

# Private and public memories of Expo 67: a case study of recollections of Montreal's World's Fair, 40 years after the event

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the results of a long-term memory study in which fifty visitors to Expo 67 (25 participants from British Columbia and 25 from Quebec) shared their recollections of their personal experience forty years after the event. The impetus for this study stems from a desire to understand the long-term impact of visitors' experience in informal, leisure-time contexts, and, particularly in large-scale exhibitions. This paper presents and discusses outcomes that elucidate the nature of personal memories of Expo 67 and in relation to the collective memory of cultural events/productions. Moreover, the study illustrates and discusses an interesting paradox of personal memories of the event. Specifically, most visitors report common themes surrounding the memory of self (the script of events, the things they saw and did), yet almost all participants report highly idiosyncratic stories that are mediated by their personal identities, and more so, the recollection and perception of the national significance of Expo 67 appears clearly differentiated by cultural communities to which they are affiliated. These understandings provide insights that assist museums and similar institutions employing exhibit media to comprehend the long-term impact of visitors' experiences.

**Key words:** Long-term memory, episodic memory, cultural mediation, visitor experience, identity.

*When the lights go out for the last time, when the crowds have left the pavilions and the avenues, a World Exhibition begins a new life. Less glittering but more profound, this new life is nourished in the souls of those who visited the Exhibition, and it will blossom into a legend for generations to come. (Pierre Dupuy, 1968: 7 in Expo 67: The Official Souvenir Album)*

When Commissioner General of Expo 67, Pierre Dupuy, wrote these words shortly after the event, he probably did not expect anyone to investigate the matter literally. What do people actually remember of their visit to Expo 67 decades after the event? Expo was often referred to as Canada's entry on the world stage; a universal exposition viewed by experts as one of the best of its kind ever staged since the inception of the London Exposition of 1851. This paper echoes Dupuy's thoughts by explicating the results of a long-term memory study in which fifty visitors to Expo 67 (25 participants from British Columbia and 25 from Quebec) shared their recollections of their personal experience forty years after the event.

This investigation, which focuses on visitors' memories of Expo 67, is part of a larger study exploring the nature and character of long-term memories of World Expositions. The impetus for such a study stems from a desire to understand the long-term impact of visitors' experience in informal, leisure-time contexts, and particularly in large-scale exhibitions. Studies such as this may provide insights that will help museums and similar museums to enhance visitor experience. Over the past 20 years, museums have become increasingly interested in capturing visitors' thoughts about exhibitions to assess the institution's ability to communicate

and engage with their audience. It is one strategy, among others, to situate the role of the museum in contemporary society.

Although this study examines visitors' memories of a World Exposition rather than their recollections of a museum visit, parallels can be drawn between the two kinds of experience: both require from participants a physical and intellectual engagement with displays of material culture which are presented within a circumscribed environment. These displays were and continue to be designed for public education and with entertainment in mind. Both contexts are experiences generally propelled by the organizers' desire to explain, organize and promote a specific set of values and understandings of the world. Additionally, memories from a sample of visitors to World Expositions can be located easily in terms of their chronological distance, since the event is recalled and identified more easily than are casual visits to a museum.

### **The Study: background and methodology**

Very few visitor studies have set out to understand the long-term impact of museum or exposition visits years after the experience. This study represents one of only very few known attempts to understand the impact of exhibition-like media decades after the event (cf. Anderson 2003; Anderson and Shimizu 2007a, 2007b; Hicks 2005), unlike most visitor impact studies that collect visitor feedback/response days, weeks, months after the visit (cf. Anderson 1999; Anderson, Lucas, Ginns and Dierking 2000; Adelman, Falk and James 2000; McManus 1993; Medved and Oatley 2000; Medved, Cupchik and Oatley 2004; Stevenson, 1991). This research is situated within a suite of studies conducted by co-author Anderson which have considered visitor memories of several World Expositions including, Expo 70 (Osaka), Expo 86 (Vancouver), and Expo 88 (Brisbane). Anderson (2003) investigated the long-term memories of 50 visitors who attended either Expo 86 or Expo 88 and whose memories were probed through in-depth, face-to-face interviews. The outcomes reported in Anderson (2003) represent themes common to visitors' memories of two different expositions held in two different countries, yet the emergent themes regarding memories of these kinds of events were strongly confirmatory of each other. In particular, the study demonstrated that visitors' social memories of their expo experience were highly salient, their socio-cultural identities at the time of the experience critically shaped their memories of the experience, and the agendas that visitors recalled at the time of the experience influenced the vividness of memory. Later work by Anderson and Shimizu (2007a, 2007b), which investigated visitors' memories of Expo 70, demonstrated that three psychological and behavioural factors - affect, agenda fulfillment, and rehearsal - are key to the development and retention of vivid long-term memories. Anderson and Shimizu (2007a) speculated that, in the case of the Osaka Expo 70, memory episodes that had endured for 34 years and which were so strongly associated with a person's affects and/or agenda fulfillment were likely to have influenced the degree to which they were rehearsed throughout later life. Hence, it was argued that this combination of factors ultimately incites memories to become rehearsed, and thus plausibly accounts for highly vivid memories that can be recalled many years later.

The findings reported in this paper were derived from a qualitative-interpretivist approach (Schwandt 1998) to understanding the nature and character of visitors' long-term memories of Expo 67. The nature of interpretive research often reveals insights that are not entirely predictable at the commencement of a study, and in the case of this research, the broader interpretive focus permitted the emergence of several insights concerning the impact that world fairs have as a function of visitor memories years or even decades later. The study was in part phenomenographic in nature, in that it sought to interpret the phenomenon of the nature and character of visitors' long-term memories of World Expos (Martin 1986; Holstwin and Gubrium 1998), while its theoretical location resides with the examination of episodic and/or autobiographical aspects of recall (Conway 2001; Squire 1992; Tulving 1983; Tulving and Donaldson 1972).

Between November 2006 and February 2007, 50 participants who had visited Expo 67 were individually interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). Interviews were on average 40 minutes and sometimes as long as 60 minutes. The sample comprised 31 females and 19 males who were between the ages of 7 and 40 in

1967. Half the participants lived in Greater Vancouver and the other half in the Montreal area. Interviews were conducted by researchers in English (27) or in French (23). The interviews were conducted in the language in which the participants felt the most comfortable articulating their memories of the event. All Vancouver-based interviews were conducted in English and all but two Montreal-based interviews were conducted in French. The cultural/ethnic background of participants consisted of a majority of Canada-born Caucasians with the exception of one Aboriginal woman, one African-American, and three Caucasians who had recently immigrated to Canada at the time of Expo 67.

Interviews took place in community centres, on university campuses and in the homes of interviewees. Participants were voluntarily recruited to participate in the study by means of electronic posters sent via list-serve. The advertisement cited the objectives of the study and called for participants of diverse ages who visited the exposition at least once. The advertisement stressed that participants did not need a detailed memory of Expo 67 in order to participate in the study. The interview questions followed the semi-structured interview protocol, and were conducted in a relaxed conversational manner and probed issues such as the spontaneous recall of Expo memories; episodic memories of events, occurrences and happenings during their visit(s); social aspects of their visit including stories and events that participants could recall in relation to their social context; and their socio-cultural identity (or identities) in 1967, such as their stage of life, interests and occupations. The final interview question prompted participants to discuss the significance of Expo 67 for Quebec and/or Canada.

Over 350 of these episodic memories<sup>1</sup> were discerned from fifty participants' interviews and form the basis of thematic analysis. *Episodic memory* in this study was defined as the recollection of singular events in the life of a person. It is what a person remembers feeling, thinking, seeing and doing. It is the memory of life experiences seen through the individuals' perspective and mediated through identity of the individual. Concern about the *accuracy* of participants' memories was not a focus of the study. It is known that long-term memory is a contingent, evolving, and subjective account of thoughts, events and experiences that took place in the life of individuals. Moreover, it is well accepted that subsequent experiences and time may re-shape the way experiences are remembered and conceptualized in the life script (Bruner 1994; Freeman 1993; Neisser and Fivush 1994; Bielick and Karns 1998; Ellenbogen 2002). Hence, in this study, the qualitatively rich memories described by the participants were considered their 'current reality' (or 'subjective reality') of the recalled events from 1967.

World's Fair historian R.W. Rydell (2006) has recently provided a comprehensive literature review of world fairs, reiterating the historical and symbiotic relationship between museums and World's Fairs. While asserting the relevance of post-structural analysis in understanding the role of world fairs in shaping modernity, Rydell alludes to a range of promising research avenues concerning the complex story of this cultural institution. One of the understudied aspects identified is the issue of human agency and particularly the visitors' meaning-making abilities. Rydell also comments on the general paucity of studies of fair visitors in the academic literature and there are, of course, obvious limitations to what we can find out about visitors' experiences to past expositions. However, whilst admission statistics, marketing surveys and newspaper editorial coverage may be the primary sources of data about visitors to World's Fairs in the historical past, Expo 67 provides a more immediate and exceptional opportunity for a memory study which analyzes visitor's experiences first hand. This paper will, in part, fill this research gap by considering the question of World's fair memories in relation to visitor's agency.

### ***EXPO 67- key features of the experiential case***

Expo '67 was staged from April to October 1967 in Montreal, Quebec. It spanned more than 900 acres, partly built on two man-made islands in the St-Lawrence River. It qualified as a first-category Fair, a universal, international exposition officially defined as 'one at which various countries construct their own pavilions and which constitutes a living testimony of the contemporary epoch.'<sup>2</sup> Attendance reached fifty-three million visitors; almost doubling predictions. The exposition surpassed everyone's expectation in scope and quality. With a less experienced team and a tighter timeline than at the other previous expositions, the organizers managed to produce the second largest World's Fair by attendance ever held, hosting sixty-one participating

countries. The creation of Expo 67 was linked to important infrastructural projects of Montreal: a subway system, roads, bridges, slum clearance, hotels and theatres. The theme of the Fair, 'Man and his World'<sup>3</sup> expressed humanistic interests in exploring man's ability to interact with nature and each other. In the countercultural atmosphere of the late sixties, while war raged in Vietnam and Soviets and Americans competed in the space race, the Fair's organizers 'made a deliberate point that their event would not be a showcase for what they described as "cold technology"' (Mattie 1998: 228).



Fig. 1. View of Expo 67 (Photograph by Ross R. Rupert)

## Data analysis and interpretation

The analysis and interpretation of data exposes both the uniqueness and commonalities of participants' Expo 67 memories. Emergent themes will be discussed first in *Remembering the Self* where visitors' memories of their experience oscillate between, or fuse, the very personal and Expo 67's intended portrayal of the world and the era. The second part of the analysis, *Remembering the Nation*, will launch a discussion about the interplay between individual recollections and the collective memory of cultural productions. The large number of participants' quotes is a deliberate effort to share with readers the texture and nature of these long-term recalls.

### I. Remembering the self

#### *Articulation of memories*

When comparing overall the reports of participants' memories of Expo 67, we found that the level of detail and the number of episodes reported by our subjects varied<sup>4</sup>. However, our analysis showed that the backdrop to the fifty participants' 'Expo narratives' (travelling, site exploring, being impressed by the setting, etc.) was, on the surface, similar from one participant's account to another. However, the characteristics of the actors and the conditions



*Fig. 2. Flag court at Expo 67 (Photograph by Ross R. Rupert)*

in which the plot unfolded, once we got beyond the surface-level analysis, differed tremendously. It seems apparent from this and other studies (cf. Anderson, Storkdieck and Spock 2007) that a wide range of variables such as visitor characteristics (age, gender, occupation, personal interests, and cultural background) mediated the way memory was encoded. Episodic memories are idiosyncratic and at times, mundane and yet they are indicative of the individual's identity, sensitivity and worldview at the time the memories were etched. The following interview segments from three participants provide exemplars of the heterogeneity, and richness of recollected episodes.

We were about to take the Metro [subway] to go to the Expo site, when suddenly a group of policeman came to us and pushed us aside saying "Make way! Make way!" We then saw General de Gaulle walking to the metro with his entourage. The President of France was taking the Metro to go to Expo site; imagine that! It went so fast. I was so close to him, I could have touched him! Later on we went to see him at the French pavilion and in the crowd, somebody yelled 'Assassin'. The man was immediately arrested. It had to do with the conflicts in Algeria, I think. It is the following day that General de Gaulle made his *famous* statement at the municipal hall. We went back to our hostel and talked about this incident with our new American friends.<sup>5</sup> The participant refers to General de Gaulle's speech of July 25, 1967 at Montreal City Hall where he made evident his support for Quebec's separatist movement.

*(Participant #32, 17- year-old man, Anglophone, travelling with one friend from Nova Scotia; they visited Expo for a full week. Today: Quebec resident)*

One thing surprised me. In Montreal, people when taking the bus, would push each other. They were very rude. So I thought, 'What will happen when they'll take the Metro at Expo?' Nothing bad happened. People were so civilized; all in

ranks; same thing on Expo Site. I remember saying to my relatives from out-of-town, 'Don't worry, people are very respectful'. Same thing when we would be waiting in line to get in the pavilions. The cleanliness was also surprising; so many people and yet nobody misbehaving. (*Participant # 29, 32-year-old man, Francophone from Montreal, worked as an engineer, visited several times (20+) with family and relatives. Today: Quebec resident*)

We waited two hours to taste lobster. Being Jewish it was the first time we were going to eat lobster; it's not kosher food. When it came time to order, we all ordered lobster except one of the girls ordered sole - she had chickened out at the last moment. We were furious! We kept talking about it [this incident] years after. (*Participant # 4, 17-year-old woman, Anglophone, travelled from Toronto with three other girlfriends; all four had just graduated from high school. Visited Expo 67 a full week. Today: BC resident*)

Factors affecting memory vividness can be seen at work: *affect* in the form of recalled excitement, surprise, frustration and *rehearsal* of the experience in the form of subsequent discussions with friends and relatives, or reminiscing the experience from personal photographs. These factors are noticeably modulated by visitor's characteristics such as age and specific interests. These accounts of Expo 67 do evoke important aspects of the events: the visit of the French President, the behaviour of the crowd, the waiting time before entering pavilions and the cleanliness of the site. But in contrast to what we learn from the official historical records, they are overtly saturated with personal details, feelings and judgments making the event and self remembered simultaneously. The re-framing of these episodes captured dominant aspects of their identity at the time of the visit. Participant #32 for example situates his visit as his first real trip as a young independent adult: 'We had a summer job waiting for us back home, and we were just ready for an adventure.' Visitor #29 a young father, recalls thoroughly enjoying acting as a guide at Expo 67 for his out-of-town relatives and seeing the various displays through the eyes of his children and nephews. Participant #26, a parent, reminisces dressing smartly the family for the days' visit to Expo (See Fig. 3). Participant #4 remembers clearly feeling happy to 'be functioning as an adult... We felt intelligent and about to be educated' referring to her and her friends about to start their university degree. These recollections suggest that the exposition has an enduring relationship to the participants' identity and actions (including feelings and thoughts). It is these interactions with exhibits, displays, environments and people that are remembered. The significance of these interactions however must also be considered within a particular socio-historical context that impacts the nature of the memories. The identification of themes in the memories does help account for these contextual components.



*Fig. 3. Dressed smartly for the visit to Expo (Photograph by Giselle Roy)*

### ***Emerging themes across participants' memories***

Amid the range of Expo narratives, common themes emerged regardless of participants' linguistic and cultural differences. Three predominant themes emerged from our interpretive analysis and linked memories associated with (a) technological innovations (the intended portrayal and representations of the world and the era), and (b) otherness (the personal or mediated meeting with other cultures, mostly perceived as exotic), and (c) mundane episodes (the seemingly insignificant, but highly important personal experiences of the individual).

The presence of the first two themes in participants' memories, representing two-thirds of the recalled episodes, concurs with the established view expressed in the World's Fair literature that universal expositions are 'giant rituals' of modernity; bold expressions of nationalism affirming cultural identity and economic competence through very sophisticated displays of material and living cultures associated with technological progress, racial and cultural taxonomies and the exotic (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Rydell 1994; Willinsky 1998). Below is an inventory of common memories amongst participants that demonstrate a keen interest and curiosity about technological innovations, and otherness. Each participant recalled only a few of the following memories; the frequency of these memories is indicated beside each memory.

### ***Displays of technological innovations***

These recollections speak of novelty, kinaesthetic and aesthetic experiences related to personal encounters with innovative technologies. In large part, the techno memories spoke of optimism, connecting technological developments with progress: we, human kind, transport better, build better, and entertain better. Here are a few exemplars illustrating the articulation of this theme in participants' recollections.

We went to the US pavilion. We entered through with the monorail. I felt intense happiness and awe. My eyes weren't big enough to see everything. I took an escalator. There were space shuttles, I think. Apollo? (*Participant #48, 8-year-old male, Francophone, living in Quebec visiting with parents and 6 siblings. Visited Expo 67 once. Today: Quebec resident*)

When taking the metro to the site, I was really conscious we were going under water to get to the island. I was quite anxious. It's quite something when you think about it, travelling in a train underwater. I eventually calmed down and felt safer. (*Participant #28, 10-year-old female, Anglophone, living in Ontario, visiting with parents. Visited Expo for one week. Today: Quebec resident*)

Bell pavilion had this 360-degree cinema. We were very impressed. We kept wondering how they did this. It's as if we were entering the image. It was on Canada. There were the RCMPs with their horse deployment/parade. It was unique. It was about showing off cutting-edge technology. They were talking about the technology but I can't remember the details. (*Participant #27, 40-year-old female, Francophone, living in Quebec, visiting with mother. Visited Expo three or four times. Today: Quebec resident*)

### ***Displays of the exotic others***

The fascination with other (mostly non-Western) cultures is embodied in statements concerned with 'out-of-the-ordinary' architecture, people, objects or animals. Terms like 'bizarre', 'mysterious', 'strange', 'colourful', were often used to describe the exotic displays. It spoke of curiosity and openness to cultural differences. Following are a few interview excerpts that exemplify this key theme.

I remember visiting the USSR pavilion and feeling there was something a bit bizarre about visiting the "cold war enemy" and then realizing they were just like us. (*Participant #16, 25-year-old female, Anglophone, visiting from Alberta with husband and toddler. Visited Expo 67 for one week. Today: BC resident*)

**Table 1 - Nature of memories associated with fascination with technological innovations and otherness.**

Nature of technological innovations memories	Nature of otherness memories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entering, traveling, walking in the new subway (5)</li> <li>- Entering, touching, seeing, walking in Geodesic dome (US pavilion) (13)</li> <li>- Entering, admiring structures of suspended tent (German pavilion) (6)</li> <li>- Watching, walking on, the man-made islands on which the Expo site was built (3)</li> <li>- Seeing, traveling on, watching from the suspended monorail (9)</li> <li>- Seeing up close the NASA display in the US pavilion (4)</li> <li>- Seeing from bridge, up close, visiting inside Habitat 67: residential complex made of prefabricated, superimposed cubicles (5)</li> <li>- Watching, feeling dizzy, feeling immersed by a 360-degree film production titled "Canada 67" at the Telephone pavilion (16)</li> <li>- Watching, responding to facilitators, multimedia interactive production (<i>polyvision</i>, <i>diapolyecran</i> and <i>kino-automat</i> at the Czech pavilion) (6)</li> <li>- Touching, seeing, getting in a particular display having to do with technological innovations i.e the talking chairs in the Australian pavilion, new rides at the amusement park (15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Eating and smelling exotic food (28)</li> <li>- Meeting/ listening/ conversing with foreigners (for out-of-province Anglophones, French culture was exotic) (11)</li> <li>- Hearing and seeing traditional musical/dance performances from various cultures (11)</li> <li>- Seeing, touching, climbing exotic objects, animals (20)</li> <li>- Going through, touching, seeing non-Western pavilion architectures (Thailand, Iran, African, Mexican, Ceylon) (25)</li> </ul>



In the Iran pavilion there was a demonstration that impressed me a lot with an artisan dressed in white with some kind of turban. He was doing ceramic, or paper. I remember seeing him working as he was sitting. It was totally outside of my daily life, my little neighbourhood. The building had large blue columns, with glass. It represented wealth and luxury. It was like Disneyland transformed in real. It was an architecture I didn't know. It wasn't a brick building. (*Participant #33, 12-year-old female, Francophone, visiting with friends, or relatives. Visited Expo over thirty times. Today: Quebec resident*)

I remember artisans making glass-making demonstrations at the Czech Pavilion. It was intricate work. I had never seen anything like it. It impressed me. (*Participant #1, 26-year-old male, Anglophone, visiting from Nova Scotia with wife. Visited Expo for three days. Today: BC resident*)

I remember the Chinese pavilion. It wasn't very busy. It was during the reign of Mao. I remember purchasing the little red book of Mao. I was curious to read it because I knew it had played a role in the Cultural Revolution. (*Participant #30, 27-year-old female Francophone, mother of two, lived in Montreal region. Visited Expo over 10 times. Today: Quebec resident*)

### **Recalling technological innovations and otherness**

Given the prevalence of these themes in the visitors' mnemonic script one could argue that these participant-visitors performed according to World's Fair promoters' expectations in regard to an enthusiastic reception, and as this study demonstrates, had salient memories of technological progress and novel encounters with different and 'exotic' cultures. From their inception, showcasing of technological advancements and the display of cultures of the world (divided by cultures of the colonizers and colonized) were always key components of universal expositions. As Rydell (1984, 1994, 2006) explains, World's Fairs were complex events that served multiple purposes; nation-building being a central one. Expositions, just like museum exhibitions, were seen as a great vehicle to educate the public about cultural taxonomies and the necessity to embrace science and technologies for the development of strong modern nations. Conversely, any nations/cultures that did not subscribe to these ideals of scientific progress were perceived as less sophisticated. Participant's memories evoke this reality: economically powerful countries were appreciated for their ability to display technologies (even though aspects of traditions were on display); the smaller economic players for their displays of exotic traditions. In large part, their responses to exhibitions became an appreciation and differentiation for human inventiveness whether folkloric or technological that acted as re-affirmations and consolidations of a social representation conforming and extending to the beliefs, values and interests of dominant corporative, political, and scientific authorities. As Rydell (2006) has emphasized, World's Fairs are 'embedded in particular cultural, national and globalizing political economies'. The production and reception of Expo 67 must be situated within a particular era. While embracing canons of modernity (fascination for technology and the exotic Other) western countries in the 1960s were developing new consciousness after witnessing two World Wars, the brutal violence of European colonization and the environmental effect of over-consumption. Participants' accounts describing, for example, their first encounters with images of the Holocaust, or the devastating impact of the residential school system on aboriginal communities, or their visits to *communist* pavilions during the cold war period attest to a new awareness and willingness on the part of fair producers and visitors to engage with the less celebratory side of modernity's rationalism and ideal of progress. Yet, even with the presence of this critical component in memories, participants generally regarded technological progress as a way to envision a better future.

### **Remembering the seemingly mundane**

The third theme emerging from the participants' memories consists of recalls of mundane/banal episodes that derived from the Expo experience. They constitute close to one-third of the memories recalled during interviews. The theme of mundane memories has not

received a great deal of attention in visitor studies. Perhaps because most of these memories do not seem at first glance to bear much relation to the nature and purpose associated with producing or visiting expositions. For example, anecdotes such as wearing a particular pair of shoes, having a fight with a spouse, watching one's toddler's first steps, losing the car in the parking lot, Expo 67 acts as a backdrop. The recalling of these memories may seem trivial from the point of view of exhibit developers but they do hold some meaning for the individuals who remember them. By remembering who they were with and what they did and thought at a particular time and place, these stories contribute to the construction of the self (Bruner 1994; Fivush, Hudson, and Nelson 1983). It could be argued that these mundane memories act as a reminder that the meanings of cultural event activities such as going to world fairs or museums are enmeshed within the larger scope of life performances and process of self-identity formation in the context of modern life.

There are very few people who recall the same innocuous moments, the line-up or queue being an exception. The mundane act of waiting in line is one of the most memorable episodic memories throughout the sample of visitors. It is remembered as a frustrating, but unavoidable, aspect of the experience. Participants' coping stories about the act of waiting in line differ dramatically. Some talk about the pleasure of chatting with foreigners, others discuss the intense heat, the avoidance of line, or their waiting strategies, or bypassing schemes. Why would people remember waiting in line forty years after the occurrence? Perhaps the compliance in regard to the lines or queues of people has to do with the perceived importance of the event and the disciplining of the body discussed in the work of Foucault (1980, 1981) and Bennett (1995) but it may possibly be a manifestation of individual's responses to the contingencies of modern life.

### ***Historical/structural forces and visitor agency***

It could be argued that the *educational* effect of World's Fairs (or the learning of cultural taxonomies benefiting the Western world) is evidenced in the memories of participants; and that these testimonies give weight to the notion pursued by museum scholars that exhibitions and expositions have the ability to shape visitors' attitudes and beliefs. However, the phenomenographic approach to studying visitors' long-term memory of fairs also brings something new to the discussion: it invites researchers to consider the integration and appropriation of 'World's Fair memories' into the larger scheme of the visitors' life script. In bringing out the diversity of participants' accounts as they describe their visit the approach acts as a reminder that visitors *participated* in the event in their unique ways. By 'taking part in', and 'being part of', each person contributed to shaping the event that was Expo 67. There would have been no Expo 67 without its visitors. Furthermore, despite the attempts by the promoters and organizers (states officials, bureaucrats, designers) to direct visitors' behaviour, visitors decided on the nature and combination of the itinerary, activities, frequency of visits and social groupings. The agency of visitors continued to be expressed in the way that they remembered and shared their experiences of Expo with others. This argument expresses the tension involved in analyzing visitors as recipients of dominant values conveyed through displays of material culture whilst also considering the visitors' ability to negotiate meanings based on their individual features, life experience, and the particular context of the visit. The richness and diversity of participants' memories are indicative of this individual ability to discriminate and to construct meaning within a particular socio-historical frame.

## **II. Remembering the nation**

### ***Discussions about the importance of Expo 67 for Quebec and Canada***

World's Fairs have been identified as a catalyst for nationalistic sentiments and Expo 67 is no exception. It was recognized by the media as *the* centennial party for the nation; a rendezvous for all Canadians and the world (Fulford 1968; Moore 2007). It was a colossal and concerted effort that resulted in one of the best universal expositions ever produced. It was "The greatest thing we've done as a Nation", according to Peter C. Newman.<sup>6</sup> An enthusiastic international press expressed their amazement and admiration: 'Expo 67 isn't just a World Fair: it has glitter, sex appeal, and it's given impact and meaning to a word that had none: Canada'.<sup>7</sup>

'What's got into our good, gray neighbour?'<sup>8</sup> 'The most successful World's Fair in history!'<sup>9</sup> These are all expressions of admiration for the quality and creativity apparent in the making of the Fair, which may have boosted the confidence of the hosts at the time.

The last question of the interview protocol: 'What do you think was the significance of Expo 67 for Quebec and Canada?' referred directly to the impact of large-scale expositions on the collective identity. The researchers wanted to observe the participant's point of view as witness to the event as well as identify possible differences between the Francophone and Anglophone participants. English and French are Canada's two official languages with a majority speaking English with the exception of the Province of Quebec. Cultural differences between these two linguistic communities have long been established (Bothwell 1998; Letourneau 1992; Taylor 1996).

The vast majority of respondents from both linguistic groups agreed on the importance of the event for the nation, and for multiple reasons, which broadly centred around the themes of the scope, quality, originality of the Exposition, and the event's capacity to attract people from all over the world at a time when international travel was a rather exotic and uncommon activity for the general public. We could say that episodic memories related to an appreciation for technological progress and otherness substantiated these patriotic feelings. National pride was associated with the materiality of Expo, which demonstrated the intellectual, cultural, and engineering competence of the hosts (Montreal, Quebec, Canada). The participants' responses to this question seemed to go beyond the scope of the lived memories. The forty years separating them from the event meant that they situated the event within a broader historical scope.

### ***One event, two national narratives***

As mentioned previously, participants' memories tended to be idiosyncratic and highly personalized. The thematically interpreted recollections, described above in the *Remembering Self* section, signalled more similarities than differences between the memories of Anglophones and Francophones. Yet, the interpretation and framing of the event's historical significance varied drastically between the two groups. None of the Quebecois Francophones, for example, associated Expo 67 with Canada's centennial (a major source of funding and event promotion came from the Federal Government to celebrate Canada's anniversary). For the Francophone participants, Expo 67 was primarily Quebec's accomplishment and a celebration to which the world was invited. Conversely, none of the Anglophone participants alluded to Expo 67's importance for Quebec. In some ways, one could argue that a federalist discourse would automatically include Quebec and yet it is surprising that, with one exception, none of the respondents expressed a desire to qualify the difference between host province and the rest of the country.

The other divergence between the two groups of participants lies in the positioning of Expo 67 in relation to other historical landmarks within a larger national narrative. Several Anglophone participants felt compelled to situate the fair in relation to cultural tensions either in general terms, or specifically, i.e. it was before the 'animosity between English and French Canadians', 'all-French language laws'<sup>10</sup>, or 'October Crisis'.<sup>11</sup> While none of the Francophones alluded to negative tensions between English/French Canada, many invoked Quebec's backwardness in relation to the rest of the modern world to describe the period preceding Expo 67. Expo 67 was identified as a catalyst, a key event that helped Quebec to 'wake up'. Several Francophone participants associated Expo 67 with 'Quebec's Quiet Revolution', a period of rapid social, political and cultural change when the pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic Church began to decline (Bothwell 1998; Letourneau 1992; Taylor 1996). It is important to note that the two Anglophone participants who were long-time Quebec residents (although they did not reside in Quebec in 1967) shared the same view as the other Anglophone participants residing in British Columbia. This affirms an argument that linguistic/cultural affinities, within the sample at least, took precedence over geographic ones when discussing questions of collective identities.

Halbwachs (1980), to this day an influential memory theorist, coined the term 'collective memory' in the 1920s. He discussed how memories form among people who share a common experience, idea or belief. This kind of shared knowledge, he argued, is sustained through the

act of recalling. Each recall reshapes that memory for the individual and in turn influences the memories of others. Collective memory can be shared by an entire nation or two individuals. For the purpose of the following analysis, and because of the internal consistencies of the two groups' responses, we consider the two groups' memory to be two different collective memories and for argument's sake, we will suggest that they are representative of English Canada and French Quebec sensitivities. Although the sample does not allow for any kind of statistical claims to be made, this initial qualitative exploration may orient future quantitative studies on the subject. The following excerpts are illustrative of the divergence of viewpoint:

It was tied with Canada's coming of age... It seemed like there were convoys of Canadians on the road going to Expo. The highways had just been re-worked. We had the feeling of sharing an experience with other travellers on the road... The baby boomers were becoming adults... It was before the Trudeau's repatriation of the constitution. We [Canada] were still very tied to the UK. It was an assertive step to host an event of this magnitude. It was part of the Centennial anniversary. It promoted Canadian nationalism. It was a euphoric, high-energy time. It was THE Canadian experience. And it [this high energy] continued through the 1970s 'til the movement crumbled. [Alluding to separatist movement in Quebec]. (*Participant #5, 20-year-old, woman, Anglophone, celebrating her honeymoon by driving from BC to see Expo 67. Today: BC resident*)

It had a major importance for Quebec. The thinkers of the time did a lot in Quebec to trigger 'The Quiet Revolution' but for [the development of] design, and architecture, Expo was pivotal. The intellectuals, such as the authors of 'Refus Global' knew what was going on outside Quebec but for the general population, Expo 67 was a 'wake-up call' for the whole population. Most of us were used to 'suburbs architecture' It was a shock. It influenced the way we designed chairs, furniture... I bet tons of design students were really inspired by this... It was an explosion, and a catalyst of creativity to help accelerate progress. Mayor Drapeau might have foreseen the impact of that Expo. He was a visionary; he helped us get out of our darkness, and backwardness. (*Participant #42, 10-year-old boy, Francophone, visited Expo over 20 times. Today: Quebec resident. Currently working as a designer in Montreal*)

It was a big deal. It was the first event that gave an international presence to Canadians. It was very meaningful... I remember meeting lots of Canadians in line from all over the country. We really had two communities in Montreal: the Anglophones and the Francophones. Can't tell you about the Francophones but the Anglophones in Montreal felt very Canadian. (*Participant #8, 24-year-old man, Anglophone, was a graduate student in MTL. Visited Expo over 20 times. Today: BC resident*)

Yes, it was undoubtedly very important. It was a very important category of Universal Exposition. The last big one had been in Brussels in 1958... It opened the mind of Canadians and Quebecois. 'The Quiet Revolution' in Quebec had already started. It was very beneficial. We really had to 'get out of the woods'. (*Participant #45, 40-year-old man. Francophone, from Montreal' region. Visited with his wife and in-laws less than five times. Today: Quebec resident*)

Table 2 is a summary of participants' responses to the question of Expo 67's significance for the nation. Given the Quebec/English Canada political and cultural landscape over the past forty years, it is interesting to observe how differences of opinion on questions of national identity between English Canada and Francophone Quebec are echoed in the interpretation of a large-scale cultural event supported by multiple governments (municipal, provincial and federal). Quebec's pursuit of political and cultural self-representation and various forms of sovereignty (within or without Canada) emerged in the early 1960s. Heated public debates on these issues

**Table 2 - Participants' response to the question of Expo 67's significance to the nation.**

<b>Anglophone BC-resident participants (#) = Frequency of commentary</b>	<b>Francophone Quebec-resident participants (#) = Frequency of commentary*</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The ultimate Canadian experience that summer (3)</li> <li>- Canada's coming of age (3)</li> <li>- Canada's first meaningful appearance at the international level (6)</li> <li>- It felt very proud to be Canadians (4)</li> <li>- Canada's centennial: Expo 67 was the ultimate centennial party (3)</li> <li>- A WOW for the whole Canada (3)</li> <li>- It influenced a whole generation of designers in the country (2)</li> <li>- We realized we weren't just British Columbians, we were Canadians (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Opened Quebec to the world and the world came to us. (18)</li> <li>- Important moment in Quebec's history (2)</li> <li>- Expo inspired people to immigrate to Quebec (2)</li> <li>- Benefited Montreal's infrastructure and construction businesses (2)</li> <li>- It developed creativity of Quebecois, and transmitted the 'creative bug' to future generations of film makers, artists, architects in Quebec (2)</li> <li>- The world discovered Quebec and Canada. 'Before it was nothing more than just a quiet place.' (2)</li> </ul>
<b>Historical landmarks to situate Expo</b>	<b>Historical landmarks to situate Expo</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expo 67 was before the tension, the animosity between French and English Canada (5)</li> <li>- Expo 67 was before the French-only law (1)</li> <li>- French people were surprisingly nice and spoke English to me (1)</li> <li>- The high-energy wave of nationalism crumbled in the early '70s (1)</li> <li>- It was pre-Trudeau government. (1)</li> <li>- After Expo, we [Canadians] never knew as clearly who we were (1)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Before Expo we [Quebecois] were: backward, secluded, parochial (5)</li> <li>- Expo is linked with Total Refusal manifesto and with the Quiet Revolution (1)</li> <li>- Contributed to a collective awareness in Quebec (2)</li> </ul>

\* One of the 23 francophone participants (Participant # 31) did not reside in Quebec at the time of the interview. She currently resides in Ottawa but continues to entertain close working and family ties with Montreal and Quebec francophone culture.

have shaped the relationship between English Canada and Quebec over the past 40 years. What became clear in the late 60s is Quebec's sense of itself as a culture/people distinct from the rest of Canada - a situation often met with frustration, or mixed feelings, by English Canada and palpable in the Anglophone participants' memories of Expo 67.<sup>12</sup> The object of this paper is not to focus on the relationship between Quebec and Canada, but to discuss how political perspectives embraced by collectives (in this case Anglophone in/outside Quebec and Francophone inside Quebec) affect perceptions of cultural productions.

The participants' explanations are not without foundation and yet the same event is framed in terms of two different historical scripts. As Elsner (1994), pointed out, studying collective memories is not about determining whose memory is most accurate, but rather about examining the consensus of assumptions and prejudices shared by the historian and his audience.<sup>13</sup> What is remarkable is the clear appropriation of the same event by two different collectives, for two different national narratives. Clearly, Expo 67 was part of a modern epic for two nations: Canada's and Quebec's. This overlap would confirm Benedict Anderson's definition of nations as imagined political communities '*imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign*' (Anderson 1991: 6). Anderson views the idea of *nation* as a construct, an artificial grouping different from an actual community because it is not (and cannot be) based on daily face-to-face interaction between its members. Instead, members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity. This is a kinship that manifests itself, among other things, through shared memory.

This idea of collective affinity through shared knowledge has been discussed by several thinkers whose work helps us to interpret the participants' responses. Lyotard (1993) envisioned the process of knowledge legitimation (scientific and non-scientific) through the use of *popular narratives*. Popular narrative, defined by Lyotard, is a central and essential component of society. It is a type of knowledge that is instrumental to the transmission of social tradition. It creates social bonds by providing access to membership through apprenticeship (modelling), language games, and specific transmission pragmatics. Popular narrative ideals are embedded in daily activities and disseminated and reproduced through various channels (families, school, museum, media). The ubiquity of these values and beliefs establishes them as common sense or taken-for-granted and legitimizes them as a result.

We locate Expo 67 within two different and yet overlapping popular narratives of two nations. These national narratives expressed in the memories of participants appropriated Expo 67 because of its ability to demonstrate the nation's modernity through technological achievements. Yet, the two narratives diverge in their historical framing. Several Anglophone participants regard Expo 67 as the last great achievement before Canada became challenged by Quebec's efforts to define itself as culturally different from the rest of Canada. For many Francophone participants, Expo 67 was a pivotal moment where Quebec stopped feeling secluded and non-modern. Wertsch (2004) developed the term *schematic narrative templates* to describe the configuration of collective narratives, which preserve their structure of the plot while interchanging some of the events or actors. The Anglophone's schematic narrative template emphasizes tense aspects of nationhood and the feeling of a weakening relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada. The schematic narrative template of Francophone participants concerning Expo 67 has to do with Quebec's emancipation as a modern nation (separate from Canada)<sup>14</sup>. Wertsch stressed the role of national leaders in disseminating collective memories through media, school textbooks, cultural policies, and official versions of national history; naturalizing the beliefs of communal belonging. Given the many disconnects (the fragmented memories versus coherent explanations; the banality of episode recalled versus the importance given to the event) between the experience of the visit and the explanation of Expo's significance for the collective, it is apparent that participants relied on sources other than their own experiences to construct their representation of Expo 67's importance to the nation. Foucault's (1980) notion of 'capillaries' is helpful in that it stresses that power struggles are perpetuated in the smallest, most banal manifestations of social relations. In this case, the conflicting patriotic agenda promoted by political histories is obvious even in their interpretation of the same cultural production.

### **An obligation to remember differently**

In his philosophical essay *Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit (2004) pondered the obligation of remembering. Although Margalit focused on the remembrance of traumatic societal events, he developed a framework that helps thinking about the necessity of remembering for the collective. He set the stage of his argument by discerning between *ethics* and *morality*, which he stated are based on two types of human relations: thick or thin relations. *Thick relations* are grounded in associations with parents, friends, lovers, fellow countrymen, the 'near and dear'. *Thin relations* have to do with relation to the stranger and the remote i.e. humanity. Ethics is associated with the thick, the local and particular. Morality by contrast is thin, general, abstract and detached. *The Charter of Human Rights*, for example, would have to do with thin relations and thus would be grounded in questions of morality i.e. treat others well, whoever they are and whether you know them or not. Thick relations are anchored in shared past and shared memory. 'Memory is the cement that holds thick relations together'. If imagined communities such as nations are partly held together by memory, this means that loyalty to these thick national relations must be accompanied by the act of remembering defining moments. Given their affiliation to different imagined communities (English Canada, Quebec) participants have an obligation to remember significant events differently. Remembering becomes a way to sustain the specificity of national identity.

Margalit's linking of the individual's participation in and memory of the event with the larger scheme of collective memory and national narrative may suggest another link between remembering Expo and the explanation of national narrative.

We do not expect to be remembered individually by the nation. But many of us are so woven into the web of thick national relations that the use of the first person plural 'we' is quite natural. This 'we' is an enduring body that will survive. We shall not be remembered personally but we shall be remembered by taking part in events that will be remembered for their significance in the life of the collective. (Margalit 202: 96)

Could it be that remembering the significance of Expo 67 has to do with a desire to be remembered by association with events that are meaningful for the nation? Most responses incorporated personal memories of Expo or included at least a 'we' when speaking of the importance of Expo 67 for the collective, as if to bear witness and inscribe oneself in the larger story of the nation. The notion of agency here operates differently than when asked to focus on the personal experience. The question of collective meaning prompted participants to envision their experience as being something larger than themselves while being able to contribute to its unfolding.

### **Conclusion**

The study demonstrates that the experience of visiting exhibitions continues beyond the duration of the actual visit. Indeed, there is ample testimony of the continued *life* of the exhibition and of shared experiences long after the exhibition has come to an end. Moreover, understanding visitors' long-term memories of exhibitions, and other museum activities, months and years after the event helps to gain a more encompassing understanding of the exhibition's contribution to its community.

The overarching themes of technological innovation and cultural otherness in participants' memories converge towards previous analyses viewing World Fairs as both constitutive of and as constituted by modernity's ideals. On the other hand, the participants' insistence in remembering the *self* in these experiences via the interaction with displays, or with mundane episodes not related to these displays, is indicative of the participants' agency in constructing meanings in ways that depart from the exposition organizers' aims. We conjecture, visitor agencies in constructing meanings in these fashions are likely indicative of most museum experiences.

The micro-narratives of Expo 67 may not describe the event's scope, but they are meaningful, and moreover, helpful in remembering and constructing the *self* as a unique individual and as a member of a larger community. Indeed, participants' explanations of the

significance of Expo 67 for the nation suggest that imagined communities, such as nations, successfully appropriate cultural events to legitimize their identity. Furthermore, this outcome underscores the power of community identity to shape both experience and perception of visitors encounters with exhibitions.

Finally, this study has demonstrated, as Commissioner Dupuy suspected, the richness of lived memories, long after the lights of Expo 67 went out for the last time. Ultimately, it could be claimed that Expo 67 was remembered differently by each of the fifty-three million people who visited it. Because of the selective nature of any historical records, we could argue that some of these personal histories go where no official records have gone before. Fortunately, their unofficial status does not prevent them from circulating to enrich and alter the collective memory of Expo 67.

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### **Appendix: Expo 67 Memory Study Interviewer Protocol** **Administration Time: 30 Minutes**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender: M F

3. DOB: \_\_\_\_\_

4. No. of times Visited: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Local Montreal Area Residence/Out of town visitor.

6. In 1967: Quebecer (French Ca)/Western Ca/Mid West/Eastern Ca/Atlantic C  
/American/Other

- 1) What are your immediate memories of Expo? Tell me about your visit to Expo, what kinds of events, occurrences, and happening do you remember? What were the most memorable experiences of Expo 67? Why do you think they were so memorable?
- 2) What comes to mind when you look at these pictures of Expo (interview to show a variety of photographic images of Expo.)?
- 3) Which pavilions and/or scenes do you remember visiting? What did you see (i.e. exhibits) inside these pavilions? *Why were these memorable?*
- 4) With whom did you visit Expo? What kinds of aspects, stories, and events do you remember about your social settings and the social settings of others?
- 5) Describe to me the sensory experiences and emotions that come to mind when you think about your visits to Expo – tastes, smells, sounds, emotions/feelings and affect (both positive and negative).
- 6) Do you remember planning your days or visits to expo?
- 7) Where there any frustrating or rewarding episodes that you recall?
- 8) Do you think Expo 67 had an effect/meaning on/for the Nation (Quebec/Canada) and on you?
- 9) Describe who you were in 1967 (40 years ago); what was your stage of life; what were you doing; what was happening for you? What was your mood in 1967?



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### Notes

- 1 Other episodic memories were identified but only the most vivid ones were coded.
- 2 Definition elaborated by Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) founded in 1931. The BIE establishes the dates and locations of fairs and broadly oversee planning and organization, insuring that the host country meets the organization's rules and requirements.
- 3 The original title in French 'Terre des Hommes' referenced the title of a book from French author Antoine de Saint-Exupery (1900-1945) whose writings were reflections on the place of man in the universe.
- 4 The number of vivid memories recalled by participants varied from 2 to 13.
- 5 The participant refers to General de Gaulle's speech of July 25, 1967 at Montreal City Hall where he made evident his support for Quebec's separatist movement.
- 6 Reference in Fulford, 1968, 25-27.
- 7 London Observer's headline referenced in Fulford, 1968, 26-27.
- 8 Reference in Fulford, 1968, 25-27.
- 9 Time's headline referenced in Fulford, 1968, 25
- 10 In 1977, René Lévesque's government passed Bill 101 making French the sole official language within Quebec.
- 11 The October Crisis consisted of a series of dramatic events triggered by the kidnappings of two politicians by members of the Front de Libération du Québec in the province of Quebec, Canada, in October 1970, which ultimately resulted in a brief invocation of the War Measures Act by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.
- 12 Discussed at length in numerous publications. A few solid references: the work of Fitzmaurice 1985, Resnick 1985, Rothwell 1998.
- 13 Indeed, the split between history and memory has been recently challenged, and a more fluid transition between memory and history is proposed instead (Thelen 1989; Burke 1989).
- 14 Pauline Currien's doctoral dissertation (2003) discusses at length the cathartic role Expo 67 played in Quebec's identity as a modern nation. She analyses the intent of the Quebec's pavilion's organizers while taking into account the larger picture of Quebecois' identity construction. The number of interviews with Expo 67 visitors is limited to a few individuals.

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