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First Floor

The rooms

The castle, not being conceived as a museum but as a house, contains rooms which are very different from one another. The partial destruction of the building, due to abandonment and war, has ruined a number of rooms stripping them of their original decoration: wallpaper, silk stuccoed ornaments, carved wood and gilded frames, mirrors, and paintings everywhere. The original floors, in wood or in marble are gone. Quite a number of rooms still have painting on the vaulted ceilings. As it was a house the rooms are different in size and in shape because they were designed for different functions. The reception-rooms were lavish and grand, the bedrooms intimate and simple. Entering the house for the first time, even as a ruin, one could smell its atmosphere as if a lady had just crossed the room, leaving the smell of perfume lingering. I have never seen the rooms with furniture but knowing other historical houses the furniture surely did accentuate the differences between the rooms even more. The house is unlike the typical art museum where the rooms attempt to be similar and the same to be suitable for all artistic uses. The work of contemporary artists is extremely differentiated, in kind as well as expression. But they want to be treated on an equal level. The normal museum with its similar rooms evades the problem of so-called inequality in presentation. This castle is more difficult. Somebody said that in an Old Masters gallery the paintings by Rubens, because they are big, are in large rooms whereas the paintings by Raphael, being much smaller, are in small cabinets - but nobody in his right mind would ever claim that because of that, Rubens looks more important than Raphael. That could be the motto for the installation of artworks in the various rooms in this house.

The light

The castle has windows on all sides. Being high on a hill and not blocked by other buildings, the sun turns freely around it. The rooms facing North get no direct light; the other sides get light according to the time of day and season. The artificial light consists of white neon tubes hidden by the cornices of the walls and diffuses over the vaulted ceilings. Depending however on whether the ceilings and the walls are white or not, the intensity of the artificial light reflecting into the room is different from room to room. Thus the artificial light, when on during the day, does not cancel the differentiation of the natural light. Actually the artificial light follows, in a nice way, the fluctuation of the natural light. Even when it is dark outside, the light in the rooms differs greatly because of the different reflective qualities of ceilings and walls. No attempt has been made to correct that uneven light. It would have meant the introduction of electrical equipment visually disturbing the rooms. That now the light is uneven is pleasant - making each room more distinct. Uneven light is more real. It is the natural reality with which works of art, wanting to be real too, have to cope. Of

course one should not hang on a colouristically fragile and subtle painting in weak light. But there are paintings that look better in light somewhat less strong than the electronically controlled illumination of many a modern museum. In the castle we have light, not illumination.

The choice

A choice, of artists and of works, contains what is there, not what is not there. I believe that the present exhibition presents a fair view. I take the freedom to express that view. Critics may quarrel with my choice. They themselves would have presented another choice with which I would then quarrel. So it goes on. Nobody's choice is perfect. But I do not see any relevance in confronting me with names of particular artists which I have left out. As I have argued before, this exhibition is the beginning of a longer process aimed at establishing an institution resembling a museum. The number of artists will grow. Corrections can be made. At this critical point in the Castello di Rivoli's short contemporary history that process of growth is as important as the exhibition. The exhibition is the first phase of the process which takes into account a general situation in art, not the interests of a particular nation. Any choice made on the basis of a national view is bound to become provincial. It may be true that artmaking is in many ways to the artistic concerns and traditions of a particular country or even city. But the intentions of contemporary avantgarde art do not stop at a country's borders. In Rome one must think of Paris, in Paris one must think of New York, in New York one must think of Vienna. The point of reference is always somewhere else. The touchstone is beyond the horizon. Paris was once the centre of the avantgarde because the Frenchmen Braque and Léger did not complain that Picasso came from Spain, Mondrian from Holland and Brancusi from Rumania. Finally, there was the castle with its limited number of rooms. I was not prepared to throw the castle away in favour of an overcrowded, doubtful, incomplete idea of completeness.

The windows

Nowhere the rooms in the castle are closed to the outside. From the inside the many high windows are a spectacle. They show, when the weather is clear, at the foot of the castle's morainic hill the town of Rivoli: narrow streets, slender churchtowers, tiled roofs and small terrace-gardens. From the town's lowest point the long line of the Corso Francia leads Northeastwards, past Collegno, towards the maze of Turin. Beyond that we see, on its hill, the Basilica di Superga, also designed by Juvarra. Towards the Southwest one's eye loses itself in the haze over the plains of the river Po; and further South we see the dim outlines of the mountains of Liguria. The remaining view, West and North, passing over the Susa Valley, is dominated by greenish grey foothills and then the snowcapped Alps. There is no reason to hide these views. They do not distract one's attention from art. They demonstrate that the museum, also this castle, is but a building giving the works of art a place to stay - without however shielding them against the world of which they are as essential a part as trees are.

The walls

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Mise-en-scène

Anyone who makes exhibitions is occasionally accused by the critics of being a manipulator. He forces artists into positions they do not want and he misleads the public into false perceptions. The concern of the critics is touching. Critics, of course, do not manipulate. The charge of manipulation can never be answered because it only indicates that the one who makes it wants to manipulate and mislead differently. But I do not like the word manipulation. It offends the seriousness which anyone working in art should try for. It is true, however, that the exhibition maker is a *metteur-en-scène*. That is inevitable and it is stupid not to accept the fact. If one puts an object into a room or onto a wall one cannot escape the decision as to where to put it. Putting two objects in the same room, even if they are by the same author, complicates the decision enormously. It is more difficult to put two objects by different authors into one room - and more complicated still if there are to be completely different objects in the next room. Such is the case in the construction of all group-exhibitions. Devoting one's energy to one-person exhibitions only avoids the problem and evades the reality of art which is that artists work not in complete isolation. They work in a world with other artists and they are aware of each other's work. That Kounellis chooses to present a work involving fire had also to do, I believe, with the fact that Joseph Beuys, two rooms away, was working with stones and olive-oil; and that Kounellis' work was not so much a object was not unrelated to the large object by Pistoletto next door; and the material 'simplicity' of Kounellis' piece confronted the geometric 'simplicity' of Sol LeWitt's wallpainting in the other adjoining room. That these works were grouped together is my *mise-en-scène*: I thought it might be interesting to have four different artists of roughly the same generation in each other's vicinity. What I want to say is that, if placing next or in front of each other cannot be avoided, it is better to try and do it consciously. In the cinema, years ago, the term 'film d'auteur' was coined. It fits also exhibition-making. There is no automatic, logical way to put artworks together. One has to take responsibility for how works of art, they too, look at each other.

Permanence

Some works now in the castle, if they have to leave, would have to be destroyed (Sol LeWitt, Lothar Baumgarten, Nicola de Maria, Niele Toroni). They are conceived for the rooms and for the

walls were [sic] they are now. Other works could be removed without destroying their [sic] actual substance but it would be difficult to provide them with spaces so suitable as where they are now (Daniel Buren, Gilberto Zorio, Joseph Beuys, Jannis Kounellis, Gilbert and George). And other artists have invented 'ensembles' in dialogue with the room - and even if they consist of independent, singular work, breaking up the ensemble would be a loss (Mario Merz, Giulio Paolini, Marisa Merz). But that is only one side of the problem of permanence. Often contemporary artists use extremely fragile and perishable materials, but that does not mean they actually want their works to perish. Paper is fragile but we still can look at Egyptian art on paper over 2000 years old. The artist uses materials according to his esthetic ideas. In terms of time all materials are fragile: iron corrodes, wood rots, stones crack up, linen withers away. The point is that the artist rightly expects the culture to treat his work in such a way that it doesn't perish and remains visible in history. The second point is that in our time the museum is the permanent home for art, just as the church or public buildings have proven to be the permanent home for much of the very best historical art. Presently they still built churches and public buildings, but no longer do the best artists work there. The best artists now work in and in connection with the museum. That, if one wants, should be the moral of the Castello di Rivoli.

The floors

The floors are an equal grey or an equal reddish colour, made of a synthetic surface material which is sufficiently dull not to reflect its colour on the wall. One floor (in the Pistoletto room) has its original marble, black-and-white geometric pattern. It is beautiful. Two more marble floors are remakes. The one supporting Richard Long's Stone Ring gives a strong identity to that sculpture. It is hard enough to give the sculpture an edge which it probably would not have on the synthetic floor. We tried but it did not look good. The synthetic floors look a bit like dry sand. They are perfect for paintings on the wall, not diverting visual attention, but for sculpture they seem too soft. That impression may be the consequence of their delicate pastel colour. The floors on the third floor (the spaces for contemporary exhibitions) have actually the colour of pale sand but look harder, more like stone. The soft grey floor is not bad for the stones of Joseph Beuys because the surface actually soaks up oil spilled from the sculpture, making the stained floor part of it. But Carl Andre's steel piece could use a tougher floor: now it tends to sink into it. Similarly the crispness of Luciano Fabro's Habitat would be better served by a polished wooden floor. As the rooms are different, each having a character of its own, so maybe should eventually be the floors ...

Second Floor

Parcours / viewpoints

The lay-out of the rooms in the Castello di Rivoli is rather symmetrical. But there are also many doorways (even if we had to close a few) which permit the visitor to wander around rather than to follow a prescribed route. Routing is a major concern of museum curators, not only from the point of view of crowd-control, but also because it enables him to construct a visual sequence in what he wants to show the public. The Castello allows, even invites the public to meander. The exhibition has no precise sequence and no hierarchy. There is, however, a certain grouping of works. Still, wandering about the public can construct its own sequence of following preferences, likes and

dislikes. Instead of an avenue lined with beautiful trees, this exhibition is a landscape: a collection of encounters and vista's works of art and rooms end views across into other rooms, feeding the imagination and memory.

Restauration

The Castello di Rivoli is an historic building built by an important Baroque architect (Juvarra) in an area not abounding in architectural wonders. It is also extensively damaged. Thus the building faces a serious and delicate problem: that of restauration. Usually the objective of restauration is to bring a building back into its original state. Then the things that were in it can be restored to it. The public can see what the building looked like when it was first built. The Castello di Rivoli, however, was never really finished. Lacking are, for instance, the central block and the West wing. The central part was only just started when building stopped, and the West wing was never started at all. The project also included terraces and gardens; these too were never realised. What is now there is a rough, unfinished fragment somewhat forlorn, however majestically, on a hill. And one really wonders if the Savoia family have ever taken as much care finishing the interior of the fragment as they did with other, more beautiful palaces surrounding Turin. As most seems to be gone the castle would forever remain a cripple except if contemporary art were accepted as a form of restauration - or rather as the natural continuation of the castle's life into the present. Nothing of which there is now needs to be removed but nothing too should be added to copy or falsify the old. Contemporary art and the application of contemporary art: both are real and concrete and mingle well with what is very real in the castle as it is now: its fragmentary state.

The colours

One particular characteristic of the rooms in the castle is the great variety of colours. The colours were exciting. But at the same time they presented a practical problem. Certain conventions in showing art made it impossible to hang certain paintings on certain coloured walls. So I was happy with the rooms that could be whitewashed. That took care of a problem. Yet the white rooms seem to lack something. They are very effective but they lack colour. Somehow their being just white does not go well with their proportions. Their being white is a concession. There is one painting, a one meter grey square by Alan Charlton, which is the epitome of the kind of painting designed to hang on a white wall. For practical reasons it had to go on a greenish wall. The green was the original wall colour and the restauration authorities luckily did not allow it to be whitewashed. To everyone's surprise Alan Charlton's painting looked very good on that green wall. This suggests that maybe also other paintings can hang on coloured walls. The white rooms have to be reconsidered.

Beauty

Possibly a disturbing aspect of this exhibition is its apparent beauty, its lushness even. Normally exhibitions of modern art are more reticent and cool in their exploitation of space. Most of the time the space itself is relatively bare. This might be explained by the fact that much modern art avoids classic beauty. Its perfection seems more to reside in an internal balance of formal and intellectual means. But if the beauty of the exhibition is disturbing, it is also a great gain, showing the supreme

capability of contemporary art to compete with any previous art. The sparseness of contemporary art is a myth. That realization should change modes of exhibition. - But why is the exhibition beautiful? I do not know. Maybe, being in this robust house, it becomes more robust itself.

The museum

The museum has come to mean a certain codification of itself. As an idea it has become more and more immovable. Museums all over the Western world, taking part in the same culture of modern art, have become identical. The classic museums and galleries were conceived and constructed around the turn of the century. They have a fairly large entrance-hall or foyer (giving the bourgeoisie space for festive gatherings) that lead to a flight of almost identical rooms, at least identical in spirit, often in a symmetrical lay-out. In front of the changes of style and intention in art, the museum has taken a position of neutrality. Neutrality was the museum's answer to the stylistic and [sic] ideological complexity in twentieth-century art. The museum more or less left art to do whatever it wanted to do. Recently built museums have largely continued that attitude of non-involvement, in more contemporary architecture, and often exaggerating it. This means that the conditions under which works of art are seen have become standardized - strangely enough in a period of history in which art forms have become more and more diverse. A number of artists have been making works that do not conform to the formula of museum presentation but more artists have taken that formula into account. They can do that, of course. But the question still is whether not museums should try to develop different conditions offering artists different types of presentation. Certainly it will be a slow process. It will have to cope, for instance, with the formal conventions of the art market of which artists and museums are also a part. It also will need prolonged and radical thinking on the role of art in the world - a subject not often touched, with the excuse that contemporary art, unlike old art, is the expression of personal freedom. If so, the idea of freedom is at variance with the conventions within museums and the art world at large. Maybe the Castello di Rivoli, being a house and not a standardized museum, can indicate some diverse possibilities, without falling into a new convention.

The ceilings

Very often the ceiling is the culminating point in the room - not just because of its height but also because a number of them are painted, ornamentally or with allegorical figures. The ceilings in the castle differ in height but most of them are high. Once the visitors to the castle sat back in their chairs and their eyes would travel upwards to contemplate the didactic scenes. The prince lying in bed would see his own glorification. The walls, the ceilings, the floors, even the view from the windows once took part in the visual spectacle of the room as a whole. At present we use only the walls and floors, sometimes in combination. In the present art system, other areas are not representative enough. But having a castle with its particular atmosphere and possible visual richness, and not having a museum where the ceiling is only a source of diffuse light, one might actually attempt a greater visual density in each room by also, where possible, use or involve the ceiling. Some artists do this: Gino de Dominicis, Gilberto Zorio, Daniel Buren, Lothar Baumgarten, Giuseppe Penone and, in his design, also Claes Oldenburg. Could sculptors not design floors, and painters ceilings? Donald Judd, among others, expressed a wish. Imagery would then not only rise from the floor or go around the walls but also fall down from the ceilings ...

The exhibition

An exhibition is, more than an intellectual, a practical undertaking. That is, I do not understand why it should be intellectualized whereas its operations are simple. Those operations, however, require a certain subtlety of eye which in the intellectual and ideological battles about movements, styles and novelties, normally surrounding exhibitions, usually gets lost. An exhibition can mean: adapting a space to a type of art or adapting an art to a type of space. In the Castello di Rivoli inevitably the latter had to be the case. Even if the castle and its rooms were to a large extent in ruin, it looked too strong to give up. The house became a condition of its own. The exhibition is a research of the available space by artworks. Then, an exhibition has a sense and praxis of its own which differs from those of a museum. A museum involves the idea of permanence. An exhibition is based on the notion of the temporary; it provides a glimpse rather than a complete spectre (if that ever can ever be shown). Therefore the exhibition incorporates the idea of change and thus the idea of discussion and criticism: not only about the choice of works but also, and as much if we want to be serious, about the exhibition's praxis of presentation. One artist would say to me: you should make something new. Another would say: yes, something unusual but I would like to see my painting in the middle of a white wall. - That is what I mean by praxis.