Living Space: The New Media City of Expo 67

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American film and media scholar Gerald O'Grady has recently argued
that Expo 67 represents the most important media experiment of the 20th
century. It is an 'event' which can be read as a pivotal precursor to the
multiplication and interconnectedness of screens that characterize twenty-
first century digital architectures.[1] While Bazin predicted that the myth of
total cinema would lead to the [1]disappearance of the screen (i.e.,
holographic cinema),[2] the contemporary context presents just the
opposite: frames within frames that foreground the materiality of the
screen. What distinguished Expo '67 from all other previous world
expositions was its spectacular showcasing of audio-visual technologies.
Held in Montréal to celebrate Canada's centenary, Expo 67 was one of the
most successful world fairs ever held with attendance at just over fifty
million.[3] Over three thousand films were produced for the event, several
film festivals were connected to it, including a large Montreal Film
Festival and a student film festival. Approximately sixty-five per cent of

all the pavilions and complexes presented moving pictures, many of

which were dazzling displays of the new flexibility of the screen and the

new synesthesia of the visual cultures of the world mediated through

technology in the sixties. As Judith Shatnoff's review in *Film Quarterly*

described: "Film came on two screens, on three, five, six, nine in a circle,

112 moving screen cubes, a 70mm frame broken into innumerable screen

shapes, screens mirrored to infinity, a water screen (at the Kodak

pavilion), a dome screen…"[4] . And new names were being invented to

describe these screens: Circle Vision, Polyvision, Kinoautomat,

Diapolyecran, and Kaleidoscope. While the Moscow World's fair featured

Glimpses of the USA, a projection on seven screens by Ray and Charles

Eames in 1959 (which upstaged *The Family of Man* photographic

exhibition curated by Edward Steichen) and while the New York World's

fair (1964) had dozens of multi-screen projections, including *Gimpses of*

the USA on fourteen screens at the IBM pavilion[5], there was nothing that

matched Expo in terms of , the reinvention of screens and new kinds of

theatres to accommodate new forms of projection.

     In his book on Expo 67, Canadian critic Robert Fulford commented that

Expo 67 did not change the way films were made but the way they were seen.

[6]My paper will focus on how expo dubbed "McLuhan's fair" and McLuhan was

involved in several of its aspects, can be seen as a utopian media city. The paper

is divided roughly into two sections. The first deals with the overall design and

architectural conception of expo in terms of a new humanist approach to

architecture and urban planning that was both influenced by and influencing new

forms of media production. The second section will focus on one particular

experiment called *Citérama* by Québec artist Jacques Languirand (who worked

with a number other Québec filmmakers including Jacques Godbout and Gilles

Carle), to consider the emergence of a new shared language of media that was

performative, ephemeral, and universal—this new language forms the basis of

the utopian city which was Expo. I would argue that this installation along with

so many of the media experiments at Expo sought to create a communicative

bond based on a version of relational aesthetics that was dialogical, aleatory, and

contingent.

I. Humanism and Architecture

  As a future tense city, Expo was said to be itself a cinematic city, filled

with structures made of webs and screens that refracted and reflected

other images, bodies in movement and atmospheric variations. Indeed, the

"master plan design intent" whose chief architect was Edouard Fiset,

recommended that designers and architects explore the new possibilities

of webs and film-like materials. Expo was called the "Space-Frame Fair"
because so many pavilions covered large areas with lightweight materials
creating structures that were demountable and ready for transportation. It
is the immaterial, the impermanent, the non-linear, the ephemeral of Expo
that gave it its modern futuristic sheen which mirrored the new,
dematerialized commodity culture of North America.[7] Thus, it was not the
monumentality of earlier expos that we find at Expo '67 --Tom Gunning
has described the world exposition as an "a disposable imperial city,
expressing man's dominance over the earth"[8]. Instead, we find the
flexibility of the city in movement. Not surprising, transportation and the
orchestration of traffic was the key component of the entire plan with
trains uniting vast areas of the complex site. The trains were themselves a
complicated network of movements and connections, organized according
to different speeds, operating at different heights while offering riders a
variety of views and vistas.[9] Expo's one thousand acres with two man
made islands built on the Fleuve St-Laurent (Île Notre-Dame and Île
Sainte-Hélène) offered something unique in the way of urban design and
unlike any of the other previous expositions it combined a unified system
of signs, urban furniture representing a new sense of globality.

The relation between screen and architecture, the screen *as* architecture, was central to the humanism that was at the heart of the design aesthetic of Expo.

Expo was built to reflect certain trends in international art and architecture of the sixties. These new trends were first articulated at CIAM 8 held in 1951 in England to consider the "heart of the city" with a specific focus on humanization of urban life, responding to some of the criticisms that Lewis Mumford has made of the group for its emphasis in Corbusian style, on the functional city. [10]In the published proceedings, Siegfried Giedion (who had collaborated with McLuhan) summarizes the problematic in terms of creating a new kind of active spectator. He argues that public places must be created that encourage relations between citizens, places free from the automobile that promote "the right of the pedestrian," Island cities like Venice, encourage encounters between people. Artists (painters, sculptors, designers) should not be brought in at the end of planning but should have a central role in shaping city spaces. I think we can read the creation of Expo as an island city designed precisely for specific forms of circulation and networks of interaction in these terms.

Giedion argued that the humanisation of urban design must

incorporate "moments of repose" between activities, the play of light and shadow in order to enable and encourage the conviviality that was the hallmark of great cities. The city is conceived as an active environment deeply connected to temporality, to precisely that which cannot be planned—in essence Gideon argues for the performative aspects of everyday life to be brought back to the city and interestingly sets up an analogy between spectatorship and citizenship. CIAM 8's great contribution to the discourse on urban planning and I would argue to the beginnings of urban media cultures which we see articulated at Expo, was to consider the city as an interactive medium.

While not directly involved in the planning of Expo 67, the town planner Jacqueline Tyrwhitt who helped to organize CIAM 8's congress and edit the proceedings, and who was a close collaborator not only of McLuhan (she was part of the Explorations Group he had set up at the University of Toronto) but of John Bland (Bland/Lemoyne/Shine) who designed the Labyrinth Building at Expo 67, and who was a mentor to Mosche Safdie. Safde was the architect of *Habitat*, perhaps the central symbol along with Bucky Fuller's Geodesic Dome, of Expo's contribution to a new humanist conception of urban planning based on affordable community housing and environments designed for collective living.

While the relation between CIAM 8 and Expo 67 needs more explication and fleshing out, it is important to underline that just as the city was being conceived in terms of a dynamic interactive art work, so too were experiments with the media (sounds, lights, performance, screens) being conceived along the lines of networks and environments. This belongs to a very exciting and as yet unwritten history of the mutual influence of urban and media practices in the 1960s.

II. CITERAMA

Citérama was conceived by the Québec novelist and playwright Jacques Languirand (who shortly after Expo wrote a wonderful and as yet untranslated book on McLuhan *De McLuhan à Pythagore* (1972).
Citérama was part of the *Man and his Community* Pavilion and I wish to highlight this installation in particular because it was conceived as a media city, the city conceived as media. The physical building designed by Arthur Erickson was built like a pyramid made of wood logs that culminated in a cone shaped roof that was open to the sky, as visitors passed underneath it and they were able to catch a 'utopian' vista of the sky140 feet overhead.

Citérama consisted of two concentric platforms stacked, the smaller one rotated faster than the larger one and stopped at intermittent points so that the 200 person audience which surrounded the installation could make connections between the various images. Each platform was divided into 12 stages, and each of the stages are three dimensional settings. 6 of the12 inner stages carried slide screens which were themselves divided in half and each with 350 images for a total 700 rear projected images that were created as a "film fixe." This was intended as a 'collage in motion." on the smaller platform images projected included a montage of children eating and going to school, concrete and iron being poured into molds, television screens being manufactured, images of war and violence. The installation's Pop Art and post humanist style serves to create a sense of museification and suspended animation. The Pop Art was also a methodology for the installation breaking down boundaries between high and low art, between different media, between audience and spectacle which Languirand contrasts with a randomness (i.e., the effect of rings moving at different speeds that ensured that each individual audience member had a different experience, and made different associations, and yet it always came back to/was mediated by the same universal theme of —the city and technology—as seen in terms of "youth, scientific research,

consumerism, love, communication, violence, authority" and so on . The soundtrack which was a combination of jazz and concrete sound and recorded voices prefigured surround sound techniques, creating an immersive environment.

Like the building in which it was housed, *Citérama* was conceived as a spiral—cyclical yet open ended and open to the world. For Languirand it was impossible to synchronize the two platforms whose rotations it turned out were irregular with the soundtrack. So in the same way that each spectator experienced a different combination of images and objects, each screening was also unique and this for Languirand made the experience all the richer.

Languirand's dystopian view of the shiny surfaces of the world made through television was perhaps the negative aesthetic to the Unit B's *Labyrinth* project which carried a phenomenology of the everyday from all around the world. For Umberto Eco who reviewed Expo 67, *Citérama* failed in its pedagogical mission (the only redeeming quality that Expos may carry is their pedagogical potential). Indeed, Eco sees the NFB's *Labyrinth*'s use of technology far less intrusive and far more instructive because of its documentary elements. [11]

Conclusion

Eco misses the point of Expo 67 as a whole project, as an "oeuvre" to return to Lefebvre's insight. Quebecers Edouard Fiset and James Miller, the central architects of Expo, were given the job after several of the European architects had already been fired. They got the plan done and approved in just under two months. Indeed, in Corbusian style, Expo was built for speed, built to celebrate reason over chance, built to confirm a belief in progress. Yet it was precisely the new performative multisensory architectonics of the projected image—which were inflected by advances in satellite aided media and new forms of DIY cultures—that opened up the spaces of conviviality and spontaneity that Giedion was calling for in the early fifties.

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[1] Gerald O'Grady, talk delivered at Ryerson University, Toronto March 2008.

[2]. André Bazin, "The Myth of Total Cinema," *What is Cinema?* vol. 1, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

[3]. Expo '67 was held in Montréal from April 28 to October 27, 1967. Sixty-one countries participated. The Library and Archives of Canada has an excellent site which brings together many of the original documents and photographs of the event. http://www.collectionscanada.ca/expo/.

[4] Judith Shatnoff, "Expo 67: A Multiple Vision," *Film Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1967): 2.

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[5] Cf. Ben Highmore, "Machinic Magic: IBM at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair," <u>New Formations</u> 51 (2004), pp.128-148.

[6] Robert Fulford, Remember Expo: A Pictorial Record. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968.

[7]. "Expo 67: An Experiment in the Development of Urban Space," *Architectural Record*, July 1966,

169–73.

[8]. Gunning, 423.

[9]. Architectural Record, 170.

[10] Eric Mumford. *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000.

[11] Umberto Eco, 'A Theory of Exhibitions,' in (1967) Dotzero, volume 4.