can be discerned from the events of 1961. The year began with Moderna Museet entering the Stedelijk in the form of *Movement in Art*. The compliment was returned in December 1961 when the Stedelijk Museum 'visited' Moderna Museet through a loan exhibition of works by a variety of modern and contemporary artists from the Dutch museum's impressive collection (Hultén 1961). It was accompanied by a slender catalogue introduced by Willem Sandberg. His single page of highly polemical prose poetry provided in effect a road map that Hultén was to follow for the rest of his career and beyond.

In that text Sandberg argued forcefully that all so-called 'museums of modern art' fall into two camps: static/dead or moving/living. The former, he claimed, are led by people of rigid, conservative tastes. Suspicious of the avant-garde they see the art

museum as a means to 'escape into the past' by facilitating the 'peaceful contemplation' of an unchanging canon of art that is to be 'worshipped' not questioned. In stark contrast to these staid temples are 'museums... in which there is movement'. More than a simple building for containing art, these institutions are akin to cinemas, concert halls, schools and libraries – as well as being places of leisure and of consumption. Whereas children would shatter the silence of the static museum, 'guests by the thousand including the young' flock to visit the 'museum which moves a lot'. Movement also extends to the collection, the 'true value' of which is constantly being reassessed in line with the needs of the eternally changing present. Not afraid of creating 'conflicts and occasionally scandals', the 'living' museum is prepared to relegate the work of 'admired heroes... to the museum store' if they are deemed to have fallen 'silent', replacing them in turn 'with others, which the museum doesn't own – yet' (Sandberg 1961).

Immediately following Sandberg's piece is an article in which Hultén makes clear his admiration for the man who, in his opinion, was single-handedly responsible for transforming the Stedelijk into 'a new type of museum, an active and dynamic affair where the art collection constitutes the core around which the events revolve'. The moveable walls and 'elastic' use of the exhibition spaces mirrored a wider 'democratisation' of the museum that Hultén considered to be accessible to all irrespective of class, education or age (Hultén 1961, 5-6 and 8).

Illustrating Hultén's text are photographs depicting both the façade and interior of the Stedelijk Museum. The latter focus as much on its café and shop as they do its exhibition spaces. In addition there is an image showing a facility named as the study gallery or store (*studiemagasinet*) (Fig 1). A caption describes this as 'a very large, easily accessible poster collection' (Hultén 1961, 7). These artefacts are laid out on racking shelves or hang from a series of suspended units. This can be seen as a precursor to the gallery that, nearly fifty years hence, would be built to house Pontus Hultén's bequest to Moderna Museet.

### **Pontus Hultén's Studiolo**

In 1998 Sweden's national museum of architecture (*Arkitekturmuseet*) took over the building originally occupied by Moderna Museet, with the latter moving to an adjoining structure designed by Rafael Moneo. A decade later a double-height space was found 'at the very centre of the building' to accommodate Hultén's bequest (Tellgren 2008,

148). It fulfilled the only stipulation attached to this act of generosity, namely that 'any works not shown in the permanent hanging exhibition be made available to the public in a user-friendly warehouse' (cited in Burch 2007, 63).

This rather mundane-sounding facility was constructed by the Swedish National Property Board and White arkitekter AB at a cost of about 10 million Swedish kronor. A sizeable chunk of that money was used to enlist the support of Overhead Conveyor Systems (OCS), a Swedish firm specialising in the sort of mechanical equipment normally to be found on a factory production-line. In the unfamiliar surroundings of a museum it provides the means of moving a series of thirty panels that hang suspended from the ceiling. Mounted on these screens are paintings. These are chosen via a touchscreen computer operated by a gallery assistant. Once a selection has been made the panel in question slides across the ceiling and down into an empty space near the centre of the room. Behind this, to the rear of the gallery, is a long table running parallel to wall shelves containing books and other publications. The remainder of the floor space is dotted with three-dimensional works also bequeathed by Hultén.

This ensemble can be understood as a technologically innovative solution to some very longstanding desires. This was alluded to by the man who designed it: Hultén's long-time friend and colleague, Renzo Piano. It was Piano who, together with Richard Rogers, designed Centre Pompidou which Hultén led to great acclaim in the 1970s following his departure from Moderna Museet.

During a seminar organised to mark the inauguration of the Hultén bequest, Piano revealed that he had sought inspiration in the Renaissance-era *studiolo* or 'study'. It has elsewhere been argued that these 'princely collections' served 'to recreate the world in miniature around the central figure of the prince who thus claimed dominion over the world symbolically as he did in reality' (Hooper-Greenhill cited in Bennett 1995, 95). One such example was completed in Urbino in the 1470s for Federico da Montefeltro (1422-82). Formed with the intention of promoting his 'taste, aspirations and interests', the *studiolo* juxtaposed art and literature with scientific instruments and a suit of armour in such a way as to demonstrate a judicious balance of contemplation and action on the part of its patron (Cheles 1986, 23 and 92; Burke 1987, 505-6). The modest dimensions of the space were cleverly mitigated by the inclusion of illusionistic depictions of cupboards and even glimpses of another imaginary *studiolo*. This inventive assemblage, as well as being a place of study, 'must also have been shown

to illustrious visitors, thus fulfilling a propaganda function' (Cheles 1986, 23).

It is instructive to bear this in mind when considering Piano's original sketch for the Hultén bequest (Fig 2). It depicts the donor sat at the heart of the collection surrounded by 'the world in miniature', ie his universe of accumulated artworks and literature. He is the star at the centre of this constellation, watching as it orbits around him, rather like Federico da Montefeltro five centuries earlier. This connection is reinforced by the name given to this twenty-first-century *studiolo*: 'The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery'. Intended to store Hultén's donated library as well as his art collection for the purposes of both study and display, it underscores how Hultén, like Federico da Montefeltro, wished to be known as 'a doer and a facilitator', a man of action and a lover of spectacle (Birnbaum *et al* 2007, 62; cf Granath and Nieckels 1983, 146). This helps explain the need for a dynamic environment, a milieu that might otherwise seem rather perplexing given its intended function as a place of quiet learning.

The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery functions as a forum to flaunt Hultén's taste as a discerning collector and a socially successful individual. The technologically innovative mechanism is also a very conscious nod to the legacy of *Movement in Art* (Widenheim 2008). This link was made in media accounts of the gallery's inauguration, a flavour of which I have tried to convey in my opening paragraph. These reports recalled Hultén's desire for the public to be active and stressed his interest in 'kinetic or moving [*rörlig*] art' (Wadman 2008). The mechanised gallery equates to a pacified version of Allan Kaprow's room of cardboard boxes in *Movement in Art*. In both cases the entire space forms an artistic whole. Kaprow would surely have approved of the sense in which a 'nonart' phenomenon like a factory production-line has become 'conscripted' as a 'Kinetic Environment', an impression that is further emphasised by the very deliberate placing of Tinguely's *Fiesta Bar* (Kaprow 2003, 98).

Machines are closely associated with Hultén not only because of *Movement in Art*, but also due to a 1968 exhibition that he curated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York entitled *The Machine As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*. It occurred in the same year that Hultén put together the first major showing of Andy Warhol in Europe in an exhibition hosted by both Moderna Museet and the Stedelijk. This link with Warhol was emphasised during the inauguration of the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery through the prominence given to *Dance Diagram (Foxtrot)* (1961). This entered Moderna Museet as a result of *New York Collection for Stockholm* of 1973. This exhibition secured for the museum a stellar array of works by leading artists

active on the 1960s New York scene. It proved to be Hultén's audacious swansong as director of Moderna Museet before he left to take charge of the Centre Pompidou.

In 2008 Moderna Museet and the Stedelijk marked the fortieth anniversary of 1968 by mounting a new Warhol show. Coinciding with the opening of the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery, this temporary exhibition was as much a heralding of Hultén as it was of Warhol, even to the extent that the museum director was credited with coining that most famous of aphorisms: 'In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes' (Granath 2008). Another of Warhol's maxims features in his bequest to Moderna Museet: 'Machines have fewer problems. I'd like to be a machine, wouldn't you?' It is fitting therefore that Hultén is now, in a sense, a machine. Or, rather, the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery is the mechanism for his longevity.

This was particularly apparent in the inaugural 'hang' of the gallery. The decision to place Tom Shannon's sculpture *Slumber* (1986) at its entrance was especially evocative. This diminutive work consists of a rectangular block that is kept perpetually afloat with the help of concealed magnets. Thanks to Bourdieu we know that the 'meaning' of such an artwork is determined by 'the system of objects in which it is placed'. In its present 'system', *Slumber* is transposed into something approaching a representation of the undying Hultén. He has passed away, but he is not dead.

This unearthly quality has a miraculous effect on the bequest. The gallery invigilator operating the touchscreen monitor is in reality an acolyte assisting at the altar of high art. Meanwhile the 'food sculptures' by Claes Oldenburg, the drinks on Tinguely's *Fiesta Bar* and On Kawara's postcard series evocatively titled, *I Am Still Alive, 1974-1981* are transformed into votive offerings. Such deposits constitute 'an act of giving directed at another-worldly power', in this case the transcending power of art (Osborne 2004). What characterises them is 'exchangeability'. In return for their donation the giver is rewarded with esteem, remembrance and even life after death. Customary divisions between the sacred and the profane are effectively blurred by this pursuit of 'prestige and rank', revealing that 'some gifts to the gods are "manifestly a vehicle for relations between men"' (Gregory cited in Osborne 2004, 2; Braudy 1997, 9).

Notions of prestige, rank and human power relations are in ample supply in an explanatory brochure distributed at the Study Gallery. On its cover is an iconic portrait of Hultén by the Swedish photographer, Hans Hammarskiöld (Fig 3). It is, on one

level, a very formal representation. Hultén stands before a classical sculpture in a dress suit which is festooned with medals. This contrasts with his mien: his eyes are tightly shut and his mouth forced open as wide as it will go. A clue to this otherwise baffling expression is to be found in another version of the same scene. This time Hultén, mouth closed, stands in front of a different sculpture: a plaster cast copy of a late sixteenth-century lion by Flaminio Vacca. However, in the far better known image, the king of the beasts is absent. It is Hultén who roars.

The impression this depiction creates is of man who has mastered the game of distinction. The photograph was taken shortly after Hultén's brief and rather abortive stint at Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) had come to a premature end. It matches a description of him made in 1984, the same year as Hammarskiöld's photograph: 'A huge man, barrel-chested, athletic looking, with shaven head, he possessed great charm, was renowned for his humour, had a reputation for being an artists' museum man, and was known and respected by collectors the world over' (Berelowitz 1994, 273).

This characterisation allied with Hammarskiöld's image and Hultén's appointment at MOCA confirms just how far he had come since those early days when he needed to rely on Willem Sandberg's credentials to help realise his ambitions. Now it was Hultén who took top billing. He was, in the words of the artist Robert Irwin: 'Mr Magic... a real superstar... Royalty!' (cited in Berelowitz 1994, 272-3). From being Sandberg's self-appointed heir, Hultén had become a king in his lifetime and an immortal god after his death.

### **The Pontus Hultén Collection... Moderna Museet**

Fame in the modern sense of the word is frequently understood 'as a way of defining oneself, making oneself known, beyond the limitations of class and family' (Braudy 1997, 14). This has given rise to a plethora of 'familiar strangers': celebrities we feel we 'know' but have never met (Gitlin cited in Turner 2004, 3). One of the means by which Pontus Hultén achieved this status was via a large book he devised to complement his art collection. It was published in conjunction with its initial, temporary display at Moderna Museet in 2004 from where it toured to museums in Finland, Italy and Germany before coming to rest again in Stockholm, this time for good.

Entitled *The Pontus Hultén Collection...* this weighty tome illustrates perfectly

Bourdieu's point about the legitimising effect of 'accumulated, crystallized history'. Through its pages Hultén and his relatives have indeed become 'familiar strangers' in the 'extended family' of the art-loving public (Turner 2004, 113ff). Dedicated to the daughter who predeceased him, it catalogues by surname those artists featured in his collection. Interposed amongst the artists beginning with the letter 'H' is Hultén himself. His presence takes the form of family snapshots, commencing with photographs of Hultén's grandfather and parents and going on to include images of Pontus at every stage of life: from infant, toddler, schoolboy and university student to his professional flowering and physical decline. The montage shows two sides of this modern-day Federico da Montefeltro. On the one hand there is Pontus Hultén the anarchic man of action attired in a fantastic antique costume and jousting playfully beside a Venetian canal. This is counterpoised by the dignified, authoritative Hultén leading the Swedish royal family on a museum tour. Straddling the two persona is Hultén the hands-on deviser of pioneering exhibitions and confidante of artists. We see him chatting casually with Andy Warhol on a visit to Moderna Museet in 1968 or standing proudly alongside Marcel Duchamp amidst the kinetic artworks of *Movement in Art*.

This fusion of the personal and the private corroborates Hultén's own claim that the book, like the collection as a whole, is 'a story of friendships' (Hultén 2004, 176). This raises a host of important but rarely voiced ethical concerns (an important exception is Veier 2007, 53). Hultén was both a buyer of art and a recipient of gifts from artists he promoted and, very often, counted as friends. Today this would be considered to be a conflict of interests. Already in 1986 the ICOM Code of Professional Ethics stated that museum professionals should refrain from 'dealing... in objects similar or related to the objects collected by the employing museum' (§8.3) and that 'no member of the museum profession should compete with their institution either in the acquisition of objects or in any personal collecting activity' (§6.8).

This helps explain Hultén's insistence that his collection came together by 'sheer coincidence' and that 'it would be pointless to look for a plan or a method' (Hultén 2004, 6). This has a number of consequences. First and foremost it snuffs out any potentially awkward ethical questions. Secondly it disguises the fact that the temperamental Hultén had Machiavellian tendencies and 'would ruthlessly exploit every personal connection to make his artistic visions reality' (Lavier cited in Birnbaum *et al* 2007, 65). And thirdly it serves as a mark of distinction, aligning Hultén with Bourdieu's notion of the 'legitimate choice' – one that is 'so sure of itself that it

convinces by the sheer manner of the performance, like a successful bluff' (Bourdieu 1984, 92).

Hultén was aided and abetted by Lars Nittve, the director of Moderna Museet at the time of the bequest. In his introduction to *The Pontus Hultén Collection...* Nittve recalled travelling to France to visit Hultén and see for himself 'the selection of works that had found their way to his house' (Nittve cited in Hultén 2004, 7). In other words, Hultén's distinction was so pronounced and irresistible that art itself sought him out. With this fantasy established it became possible for Nittve to make light of the 'resonance' between 'the private walls' of Hultén's home and 'the heart of the Moderna Museet collection'. This was just another one of those cheerful 'coincidences' that Hultén had himself acknowledged.

It is a pity that Nittve chose not to have instead used this happy happenstance to explore 'the paradox of the imposition of legitimacy' identified by Bourdieu. Hultén is habitually lauded because he 'understood what was good art long before others did and thus was way ahead of his time' (Malmberg cited in Burch 2007, 61). But is the art he advocated the 'dominant feature' of Moderna Museet because it is objectively 'good', or is it *because* it is dominant that it appears to be endowed with these qualities? And is Moderna Museet not obliged to validate Hultén's aesthetic sensibility in order to safeguard not only its material inheritance but also its cultural inheritance – and legitimacy – as well? Hultén's status is symbiotic with that of Moderna Museet in much the same way that it was mutually dependent on the artists he promoted. As Lee Braudy (1997, 490) noted, a personality such as Hultén 'is the artist's fulfilling double, who presents him [*sic*] to the world'. Hultén's collection is rife with examples of this. Take Ed Kienholz, the hands of whose clock stand still in Hultén's collection. Moderna Museet's acquisition of Kienholz's *The State Hospital* (1966) has been described as 'only a small part of Hultén's contribution to the artist's career'. The subsequent exhibition *11 + 11 Tableaux* (Moderna Museet, 1970) 'established Kienholz as one of the major American artists in Europe' (cf Pincus 1990, 45 and 105). Hultén was therefore not just a prescient purveyor of art. He helped shape the very criteria – Bourdieu's 'system of aesthetic principles' – by which 'good art' is judged.

With the donation of Hultén's collection to Moderna Museet 'the paradox of the imposition of legitimacy' becomes even harder to unravel. This is actually visualised in the opening pages of Hultén's catalogue to his collection. Three of the first eleven

pages feature the following text:

The Pontus Hultén  
Collection...

MODERNA MUSEET, STOCKHOLM

The trio of dots in the title amalgamates the two, giving the private collection precedence: The Pontus Hultén Collection *is* Moderna Museet. Or, more accurately, the museum is the mirror image of Hultén's collection. That much is suggested by the spine of the book which features the title in both regular and reverse script. Lars Nittve has done his utmost to ensure the maintenance of this state of affairs. Hultén 'laid down the agenda for the future' (Nittve cited in Hultén 2004, 7) declared Nittve shortly before placing the immortal Hultén into 'the very centre of the building' through the positioning of the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery.

But this is not to say that there is universal agreement over the wisdom of this unquestioning adulation. The Hultén inheritance, whilst desirable for obvious reasons, is not entirely celebrated. Indeed, the timing of the bequest coincided with signs of an interesting reassessment of Hultén. Denigrations of him first voiced in the early 1970s resurfaced (Tellgren 2008, 337). More serious was the revelation that the late Hultén had traded in a set of Warhol's Brillo boxes of decidedly dubious provenance (Ölander *et al* 2007). In addition, Hultén's legacy has been indirectly questioned through criticisms levelled at Lars Nittve's 'infatuation' (*besatthet*) with 'American macho-cultural Pop Art'. That obsession, it is claimed, has been to the detriment of present-day artists: 'Few in the young art scene feel that Moderna [Museet] is a place for them and that Moderna has something important to say about art's role in society and its potential development' (Ravini 2010).

One of Nittve's last actions as director was to help establish the satellite institution, Moderna Museet Malmö. Its long-term inaugural exhibition drew on the museum's rich collection of 1960s Pop Art. There were two routes into the show. In one direction lay Robert Rauschenberg's *Monogram* – a stuffed-goat 'Combine' so boldly acquired for the museum by Hultén in 1964 and which (to recall Bourdieu) 'functions like a sort of "trade-mark"' for his cultural competence and pedigree. The other route led to Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's *Mascot for Movement in Art* (1960), a bronze figure ironically

enough tied to a chair. The statue's bound arms meant that he was unable to reach out to eat an appetising piece of *Gruyère* cheese – another one of those delicious snacks by Claes Oldenburg that Pontus Hultén donated, along with hundreds of other works, to Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Thanks to the theme of its first exhibition, this influence has also been implanted at the very inception of Moderna Museet in Malmö as well. Even when breaking new ground it seems to be impossible for the museum to evade the everlasting Pontus Hultén.

### **Distinction After Death**

As we have seen, Bourdieu was cognisant of the performative aspects of distinction, whereby choices are legitimised 'by the sheer manner of the performance'. He shows too that this is equally true of the flipside of acquisition, namely how best to divest oneself of prestigious material possessions. One way of doing this and of achieving longevity is through donation. But this has two potentially undesirable consequences. On the one hand, monolithic 'donor memorials' tend to 'create a tomb-like atmosphere' (Duncan 1995, 89). Alternatively, individual works, integrated into other collections and isolated as objects of aesthetic devotion, risk being stripped of their 'real world' associations as they come under the 'pure gaze' of the art gallery. This is what Bourdieu refers to as the 'museum effect' (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 91).

Pontus Hultén's bequest to Moderna Museet skilfully avoids both these fates. The decontextualising impact of the art museum was averted through the naming and siting of the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery. The biographical link with the donor was further sustained by the aforementioned book *The Pontus Hultén Collection...* plus two freely available handouts, one featuring Renzo Piano's initial sketch, the other Hammarskiöld's photograph of the lionised Hultén. In addition to these printed documents are video monitors inside and outside the gallery which broadcast *A Magic Box Becomes Real*. The striking title of this specially-made film confirms that 'Mr Magic' really does evince a 'magic stronger than death'. It allows us to see the artworks enter the museum: a liminal moment when they shift from being private possessions to public property. This is memorably illustrated by the case of an untitled sculpture by Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002). She, like her husband Jean Tinguely, was a person who Hultén cherished as a friend and promoted as an artist. Her colourful sculpture is shown prior to being restored. We watch as a conservator points out the areas of missing paint and explains how this was a consequence of the many years it spent standing next to Pontus Hultén's bath. This conjures up a vivid image of

a wet towel being draped over this artistic masterpiece as its owner emerged from his ablutions. The paint has now been retouched so that it can accept the 'pure gaze' of the museum. Yet it retains its 'living' connection thanks to the accompanying film. The nature of his bequest thus makes it possible for Hultén to have his cake (or cheese slice) and eat it.

*A Magic Box Becomes Real* is described as a 'collage of interviews' (Lundqvist and Wrenfelt 2008). The most significant protagonists, aside from Hultén and Renzo Piano, are Nittve and his then colleague, Cecilia Widenheim. They take the important role of 'gatekeeper critics' of a 'gatekeeper institution'. Together they serve as 'societal guardians of long-term renown... guard[ing] entrance into canons and pantheons of achievement' (Cowen 2000, 72). Hultén has been well-served in this regard. Olle Granath, his immediate successor as director of Moderna Museet, has been described as 'picking up Hultén's mantle' throughout the 1980s until 'an apostolic succession of sorts' saw the appointment of Hultén's former assistant, Björn Springfeldt (Tellgren 2008, 341). To date the only exception to this rule has been David Elliott, the one foreigner to have held the post. Upon arrival he found himself 'faced with domestic ghosts' and developed an antipathy for 'the mist in people's eyes when they talk[ed] about the old days' (cited in Tellgren 2008, 341). That nostalgia can be summed up in two words: Pontus Hultén.

Lars Nittve, who took over from Elliott, had no such qualms as he drew Hultén into the bosom of the museum. He stepped down in November 2010 and was replaced by Daniel Birnbaum. The latter is clearly aware that, as a 'bulldozer of a director', Hultén is not exactly an ideal role model. Nevertheless, Birnbaum still looks upon him as 'arguably the most influential European museum professional of the twentieth century... [who] tested the limits of the contemporary art museum from within' (Birnbaum *et al* 2007, 61-2).

Hultén continues to be seen as a hero for influential curators, museum directors and artists such as Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Ann Goldstein and Daniel Buren (*ibid*; Obrist 1997). Their attitude towards Hultén shows how famous people function as a standard by which to measure others and mark them out for promotion (Braudy 1997, 15). Ann Goldstein, who once assisted Hultén during his time at MOCA, went on to become its senior curator and was recently appointed general artistic director of the Stedelijk Museum. She lauded the 'visionary' Hultén for his 'brilliantly unmanageable ideas' (cited in Birnbaum *et al* 2007, 62 and 65). In making such pronouncements, Goldstein

captures 'a share of [Hultén's] renown' (Cowen 2000, 88). This demonstrates how the 'fame of others, [especially] their distinguishing marks, becomes a common coin of human exchange' (Braudy 1997, 4).

Hultén made brilliant use of this 'human exchange', as we have seen in his shrewd association with Sandberg's Stedelijk at the start of his career. But this posed a dilemma for the elderly Hultén. How could he secure his posthumous legacy without succumbing to the lure of the moribund 'static' museum so despised by Sandberg? And how could he safeguard the art he collected from future generations who might 'wish to relegate... [them] to the museum store because they no longer have anything to say'? His inspired solution was to subvert this by putting them into store from the outset. And then, in a further stroke of genius, moving that store into the gallery. The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery is therefore a strategically brilliant 'mechanism'. It enforces the visibility of Hultén's collection and disguises this under the logic of a dynamic and audience-focused 'museum which moves a lot'. It achieves the seemingly impossible by being both static/dead *and* moving/living.

What is more, the dot-dot-dot of *The Pontus Hultén Collection...* not only successfully insinuates itself in Moderna Museet's regular collection, but also implies that it is still growing. And with the right 'gatekeepers' who share Hultén's 'code' this will indeed be the case, ensuring that Hultén will continue to 'influence the museum's direction for a good part of the foreseeable future' (Tellgren 2008, 344). The multiple screens of the gallery under Hultén's name can be continually replenished and reconfigured, charging it with 'constantly renewed meaning' (Braudy 1997, 15). This bodes well for Hultén's prospects of enduring fame because the repackaging of celebrity products is absolutely crucial to the fame industry.

Thus it is that Hultén has become a 'vehicle of cultural memory and cohesion... stand[ing] as [an] example for the future' (ibid). This matches his idea of art as 'a guiding element in life. It speaks without speaking. It reveals. It foreshadows. It points the way. It can allow us to see where we are going' (Hultén 2004, 178). This makes his mechanised bequest a sort of oracle. A sacred place where one both pays respects and seeks guidance. Hultén articulates ('speaks') there. Dead as a body, he is undying as a machine (cf Braudy 1997, 6). The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery strives and achieves a *nunc stans* – an eternal now (cf Glennie and McGarry 2007). *When you see it, Hultén will be alive* (cf Alechinsky in Atkins 1986, 11).

This is all the more remarkable because this solitary gallery is in truth quite a modest legacy. Hultén had far grander plans. An entire museum he hoped to build with Renzo Piano in southern Sweden was not realised in his lifetime (Hultén 2004, 430; Eriksson 2005). It is this contingency that led to the Moderna Museet bequest. However, as with any indelicate ethical questions, this is rarely alluded to. This silence lends the bequest a sense of inevitability and properness and enables Moderna Museet to 'remain in the radiance of its former leader' (Tellgren 2008, 334). And yet Hultén more than anyone else was aware of the dangers inherent in all this. An 'institution shouldn't be completely identified with its director', he cautioned, 'it's not good for the museum... When it breaks down, it breaks down completely' (Hultén cited in Obrist 1997, 77).

This raises a key question: why did Hultén ignore his own advice? The mundane answer is that, with his health failing and his plans stalling, he was forced to scale back his ambitions. This would mean that the Moderna Museet option was a necessary compromise, despite his own misgivings. Hultén was surely keen to resolve matters to his own satisfaction while he was still alive rather than run the risk of having his wishes interpreted by others. The undesirable consequences of posthumous legal wrangles is clear from the long-running row over the authenticity of certain works by Andy Warhol.

And it is this that provides a more satisfactory response to Hultén's paradoxical behaviour and an insight into his complex psyche. As this chapter was nearing completion media stories resurfaced about Hultén's involvement in the Brillo box scandal mentioned briefly above. It would now appear beyond doubt that Hultén oversaw the manufacture of over one hundred wooden boxes long after Warhol's death and that he went on to sell them as genuine works at immense personal profit. Many of these – including six examples at Moderna Museet – have since been downgraded to 'copies' by the Andy Warhol Art Authentication board, which condemned Hultén for having 'misrepresented these works and falsified their history' (cited in Bomsdorf and Gerlis 2010). This means that those collectors, dealers, institutions and the visiting public who put their faith in Hultén have lost out in terms of money, reputation and trust.

One explanation for Hultén's behaviour is that he was at heart 'a sneaky old bastard'. This was the opinion of the former London art dealer, Brian Balfour-Oatts who had bought several wooden Brillo boxes on the strength of Hultén's credentials (Levy and Scott-Clark 2010). Others interpret Hultén's duping of people like Balfour-Oatts as a

conscious ‘lampooning’ of the art market (Thomas Anderberg cited in *ibid*). It should be remembered, of course, that if Hultén could claim to be the author of one of Warhol’s most famous aphorisms, then he might well have had few scruples about manufacturing a batch of brand-new Brillo boxes.

With the accused dead, one could consider making a pilgrimage to Hultén’s mechanised oracle at Moderna Museet in search of answers. However, we would probably be better advised to put this tawdry affair down as a particularly dramatic twist in ‘the paradox of the imposition of legitimacy’. The lesson it teaches us is the paramount necessity of maintaining a critical eye on museums and the people and organisations that shape them. It also confirms that Hultén was absolutely correct to highlight the risks that ensue when institutional and individual biographies become entangled. This was something I reflected upon in an earlier version of this paper (Burch 2008). Citing Hultén’s warning about the dangers of museums becoming ‘completely identified’ with their directors, I noted rather facetiously that, when it came to the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery, only severe mechanical failure threatened to jeopardise Hultén’s continuing presence at the museum. Ironically enough, since its opening it has indeed been beset by technical problems caused by the limited load-bearing capacity of the screens (Noring 2010). A fitting metaphor not to pile too much onto one individual, perhaps? But then again, the huge, barrel-chested Pontus Hultén did have particularly broad shoulders...

## Images

Fig 1

‘Studiemagasinet’. Source: Hultén, P, ed, 1961 *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam besöker Moderna Museet, Stockholm*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 7. Used with the permission of Moderna Museet.

Fig 2

Renzo Piano’s initial sketch for the Hultén bequest. Used with the permission of Moderna Museet.

Fig 3

Brochure about the Hultén bequest showing Hans Hammarskiöld’s photograph *Pontus Hultén, Museum Curator* (1984, Statens Porträttsamling, NMGRH 4602). Used with the permission of Hans Hammarskiöld.

Fig 4

The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery, Moderna Museet. Used with the permission of Moderna Museet.

## Bibliography

- Atkins, G, 1986 *Asger Jorn: Supplement to the Oeuvre Catalogue of his Paintings from 1930 to 1973*, Lund Humphries, London
- Bennett, T, 1995 *The Birth of the Museum*, Routledge, London
- Berelowitz, J-A, 1994 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles: An Account of the Collaboration between Artists, Trustees and an Architect, in *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America* (ed M Pointon), Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 267-84
- Birnbaum, D, Goldstein, A, and Buren, D, 2007 Director of Intelligence: Daniel Birnbaum, Ann Goldstein and Daniel Buren on Pontus Hultén, *Artforum International* 45 (6), 61-6
- Bomsdorf, C and Gerlis, M, 2010 Warhol Brillo boxes downgraded to 'copies', *The Art Newspaper*, October, 20 (217), 1 and 4
- Bourdieu, P, 1984 *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (translation R Nice), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London
- Bourdieu, P, and Haacke, H, 1995 *Free Exchange*, Polity, Cambridge
- Braudy, L, 1997 *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History*, Vintage, New York
- Burch, S, 2007 Museum Landscapes: Zoning in on a Complex Cultural Field, *NaMu I: Setting the Frames*, Linköping University Electronic Press, Linköping, 49-67 [online], available from: <http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/022/005> [23 May 2010]
- 2008 Sliding Doors, *Museum Practice* 43, 18-23
- Burke, P, 1987 Book Review: The Studiolo of Urbino, *European History Quarterly*, 17 (4), 505-6
- Centre Pompidou, 2004 *Pontus Hultén – un esprit libre*, press release, [online], available from: <http://www.centrepompidou.fr/Pompidou/Manifs.nsf/AllExpositions/E6E13AF10A1B7272C1256ED90050C303> [23 May 2010]
- Cheles, L, 1986 *The Studiolo of Urbino: An Iconographic Investigation*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania
- Cowen, T, 2000 *What Price Fame?*, Harvard University Press, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts

Daniels, M, nd Sandberg, Willem Jacob Henri Berend, Jonkheer, in *Dictionary of Art Historians* (ed L Sorensen), available from:

<http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/sandbergw.htm> [23 May 2010]

Duncan, C, 1995 *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Routledge, London

Eriksson, T, 2005 35 museimiljoner räckte till en kur, *Dagens Nyheter* [online], 26 March, available at:

<http://www.dn.se/DNet/road/Classic/article/0/jsp/print.jsp?&a=395432> [26 March 2005]

Glennie, S, and McGarry, E, eds, 2007 *The Eternal Now: Warhol and the Factory '63-'68*, Model Arts and Niland Gallery/Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University of Cork, Sligo

Granath, O, and Nieckels, M, eds, 1983 *Moderna Museet 1958-1983*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Granath, O, 2008 With Andy Warhol, 1968, [online], available from:

<http://www.modernamuseet.se/v4/templates/template1.asp?id=3670> [26 February 2008]

Hultén, K G and Tinguely, J, 1987 *A Magic Stronger Than Death*, Thames and Hudson, London

Hultén, P, ed, 1961 *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam besöker Moderna Museet, Stockholm*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Hultén, P, 2004 *The Pontus Hultén Collection...*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm

Kaprow, A, 2003 *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (ed J Kelley), University of California Press, Berkeley

Levy, A and Scott-Clark, C, 2010 Warhol's Box of Tricks, *The Guardian* (Weekend section), 21 August, 24

Lundqvist, C (director) and Wrenfelt, S, ed, 2008 *A Magic Box Becomes Real*, press release, Moderna Museet

Muchnic, S, 2006 Obituaries: Pontus Hultén, *LA Times* [online], 31 October, available at: <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/oct/31/local/me-hulten31> [23 May 2010]

Noring, A-S, 2010 Personal communication (email exchange with the author), 16 March

Obrist, H-U, 1997 The Hang of It: Hans-Ulrich Obrist Talks with Pontus Hultén, *Artforum International* 36 (8), 74-9 and 113-4

Ölander, M, Lagercrantz, L, Holmén, C, 2007 Warhol-mysteriet med svenska miljonboxar, *Expressen* [online], 30 May, available at:

<http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/1.701023/warhol-mysteriet-med-svenska-miljonboxar> [30 May 2007]

Osborne, R, 2004 Hoards, Votives, Offerings: The Archaeology of the Dedicated Object, *World Archaeology* 36 (1) 1-10

- Pincus, R L, 1990 *On a Scale that Competes with the World: The Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz*, University of California Press, California
- Ravini, S, 2010 Post-Nittve på Moderna, *Göteborgs-Posten* [online], 21 January, available at: <http://www.gp.se/kulturnoje/1.293869-sinziana-ravini-post-nittve-pa-moderna> [21 January 2010]
- Sandberg, W, 1961 STEDELIJK är sextiosex år gammalt, in *Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam besöker Moderna Museet, Stockholm* (ed P Hultén), Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 3
- Stedelijk, nd *Stedelijk Museum Collection*, available at: <http://www.stedelijk.nl/oc2/page.asp?PageID=148> [30 May 2007]
- Tellgren, A, ed, 2008 *The History Book: On Moderna Museet 1958-2008*, Steidl, Göttingen
- Turner, G, 2004 *Understanding Celebrity*, Sage, London
- Veier, T, 2007 Pontus Hultén's Collection, *Prisma 2*, 53-8
- Wadman, A, 2008 Jukebox för konst, *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 June, Kultur, 6
- Widenheim, C, 2008 *The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery at Moderna Museet, Stockholm*, press release, Moderna Museet