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EDITORIAL

THE MUSEUM EFFECT

The Pompidou Centre will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2017. With more than 3 million visitors in 2015, and despite a drop in numbers resulting from the Paris attacks (and a program often judged to be “too specialized”), Beaubourg is still a “culture machine”, in the words of Jean Baudrillard, in his famous text published in 1977*. His exact words were: “Beaubourg, a culture machine that produces mass effects and the mass, instead of absorbing culture, consumes the machine”. Yet these “machines” have increased in number. According to UNESCO, the number of museums worldwide has risen from 22,000 in 1975 to 55,000 today.

Museum shapes change as quickly as the numbers rise. As the masses flood in and collections are dematerialized, and as programmes become more complex and exhibitions succeed one another, the architectural structure becomes a work in its own right. People remember the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre, but who really knows what the Lyon Confluences Museum holds within? From the flamboyant machine by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers on the Beaubourg square to the shortly to be completed Qatar National Museum by Jean Nouvel, not to mention the Bilbao Guggenheim by Frank Gehry, we now enjoy looking at the building as much as visiting its content. Should we lament this? Famous today, Beaubourg was nicknamed “Notre-Dame des tuyaux” (“Notre-Dame of Pipes”) in the past.

The museums presented in this issue of *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* were not chosen on the basis of popularity or their attendance numbers. The editorial team preferred to explore the various ambitions of the chosen buildings. Territorial conversion, economic development, marker of identity, cultural patronage, dedication to work or collection, etc. With a constantly renewed programme and scenography, museums now have more than one objective. Although the masses consume the machine more than ever before, museums are not reduced to industrial pipework. Whether a blob or an elegant desert rose, richly equipped or meagrely filled, museums serve a goal, with varying effect.

* The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence, Jean Baudrillard, translated by Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson, October Vol. 20, (Spring, 1982), pp. 3-13, MIT Press.