

Expo 67

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## “A New Way of Seeing”; The Immersive Impact of Cinema at Expo 67

Expo 67, the World's Fair, held on Montreal's Ile Notre Dame and Ile Saint-Helene brought together the wonders of architecture, art, design and technology, inviting its fifty million visitors to enter a world of futuristic fantasy. This World's Fair was a site and an experience-scape<sup>1</sup> where visitors from around the globe would share in the excitement of innovative discoveries. New media technologies were essential to the production of Expo as a realm of futurity. They were integrated in Expo's texture to an extent that by far surpassed the experiences of everyday life. In the majority of pavilions, the cinema and the projections were not only utilized, but interwoven, “multiplied by three, by ten, by a hundred”<sup>2</sup>. This essay explores the ways in which multi-screen cinema at Expo 67 provided a “new way of seeing” that served to enhance the immersion of the visitor into the futuristic fantasy world of the fair. This analysis will be driven through the cinematic experience of the visitor in the Telephone Pavilion, the Labyrinth and the Czechoslovak Pavilion. Firsthand accounts from people who frequented Expo as well as photographs and references will be used to reinforce and provide evidence for this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Jansson, André. “Encapsulations: The Production of a Future Gaze at Montreal's Expo 67” *Space and Culture*. Vol. 10, 418. (2007). p. 418-43

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

It is first important to define the meaning of a “new way of seeing”. This photograph<sup>3</sup> illustrates 1500 visitors at Expo crammed in shoulder to shoulder in the Telephone Pavilion, surrounded by a Circular-Vision 360 degree screen. From the picture, it is difficult to ascertain where the images are coming from, where the crowd is focusing their attention. It appears that they are encapsulated by the projected images. This encapsulation creates a defined environment where people are immersed, taken out of their everyday normative state, and enter into a setting where the novel of cinema is experienced.



Fig. 1; Telephone Pavilion, Overhead View  
Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

This is the starting point in contextualizing this “new way of seeing”. In 1967, video presentations were not easily available to the masses; production was extremely expensive so movies, 16mm, 35mm or 70mm were more or less successful methods of running film; in an endless loop<sup>4</sup>. Despite this fact, multi-screen cinema had been used before in World’s Fairs, not only at the New York exhibition in 1964 but at Brussels in 1958 and even in earlier fairs,

<sup>3</sup> Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

<sup>4</sup> "Vic Michener - Freelance Copywriter." *Vic Michener - Freelance Copywriter | Experienced B2b Marketing Specialist | Bargain Rates for U.S. Clients*. Web. 15 Mar. 2010. <<http://www.freelancewriter.myfavoritemarketer.com/sample.php?id=12>>.

including one in Paris three decades before<sup>5</sup>, but this time multi-screen cinemas was a dominant factor rather than a special attraction. This time it was not at the stage of introduction, but rather at the development stage of a new cinematic language. The real revolution therefore was not in making films but in watching them. Expo provided people a “new way of seeing” that amounted to the simple equation of “one plus one equals three”<sup>6</sup>. When two (or more) moving images are put together side by side on a screen, as seen very clearly in this photograph, the sum is greater than its parts, the eye compares and combines the two images, and the mind then draws from them a fresh implication. Expo cinemas forced people to look at its subjects in new ways, to stretch the visual imagination, to participate in the film rather than just absorbing it. Robert Fulford, who spent four months reporting on the fair for the Toronto Star, compares cinematic technology at expo to “what cubism was to painting before the First World War...just as cubism forced the viewer to see the same object from several angles at once, Expo cinemas asked us to comprehend at the same time two, five, seven or even fifteen separate moving pictures”<sup>7</sup>. This “new way of seeing” cinema provoked and subconsciously motivated people to open up their minds to experience Expo as the fantastical technological spectacle that it was. Media projections elicited a multitude of varied responses and experiences from the Fair visitors.

The cinematic experience of the telephone pavilion provoked unheard of visceral reactions to the images appearing on the screens. Nine projectors, concealed in the spaces between screens projected a completely circular image while twelve synchronized sound channels spewed forth music and words creating a “cocoon of sight and sound”<sup>8</sup>. Ann Taylor, a frequent fair goer, who was twelve at the time, still remembers vividly the Mounties on their

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<sup>5</sup> Shatnoff, Judith. “Expo 67: A Multiple Vision” University of California Press. Vol. 21, No. 1. (1967). p. 2-13

<sup>6</sup> Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Jansson, André. “Encapsulations: The Production of a Future Gaze at Montreal's Expo 67” *Space and Culture*. Vol. 10, 418. (2007). p. 418-43

horses heading her way and the feeling that she better move before she got trampled and prying herself off her friends arm as she was terrified of the heights of The Great Rockies. Prior to this, her experience of cinema was her Electrohome 23 inch console in the TV room of her home and outings to the movie theatre were a rare occurrence. She described the feeling of excitement and chatter of the crowd as they shuffled out of the pavilion to the awe of the massive Man and his World Pavilions<sup>9</sup>. As seen in the image on the right, the views and panoramas created by the Expo landscape are nothing short of revolutionary and inspiring, and so as the visitors left the theatre, their senses stimulated, they began to implement this “new way of seeing” to everything at Expo. For most people the illusion was magical.

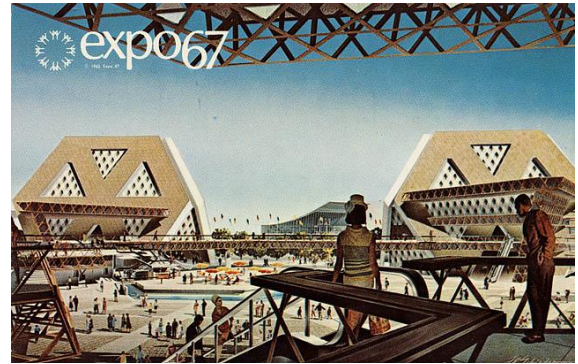


Fig 2; View Outside Telephone Pavilion  
 "Expo 67 - Exhibitions - Library and Archives Canada."  
 Welcome to the *LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA* Website |  
 Bienvenue Au Site Web *BIBLIOTH.* Web. 15 Mar. 2010.  
 <[http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/expo/053302\\_e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/expo/053302_e.html)>.

The Telephone Pavilion signified a drive toward spatial immersion, making the viewer step into a new world, forgetting his or her physical bonds. The objective was to transcend the obvious limitations of cinematic space, namely, that it is impossible for the spectator to fully occupy it. Increasing the size and multiplying the number of screens, as in the Circle-Vision technique of the Telephone Pavilion, so that spectators were literally surrounded by cinematic space was thought of as a way of extending cinema’s potential for immersion and involvement. In the Expo 67 guidebooks representations of Expo, this sense of immersion was promoted as a new stage in the development of cinema, even acknowledging the apparent blur that became present between what is real and what is fantasy. “After Expo, movies will never be the same again. Nor audiences. Experimental techniques blossomed, and the two-dimensional movie vanished in a tidal wave of images designed to swamp the mind so you *feel* first, think later. . . . [Circle-

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, Ann. "Interview with Ann Taylor." Personal interview. 17 Mar. 2009.

Vision] is, after all, only a movie. Or is it? At the Niagara scene, and while watching the film of the Rockies, many people actually fainted from vertigo, and it's hard to get more involved than that"<sup>10</sup>. Located within the realm of Expo 67, visiting the Telephone Pavilion was to enter a test capsule in which to try out the visual practices of the future.

The Telephone Pavilion, stimulated and aroused the senses of the visitor and permitted a heightened awareness of the Fair and its futuristic offerings. However this was only a beginning in how cinema would ultimately stimulate and implicate its viewers. In the Telephone pavilion, visitors stood passively absorbing and reacting to the images. The Labyrinth Pavilion would take its audience to the next level of "a new way of seeing."



Fig. 3; Labyrinth  
Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and  
Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

The Labyrinth's status as an Expo attraction is very much premised on its innovative employment of cinema technology as it leads the visitor even further into this "new way of seeing" as the individual becomes an active participant within the film. This multi-chamber installation by the National Film Board was the undisputed hit of Expo '67 in Montreal. Presented in a concrete fortress five storeys high, as seen from the inside in the image on the left, the film was conceived and designed by Roman Kroitor and Colin Low. A

<sup>10</sup> *Official Expo 1967 Guide Book*. Toronto: Maclean-Hunter Publishing Co. Ltd., 1967.

film symbolizing man's journey through life, *Labyrinth*'s narrative echoed the Greek myth about Theseus's descent into the labyrinth to kill the Minotaur<sup>11</sup>: viewers were led through dim corridors into three different chambers of the labyrinth, each of which represented one stage of the journey. Paul Salhany, a film lover who frequented Expo at the age of 22, remembers his experience in the Labyrinth, "there was a lot happening, I forget a lot, but the most poignant parts were the killing of the crocodile and mostly the poor baby born without limbs at the end, I'll never forget it. It felt a lot like being in an Imax film, I never understood then what it was about except it got to me deep inside in a good way and left me wanting to do something good with my life!"<sup>12</sup>

He remembers walking through the three chambers; the first chamber, introduced viewers to the hero, Man, and had screens on the floor and on the walls. Here, the initial sections of man's life cycle were shown: birth, childhood, confident youth, the struggle to succeed and conquer the refusal to accept mortality, and the recognition that many battles will be lost. The second chamber, a transitional stage, prepared viewers to find the personal "beast" living inside us all; people moved through an M-shaped passageway formed by semi-mirrored prisms reflecting hundreds of small blinking lights. The third chamber, representing man's triumphant return to the world, was a wide, shallow auditorium featuring five screens in a cruciform arrangement, on which the symbolic struggle was



Fig. 4; Labyrinth, Chamber 3  
Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and  
Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

<sup>11</sup> "Labyrinth." *The Film Reference Library*. Web. 20 Mar.2010. <<http://www.filmreferencelibrary.ca/index>>.

<sup>12</sup> Salhany, Paul. "Interview with Paul Salhanny." Personal interview. 7 Mar. 2009.



played out.<sup>13</sup> Hardly anyone completely understood what the Labyrinth was all about; Roman Kroiter, who directed it, said, "... it doesn't really bother me that people don't completely understand...the ideal effect would be like a very real, very vivid dream which you don't really understand. You know only that something inside it is explosive and important. The film only addresses about twenty percent to the ordinary conscious part of the mind, and eighty percent to the rest."<sup>14</sup>

The Labyrinth actually constitutes a type of hybrid multimedia as it incorporates architecture, music, voiceovers, sound effects, sculpture and even surrounding landscape. In addition, conventional behavioural codes for movies such as sitting or even just standing in one place are removed so that the progression of the narrative and the cohesion of the work is dependent upon the presence and movement of the visitors. The connection between the chambers and their images are formed to impact on the visitors. Without their procession from one stage to the next, and the movement of their eyes from screen to screen, the Labyrinth becomes insignificant. Involvement in the Labyrinth is as inescapable as it was for the legendary Theseus; each visitor is inescapably required to take on a "heroic" position and thereby take part in the Labyrinth's narrative structure. "Total involvement in cinemas was never so total, your senses are bombarded! You see happenings happening!"<sup>15</sup>

In the case of Labyrinth, not only are the senses of the visitors fully awakened but each individual makes the decision to take the risk of further exploring the unknown fantasy beyond the next chamber. This constitutes a new level of engagement within an encapsulated environment where the people experiencing this sequence of symbolic

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<sup>13</sup> "Labyrinth." *The Film Reference Library*. Web. 20 Mar.2010. <<http://www.filmreferencelibrary.ca/index>>.

<sup>14</sup> Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

<sup>15</sup> Whitney, Allison. "Labyrinth: Cinema, Myth and Nation at Expo 67." Diss. McGill University, 1999. Print.



documentary images become progressively immersed into the fantasy of the spectacle and consequently are widening their way of seeing expo as a highly fascinating and futuristic event. The technology used to create such an impression as in the Labyrinth instils in the people that visited it the idea of making a conscious decision to become involved and encourage active exploratory behaviour in the Fair goers.

The Czech Pavilion surprised most North Americans, it contained no hint of a Communist country but rather showcased “Art”, from Gothic paintings to new forms of cinema. Film was the root of the pavilion. And of the three major shows, the Kinoautomat movie, “One Man and its World”, created by the genius cinematographer Raduz Cincera tangibly produced a film



Fig. 5; Kinoautomat  
"Expo 67 - Cinema." *Internet Market, Website Design and Westside Webcams*. Web. 21 Mar. 2010.  
<<http://www.westland.net/expo67/map-docs/cinema.htm>>.

experience founded on the premise of children’s theatre: audience participation. Cincera extrapolated that just as children love to make “Tinkerbell live by clapping at Peter Pan,” adults may thrive by being involved in theatre pertaining to adult themes<sup>16</sup>. In contrast to the two previous cinema layouts, Kinoautomat was projected in a more normative theatre environment; a simple theatre room containing 127 seats, as seen in the image above. However, even more so than the first two, Kinoautomat blurred the lines between fantasy and reality. At points in the plot the film stopped and the audience was asked to decide on the actions of the hero, Mr. Novak. Meanwhile, the actor playing Mr. Novak, Miroslav Hornick, appeared in the theatre, in character, pleading for the audience’s help to solve his problems.

<sup>16</sup> Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

By pushing a red or green button, the visitor would vote at each decision point, most audiences choosing the daring and amoral alternative.

Robert Fulford in *This is Expo* describes his experience at Kinoautomat, “One day when I was there we voted 85-32 for admitting the blonde, 91-25 for breaking the traffic laws, 79-38 for dashing into that apartment, and 91-38 for smashing the porter over the head...it was great entertainment, the funniest forty-five minutes at Expo; it was also a way of making us all feel like we contributed, in a small way, to the fair.”<sup>17</sup>

Far removed from the film viewer, as purely an observer, Kinoautomat forces the audience to take part in the film by determining the behaviour of the main character and ultimately “changing the plot of the movie”.

Each person has a vote but ultimately it is the voice of the majority that chooses the hero’s response. Kinoautomat was a study and a display of “group fantasy” where people could risk decisions that in other context they would have not. When the hero joins the audience and pleads for their help, the viewers are forced to become part of the fantasy of the film.

The visitors have now become “creators” within the spectacle of Expo 67. Being provided with a multitude of opportunities to be interactive within the realm of media at the Fair, allowed the visitors to learn, enjoy and experience the sights and sounds which

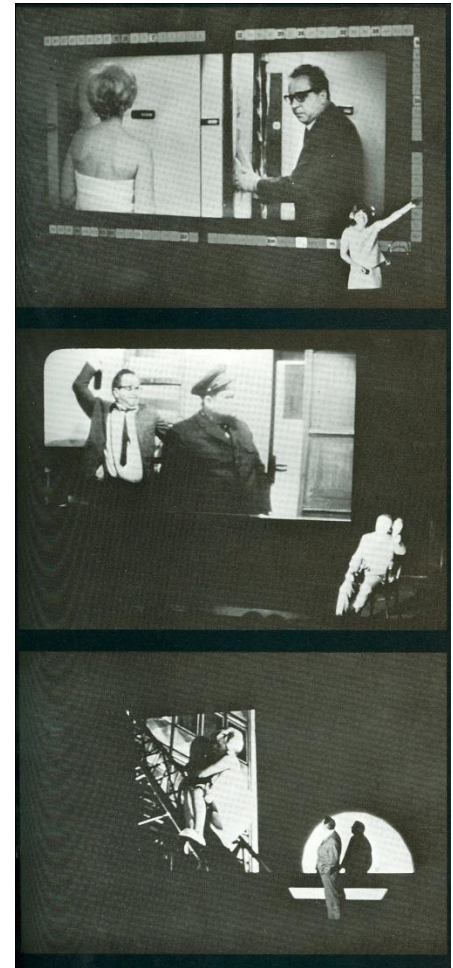


Fig. 6; Czechoslovak Pavilion  
Fulford, Robert. *This Was Expo*. McClelland  
and Stewart Limited, Toronto. 1968

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

surrounded them. This is the ultimate example of immersion in the futuristic adventures presented at Expo 67, providing the fair goer the power to control their world of futuristic fantasy.

In conclusion, cinema at Expo 67 in Montreal provided encapsulated experiences that served to significantly deepen the immersion of the visitors into the futuristic and fantastical atmosphere of the fair. The islands of Expo provided a haven, “far” away from the city and from everyday life, where the visitors could allow their imaginations to wander. The cinema in the Telephone Pavilion, Labyrinth and Czechoslovak Pavilion, as three of the most popular attractions at the fair, played a fundamental role in the creation of this atmosphere by opening up the visitors to a “new way of seeing”. The Telephone Pavilion began the process of immersion by jolting their visceral senses into high alert, allowing the people to more deeply appreciate and notice the revolutionary architecture and landscape that surrounded them. The Labyrinth further implicated the fair goers as it required them to become active participants within the spectacle, which manifested a new desire to not only look but engage in the activities of the World’s Fair. Finally, the Czechoslovak Pavilion provided the ultimate forum for the involvement of the guests of Expo, permitting them to actually manipulate fate within the context of the movie, shifting their role as simply a visitor, to a creator at Expo 67. Through multi screen cinemas, that is, the symbiosis of architecture and immersive media, each pavilion represented a totalizing spatial experience which changed and enhanced people’s way of seeing this spectacular World’s Fair of 1967 in Montreal.

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