THING THEORY

&

Urban objects at EXPO ‘58

Matus Krajnak
Elisabetta Bono
Koen Hintzen
Elisabeth Bonavera
Ruby Willems
Guus Gielen
Margarida Konig dos Santos
Jos Poortman
Jiazuo Hou
Marloes Bosman
Guido le Pair
Robbert van Bezooijen
Liu Yi
Geert Krusemann
Auke Kroon

SEMINARCH 3
April ‘12
Editorial

Gijs Wallis de Vries

This is the third issue of Seminarch, a magazine produced by students participating in seminars in the Masters Track Architecture of the Faculty for the Built Environment of the University of Technology in Eindhoven. The aim of a seminar is to develop discursive skills in architectural research. The first issue was about ‘urban tectonics’ and vernacular architecture studied from the point of view of escape and its practical and dreamy expressions in the everyday, in leisure, or in migration. Studies featured such varied typologies as the Finnish ‘mökki’ (sauna), the Japanese ‘chisatsu’ (teahouse), covered bridges in the U.S., urban beaches in Berlin, or fugitive camps and settlements in Asia and Africa. The result of this strange combination was a new insight in the construction and meaning of shelter. The second issue was about empty churches. It started from the fact that in the Netherlands many churches are or will be vacant, which calls for ideas about their reuse. The profound reason for this seminar was that buildings of worship confront us with the limits of architecture to express meaning. Students read Kant, Burke, Goethe, Hugo and others on the Sublime, and Eliade on the Sacred, and then used their concepts to propose a vision on religious heritage. To reach an in depth architectural understanding some applied the theory about ‘incorporation’ by Hermann Schmitz who expands the classical conception of tectonic expression in the sense of a metaphorical representation of forces in a construction to a dynamic and structural “Körpergefühl”.

This issue of Seminarch is devoted to the seminar Urban Objects at the EXPO 58, a Thing Theory for Urbanism, initiated by Karel Wuytack and supervised by him and the undersigned. It was a real pleasure to experience the city in a new way, cast an unusual look at architecture, and gain fresh insights in the life of public space. If this way of seeing was already familiar to some of us, it gradually became more conscious and grew articulate in the study of ‘thing theory’ and the analysis of the objects of the EXPO 58 in Brussels. We hope the reader will share this pleasure while discovering the incredible insights in the character of objects as they change into things of joy or disgust, and, in any event, into matters of concern. For that was precisely what this seminar is about: the question why and how the physical environment should concern us. Beyond an understanding of how the public may be manipulated, and how design is involved, the critical question is to what extent architectural thought is able to grasp the many concerns of the citizen. In the context of the need to reuse the already existing city, rather than continue its expansion, a speculative vision that awakens the slumbering potentials of material culture in general and of objects in particular is more than welcome.

‘The story of objects asserting themselves as things, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation.’

Bill Brown

I would like to thank the Eindhoven University of Technology for the opportunity they gave me to continue to explore, together with professor Gijs Wallis de Vries and the students, thing theory. Given the vast variety of ‘things’ that we encounter in our daily environment. This urban thing theory seminar asks attention for how inanimate objects enable human subjects (individually and collectively) to form and transform their relation vis-à-vis the city. Thing theory is grounded in empirical research and design practice. It is an exercise in speculative thinking about the status of the object and of material culture (as ‘the real’) in our present-day society and an opportunity to engage in some deep introspection about our own practices as architects and urban designers. By choosing the case of the World Expo in Brussels we had the opportunity to focus on a 1958 miniature representation of the world. Through lectures, literature, maps, photos, films and a site visit we tried to re-experience/understand in 8 seminars the sensation the 35 million visitors (4 x the population of Belgium at that period) had during 180 days. It was not motivated by an EXPO 58 nostalgia but it was a possibility to test urban thing theory on a specific case by focusing on a range of objects (from pavilions over sculptures, obelisks and small souvenirs) all related to the first post-Second World War universal and international exhibition.

For this introduction I will start to give you some more insights about the content of the 8 seminars before I will briefly situate the different contributions of the participants for this third Seminarch magazine.

The opening seminar started around an axonometric map of EXPO 58. First we read the reference text ‘thing theory’ of Bill Brown where he invites us to look through objects, and explains the difference between an object and a thing / the thingness of objects. In the second text ‘From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public’ Bruno Latour asks ‘What would an object-oriented democracy look like?’ and writes ‘If the ‘Ding’ designates both those who assemble because they are concerned as well as what causes their concerns and division, it should become the center of our attention: Back to things!’ The second seminar started before the images of Liege, Bruges and Brussels made by the Baukunst-Adrien Verschuere office for the exhibition 3 CITIES we visited in Brussels. The manipulation of the objects in those pictures made it clear that alternative means makes it possible to produce new forms of understanding of cities. Our city walk started in the city museum of Brussels and finished in the seminal totem of the Brussels skyline and icon of the EXPO 58; the Atomium, a structure half-way between sculpture and architecture. Inside that object we visited the permanent exhibition on EXPO 58 and enjoyed the panoramic view over the EXPO 58 site with his relics. Back in Eindhoven for seminar 3 we did our city walk through Brussels again, but now by reading what Victor Horta was saying about the relation between those objects we saw and the urban fabric of Brussels. To complement those considerations between object-city we discussed about urban objects on contemporary urban squares ver-
An introduction to Thing Theory

sus environmental sculptures. Then we investigated the interplay between architecture and sculpture through the concept of architecture as a ‘drop building’ like a ‘drop sculpture’. For Christopher Alexander a space is not understood as a ‘thing’, as a ‘something’ while a building is well understood as a ‘thing’. With the Heart of The City Alexander invites us fifty-five years after the CIAM conference and fifty years after the 1956 Harvard Conference, through the notion of ‘Positive Space’ to a journey of non-traditional thought about architecture and urban design. A challenge we took in seminar 4 knowing that the notion ‘heart’ has, like the notion ‘thing’, a spatial (central place, center) and emotional (relational) component. His notion of Positive Space will be the starting point to explore the importance of objects in the work and research of Le Corbusier who wrote the text for CIAM 8 ‘The Core as a Meeting Place of the Arts’. The next seminar was about Art; André Breton repeatedly refers to a ‘fundamental crisis of the object’ it implies a new orientation vis-à-vis the world of things. We started with the text ‘Art and Thingness’ to explore the Duchampian ‘ready-made’, the ‘invisible object’ of Giacometti and Breton’s categorization of what he calls ‘objet trouvé’. Those nuances helped us to understand the surrealist perception of the city of Paris. Finally we introduced and situated through the work and writings of Alison and Peter Smithson the notion ‘As Found’ as a radical way of taking note of things. In his lecture and text ‘The City in Things: Tafuri, Rossi and Piranesi.’, professor Gijs Wallis de Vries explored in seminar 6 through Manfredo Tafuri the concepts of ‘space’ and ‘things’ in Piranesi’s Campo Marzio and the work and writings of Aldo Rossi and Giorgio de Chirico. The last image was Giovanni Antonio Canal’s capriccio ‘A Palladian Design for the Rialto Bridge, with Buildings at Vincenza’ (1755-59), who was the starting point of the exhibition 3 CITIES we visited in Brussels; ‘You could assume that nothing is missing in this painting: not the boats, not the gondolas, not anything else which places the observer in Venice; I can tell you however that numerous Venetians have asked me which part of the city this is, that they haven’t had the pleasure yet of seeing.’ Seminar 7 was about how Radical architecture could help us to take another, critical look at the objects that surrounds our lives. Knowing the importance for the ‘radical’ Florentine movement of the lecture of Manfredo Tafuri’s essay ‘Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica’ and more specifically his interpretation of Piranesi’s Campo Marzio as a spatial constellation of architectural objects versus Hilberseimer’s non-figurative city is fundamental to understand the meaning of titles as; ‘City without architecture’ (Archizoom Associati) ‘architecture without city; the world of objects’ / ‘life without objects’ (Superstudio) and ‘objects without city or architecture’ (UFO). ‘No-stop City establishes a direct link between metropolis and furnishing objects; the city becomes a series of beds, tables, chairs and cupboards; the domestic and urban furniture fully coincide’. In the seminar we explored how Andrea Branzi developed this idea of ‘a system of objects’ further in his Agronica model of weak urbanization (1995), tested it in the master plan of the Philips site in Eindhoven (2000) and writes about in the ‘ten modest suggestions for a new Athens charter’, that he presented on la Biennale di Venezia (2010) and in the exhibition Andrea Branzi, Objects and Territoria (2013). For the last seminar students asked to situate Rem Koolhaas his text ‘Dali & Le Corbusier
The Paranoid-Critical Method\textsuperscript{17}. So we focused on the cover drawing that Madelon Vriesendorp made for that text and the cover of her own book ‘The World of Madelon Vriesendorp’\textsuperscript{18}. Both are related to the Paranoiac – Critical Interpretation of ‘The Tragic Myth of Millet’s L’Angelus’\textsuperscript{19}. The PCM is a method of conceptual recycling through the fabrication of flashbacks and flash-forwards to discover hidden meanings to relate objects that were otherwise unrelated. The Chrysler building and the Empire State building on the first cover were related to the paintings and film Flagrant Délit, the new objects on the second cover to the Mind Game she developed. In the semi-secret object archive of Madelon Vriesendorp the quote ‘life without objects’ (Superstudio) is omnipresent between her immense collection of objects. She writes: ‘I call my collection a ‘city’ since it is constantly expanding, changing and incomplete. I was forced to rearrange and reshape my ‘city’ when it grew beyond its limits. I classified the collection into subjects and separated them into smaller groups, losing some of the original arbitrariness.’ Charles Jenks writes in the introduction of the same book: ‘Many people think with objects, some people count with them and others, like the artist Madelon Vriesendorp, see through them’. But does ‘to look through objects’ mean the same as ‘to see through objects’? In the famous chapter ‘Eyes that do not see’, Le Corbusier asked in 1923 the architects to observe their time differently. In 1928 Dali refers in his text ‘poetry of the mass-produced utility’\textsuperscript{20} to that specific text of Le Corbusier and explains how Le Corbusier tried on a thousand occasions ‘to make us see objects of the purest and most authentic poetry!’

We asked the participants of the 2011-2012 seminar ‘URBAN OBJECTS AT THE EXPO 58, A THING THEORY FOR URBANISM’ to develop a comprehensive analyses/exploration of the objects of the EXPO 58 in the form of a written essay and a presentation through imagery at the middle and the end of the seminar. All those ‘object studies’ are collected in this third Seminarch magazine in which Matus Krajnak will situate EXPO 58 and tell us about the impact and actual re-use of the EXPO 35 relics on the site. Before we actually enter the site, through one of the 10 entrances of Elisabetta Bono, she will explain us some insides of how to come inside. We can choose the ‘Attractions gate’ to enter Karel Wuytack’s ‘Vrolijk België’, a look like traditional Belgium 1900 city without a name, or the ‘Atomium Gate’ to enter the world of ‘neatomian architecture’ dominated by the Atomium building who is, at once, an object, a place, a space and a Utopia. Bastiaan Oltwater writes about this ‘atomium era’. What the entrances mean for the
Elisabeth Bonavera here totems and signals mean for the territory of the expo site. On that site we have this other icon which is pointing to the Atomium (a 165 milliard times enlarged iron molecule); The importance of the notion of scale/scaling of pavilions is explored by Guus Gielen. In opposition to the scale less 'Mathematical objet trouvé' of Margarida Maria Konig dos Santos here Philips pavilion of Le Corbusier, Yannis Xenakis and Edgar Varèse. Jos Poortman flirts with surrealism when he finds in the English pavilion a space filled with objects and a specific object that he explores trough a The Paranoid-Critical Method. In opposition to Hou Jiazuo who is interested in the physical/spatial relation between an object (sculpture)and a specific architectural space (place)through movement. Marloes Bosman introduces with here ‘whirling ear’ of Calder the notion of displacement. But couldn’t we not consider the whole EXPO 58 as one big displacement in its ambition to be a representation of the world. Inside this ‘rendez-vous’ of the nations Guido le Pair is looking for Cold War within the expo site. He focuses on the dialectic between the cylindrical shape of the American pavilion and the glass box of the Russian pavilion and how they are related to their common battleground; public space. Robbert van Bezooijen looks how this ‘cultural Cold War’ is continued in the interior of those pavilions and how it is related to the display and selection of the objects they chose to represent their vision. Liu Yi focuses on the centerpiece of the enormous Soviet pavilion, the Sputnik and relates that magic object we send to the sky with the Citroen DS in the French pavilion. An object Roland Barthes describes as falling from the sky. Looking to the sky it starts to become dark and, after that Geert Krüsemann introduced us in the immaterial qualities of light and lighted up objects, we suddenly can discover the global light concept of the EXPO 58. Auke Kroon’s night image of EXPO 58 is the last contribution to this Seminarch magazine here the whole expo site is transformed by those objects that are giving light or are lighted up.

In the hope this magazine will bring some new light on objects of the EXPO 58, I wish you an agreeable reading.

1) Bill Brown, Thing Theory, Critical Inquiry, nr 1, 2001, pp.1-22
3) Christophe Van Gerrewey, 3 CITIES IMAGE/ CONSTRUCTION, Palais des Beaux-arts, Bruxelles, 2012
6) Markus Brüderlin, Friedrich Teja Bach, E. Beyeler and W. Hofmann (eds), ArchiSculpture: Dialogues between Architecture and sculpture from the 18th century to the present day. (Basle: Fondation Beyeler, 2004).
9) Sven Lütticken Art and Thingness, Breton’s Ball and Duchamp’s Carrot, e-flux magazine, issue 14, 15, 16, 20011.
11) Thomas Schregenberger, ‘As found’ is a small affair, it
is about being careful’, in Architecture is not made with the brain, The labor of Alison and Peter Smithson, AA Publication, London, 2005.


13) Francesco Algarotti, Ricolta di lettere sopra la pittura e l’architettura, 1765.

14) Manfredo Tafuri, Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica, Contrpiano magazine, nr 1, 1969.


Contents

Editorial
- Gijs Wallis de Vries -

Thing Theory
- Karel Wuytack -

Reconstructing the Past, Projecting the Future through Objects
- Matus Krajnak -

Gates in the Expo 58
- Elisabetta Bono -

Signals and Totems
- Elisabeth Bonavera -

Atomium. An optimistic vision
- Bastiaan Oltwater -

Scale
- Guus Gielen -

Philips Pavilion
- Margarida Konig dos Santos -

(Sur)realistic link Salvador Dali/Le Corbusier
- Jos Poortman -

Movement and sculptures at EXPO 58
- Jiazuo Hou -

The Whirling Ear
- Marloes Bosman -

Two superpowers at Expo 58
- Guido le Pair / Robbert van Bezooijen -

Sputnik and DS
- Liu Yi -

Modernity & Lighting
- Geert Krüsemann -

Lighting at the Brussels EXPO 58
- Auke Kroon -
Reconstructing the Past,
Projecting the Future through Objects

*Matus Krajnak*

A Story of Two World Exhibitions

*Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, providing an inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to our lived experiences. They are historical records that are important as tangible expressions of our identity, as measurable evidence of our progress. Places of cultural significance reflect the diversity of our communities, telling us about who we are and about the past that has formed us. They are equally precious as they are irreplaceable.*¹

The Beginnings of a Sequence

There have been many international exhibitions leading up to the present day, each with its own identity but all with features in common. They were landmark events in history, both for their respective countries and their citizens. But they were much more than events. With many links between them, they stand out as part of a significant economic, social and cultural process. Over time, the character of exhibitions has evolved, and three distinct eras can be identified: the era of industrialization (until 1938), the era of cultural exchange (1939–1987), and the era of nation branding (1988–present). Collectively, the exhibitions set out to chart in a visual way “material and moral progress within a world context.”²

¹: official EXPO 35 / 58 posters
²: ‘Puck’s Suggestion for the World’s Fair’
*The Colossus of Chicago would knock out the Eiffel Tower*
³: ‘Odds and Ends, in, out, and about, The Great Exhibition of 1851’. *George Cruikshank, 1851.*
The idea of holding exhibitions of objects originated in 18th century Europe, but the Great Exhibition of 1851 is generally regarded as the first event in an international sequence. While its iconic Crystal Palace seemed to belong more to an ‘enchanted land’ than to a ‘gross material world’, the objects that collected inside, carefully classified as they would be in all subsequent exhibitions, represented what anthropologists and historians came to call ‘material culture’. For its generation, there was as much ‘romance’ in the objects as there was in the building. As people grew older, many looked back to the Great Exhibition as a formative experience for them, and as a turning point in human history.

4: Crystal Palace during construction
5: part of the Turkish Section in the Crystal Palace ‘displayed after the Eastern fashion’, London, 1851
6: l’avenue de Belgique with Grand Palais in distance, 1935
7a: aerial view before commencement of works for EXPO 58
7b: aerial view after works were completed
Transcending an Era

To date, the city of Brussels has hosted four officially recognized world fairs, spanning seventy years between 1888 and 1958. Much like the exhibitions of past years shared several locations in the city (Parc du Cinquantenaire, Parc du Tervueren, Mont des Arts), EXPO 58 marked a return to the site of a previous exhibition (Expo 35), the Heysel plateau in northwestern Brussels. More than twenty years and a world war separated the two events, producing decidedly different aspirations for the new expo, however an emanating change in social attitude was less than obvious on a site planning level.

For the 1935 fair, the various pavilions were evenly spread over the exhibition terrain, fully exploiting the Heysel plateau. Several axial avenues segmented the site, defining areas for Old Brussels village – a historical reconstruction of the past, reminding of the old and well-known among the new and strange – as well as a park, an agriculture section, and various entertainment spaces. Even a full-scale stadium was seamlessly incorporated, positioned in an area “not defined by any grand architectural gesture but by more subtle detailing.”

The revised plan for EXPO 58 expanded upon, but generally respected focal site features and organizing elements inherited from its predecessor. Whereas in 1935 the axial avenues spatially organized the site, in 1958 they segmented it into thematic zones, outlining areas for art, science and tourism, international activities, domestic and foreign affairs, folklore, sport and amusement.

One significant change saw the existing site boundary shift southwest to include the Royal Park of Laeken, which increased the overall exhibition area by some 40%. The many mature trees in the landscape helped diversify the atmosphere and added to the visual impact of the exhibition.
Other interesting developments related to navigation. One was the Passerelle pedestrian bridge, an imposing piece of infrastructure built to compensate for differences in terrain between the new Laeken section and the rest of the site. Another was the popular cable lift, which ran along the axial avenues, revealing to riders roofs, back walls and annexes of adjacent buildings. The stations were built as light and transparent as possible, and minimized the space occupied on the ground. From the underground station of the Grand Palais, the line serving the Benelux Gate diverged in order to avoid areas of the Atomium. From a comfortable 5 or 6 meters above ground, the cable lift offered yet another unique vantage point on the exhibition.

EXPO 58’s robust scope called for a densification of the surviving urban plan, resulting in portions of existing routes such as l’avenue Astrid and l’avenue des Athletes making way for new buildings. The site’s focal centre remained on the axial l’avenue de Belgique but migrated from the polar place de Belgique to the more central Atomium area. The iconic structure defined a new node for the exhibition, its panoramic view from above creating a completely new relation with the objects on display and placing it all at the fingertips of the observer. The spatial logic of the axes of 1935 was thus completely transformed. The new l’avenue de l’Atomium extended the original l’avenue de Bouchout over adjacent natural terrain, terminating at the point of the Atomium Gate and establishing a direct connection with the Heysel site’s perimeter.

8: view overlooking the Passerelle roundabout
9: la Passerelle with the French pavillon ‘58
10: the cable lift with its 3 trajectories, at the underground Grand Palais station
Architecture and Meaning

Along with elements of the site plan, a handful of structures from Expo 35 were reused for the new exhibition. These pavilions underwent various revisions to disconnect from the past, representing “...a symbolic expression of the final break with a certain traditional image of the city and its architecture.” The most dramatic change concerned the Grand Palais, whose iconic 1935 facade conversely reminded of the past and needed to disappear from the collective memory of the public. The reworked facade – bearing the symbol of the exhibition and the dove of peace, back-lit with blue light at night – became an icon itself.

Neutral, homogeneous porticos complemented the architecture of the existing palaces at la place de Belgique. They worked to spatially cut off the square, creating the atmosphere of an open-air lounge.
On a broader scale, Expo 35 witnessed the aftermath of art deco, as well as the emergence of two formally and ideologically opposing styles in monumental classicism and modernism. Modernism may not have been the predominant style at the exhibition, but its proponents were well represented. Buildings from England, Belgium, Finland, Switzerland, and Norway all figured into this category. At EXPO 58, countries exhibited in various interpretations of the modern aesthetic, ranging from the corporate internationalism of the new German pavilion, to the ambitious structuralism of Le Corbusier’s flamboyant Philips Pavilion.

Like all other exhibitions, EXPO 58 did not pass without criticism, especially during its time and within its own borders. The layout, particularly in the relationship of one pavilion to another, was far from perfect. The absence of a strong urban vision made the exhibition “an enormous mess of heteroclite objects,” a mistake perceived by the architects as a personal threat but one they ultimately could not avoid.
Furthermore, the 1950s emerged with the realization that scientific progress was not always a blessing. This concern was reiterated to all participating countries, calling for installations to “honour humankind in the fullest and most elevating sense of the word.” In view of this, many Belgians saw the architecture of EXPO 58 as overblown and artificial, conflicting with its central theme of progressively “Building the World on a Human Scale.”

While some were firmly focused on imagination and human progress, others – especially those that came away from the war with a negative global image – emerged with political motives, using the important international stage to reinvent themselves and turn a page with the rest of the world. Both Italy and Germany presented decidedly different renditions of their pavilions for the new exhibition. Gone were the stark Nazi tendencies emanating from the former’s scaleless and overly formalist Expo 35 pavilion. Similarly, the latter replaced an imposing expression of power and heroism with an elegant, well-detailed glass structure, determined to evade all ties with the war and past ideologies. The exhibition was the ideal setting to deflect from an unpleasant past and point towards a bright new tomorrow.

Building on a Successful Precedent

A number of original planning elements exist to this today, figuring in current as well as future developments for the Heysel site, as evidenced by recent competition entries from OMA or KCAP. Both approaches seemingly follow the EXPO 58 template of proposing new buildings within the existing urban framework. Clearly, any conceivable future development for the exhibition site, regardless of scope or ambition, would do well to embrace the Atomium as a national icon, the boulevard du Centenaire as the Heysel site’s principal axis, or the Grand Palais as a building of significant historical merit. In retrospect, the Expo of 1935 has not so much been forgotten as it has been overshadowed – largely for its moment in time and modest infrastructure – by the robustness of EXPO 58. Indeed Expo 35 is perhaps best remembered as the event that paved the way for its successor, the far bigger and superior EXPO 58 which would follow some 23 years later. Understandably, it conceded to the largest organized event in Belgium’s history, an unprecedented success that helped put the country on a world map and keep it there.
Bibliography

Specific

1-3. Lord Asa Briggs, *The History of International Exhibitions*, manuscript commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2002 [PDF]


General


Internet Links

i. news article: “50 jaar geleden opende koning Boudewijn Expo 58”
   http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/archief/2.1222/binnenland/1.285692

ii. *Exposition de Bruxelles 1935 - Projet BIE - Film n°1*
   Worldfairs: forum de discussion sur les expositions universelles

iii. OMA - NFA, “Heysel Plateau : Expo 58 site redevelopment”, competition report [PDF]

Images

2. Allwood 1977, frontispiece
3. Allwood 1977, p. 20
5. Allwood 1977, p. 13
7. Baltus 1960, p. 8-9
8. Baltus 1960, p. 156
10. Nevi 2008, p. 120
11. Baltus 1960, p. 19
12. Baltus 1960, p. 20
13. Baltus 1960, p. 20
15. Expo 58: Hedendaagse Kunst op de Wereldtentoonstelling, p. 17
18. Baltus 1960, p. 139
As spectators, we travel through the city observing its architecture and constructed spaces. shifting contemporary scenes and reflections from the past until they thicken into a personalized vision.”

Brussel, 17th April, the World Fair opens its gates to millions visitors, coming from all the world. After II World War, this was the first World Exhibition, and it represented, somehow, a new beginning for the whole society. Nineteenth century was gone and all nostalgic beliefs with it. What is more, new conditions were set up and some fresh air rianimated thoughts. This behaviour, spread in all Europe (except for Russia) and America, was reflected also at the EXPO 58, that expresed a renewed hope for the future.

EXPO 58 belongs to the century-of-progress expositions, the following EXPO’s cathegory after the Victorian generation expositions of the XIX century. What especially distinguished the two kind of exhibitions was, as Rydell claims in his book, a

“growing emphasis placed on entertainment as central to the moderning strategies of the exposition promoters”

The first generation EXPO was grounded on education and entertainment, the second one on entertained, leisure and technological progress. In fact

“...like the design for the future laid down by an earlier, Victorian generation of world’s fair builders, the century-of-progress exposition planners continued to exhibit a positivist faith in technology and unfolded
1: 17th April 1958, Brussel
Opening Ceremony of Expo 58
2: Gates open
*In the first day of the exhibition more than 150,000 enthusiastic visitors were waiting to enter*
Gates of the Expo 58, 7/10
3: Main Hall Gate
4: Esplanade Gate
5: Atomium Gate
6: Park Gate
7: Belvedere Gate
8: Royal Gate
9: Mondial Gate
10: Map
blueprints for the future that were still flavèd by racism."

The 10 gates of the EXPO represent a defined border of the area of the exhibition. They play an important role, because they mark those limited points of connection between the EXPO area and the environment around. From the visitor’s perspective, a gate draws the attention from the first moment and also it works as landmark, for visual orientation.

Generally speaking, a gate can be consider a object belonging to a collective memory, in the way that the idea of a doorstep has always been in our conception. Since old times, from Ancien Greece and Roman times, a city was always provided with a main entrance. This limit was a clear expression of a power wielded on a particular area. It means that “from that point, my authority is valid”. In this way Propylea in Athens, Tito’s Arc in Rome and city walls in Middle Ages have had this role.

It is interesting to notice how gates define a link between inside and outside, even if the inside is not, for instance, a building, but an open space. Inside is actually open, as the outside, but enclosed within “lines”.

The overall plan of the EXPO reveals in fact an urban configuration, the exhibition space is developed along main axis, a sort of boulevards, where visitors could walk and admire all the attractions. We can talk about “ExpoCity”, where reality is built so quickly, it stays temporary, but it seems so realistic. Therefore all parts of the exposition have a role in the whole organisation, exactly like a city. Pavilions are buildings with interior spaces, that pull people in; sculptures are the same as urban objects into a square or into a public spaces and entrances are obviously gates of the city; some of them can be considered even monuments or points of constant attraction.

**Entrances role, from landmarks to tickets service**

The 10 gates of the EXPO had two functions, two different categories of use. Firstly, they carry out a practical function and secondly they play a symbolic role.

On one hand the main role of the 10 gates was allow people to go in. The EXPO was not for free, so entrances were a place to buy tickets and have, consequently, permission to take part in the event. When practical function is complemented by landmarks function, the first use of a gate as a place to sell tickets is implemented with a more completed use. The range of features gets wider, the gate needs additional features, such as visibility, colours, design....

According to Thing Theory,

“... there is a materiality of things, in other words, a materiality-effect, “that seek to recast thingness and its apprehension within, and as, the domain of the social.”

A Thing establishes a particular relationship with
its observer, and it generates a perception of the thing itself through its features. Therefore connection between Things and society is so tight, because cultural background is built on traditions, collective imagines and language. There are in fact things, which constitute

*"an imaginary visual tableau to narrate the temporal development"* 5

of human history and growth. However this “tableau vivant” is also related to different social contexts; the main point of the question is what things are for a given society, and how the same things are considered instruments and objects of possessions by another society. To express this concept, it is possible to use the following expression:

*"discrepancy between percepts"* 6

This aspect underlines importance of society, meant as community, in defining objects as Things. As Bruno Latour says “things do not exist without being full of people”, and core element of things, their thickness, is made by layers of collective memories. In our case of study, at the EXPO 58, entrances showed a thick layer of images, attracting visitors through association of ideas and mental connections. Analysing typology aspects, some gates present architectural features, that are connected to the standard idea of gate, so easy recognizable, too. They can be closed and open, according to the necessity

11: Attractions Gate
The Attractions Gate is located close to the Folkloristic Section and the Attractions Section.

12: Rollercoaster L’éclaire
The attraction was especially fast and it was twisted through most of the Amusement Park of the Expo
of the situation. For instance Belvedere Gate and Royal Gate follow a traditional concept of entrances, stone colons and metal railings, also because of the Royal Palace near that gate. They communicate an impassable border, when they are closed. Then, some others, such as Main Hall, Esplanade, Atomium, Mondial and Park Gates, they stand, but they can not be closed and sometimes it’s not even possible to walk through them. Although they miss all these gates’ features, they still express an exact point of the EXPO area and that is what they are made for: guiding observers. Atomium Gate is situated where the axis towards Atomium starts. The same is for the Main Hall entrance; it is a structure over the Main Hall building, pointing out the huge pavilion to the audience.

**Starting spots of the EXPO 58, linked to the collective memory**

On the other hand Attractions, Nations and Benelux Gates represent something more related to sculptural objects. They interact with visitors in a creative way; suggesting shapes and memories. They are objects belonging to a common imaginary dimension. About folkloristic memory we have the Attractions Gate, that reminds, or even more, it is designed as a Mat de Cocagne or Meiboom, a pole used during folkloristic celebrations. The game involves staying on, climbing up, walking over or even traversing this grease pole, on which some prizes are hanged up. On the other hand, playing with the Meiboom consists just in dancing around
the pole, keeping a rope on your hand. The gate’s shape itself suggests an idea of leisure and entertainment; in this way, visitors can easily understand that they enter the Attractions section.

The Nations Gate is located in the International Section of the Exposition. It is a sculptural object, that evokes modern design, construction and innovative relationship with space. It conveys a message that could to be caught by different cultures; the message for visitors is modernity and progress towards development and National pride.

The third one, the Benelux Gate entails a multiple meanings and memories. It represents, like the Nations Gate, a dynamic attitude towards modernity. In particular its shape, designed by architects A. Pirnay, R. Jeanne and G. Martin refers to an airplane. The architects said about the concept of the gate that:

“un auvent horizontal s’étirant comme les ailes d’un avion se rencontrent à l’angle obtus dans leur partie la plus large.”

Moreover, this Gate is connected with modern way of life. EXPO 58, especially in some parts, like the Usa pavilion, was supposed to show a new way of life and to promote a message for a wide range consumers, not just middle class, like it was before the century-of-progress expositions. Because of Benelux Gate was also working as lift cable station, it was a remarkable starting point for new mobility experience into the World Exhibition.

Element of mobility is widespread in the EXPO, in fact it was possible to visit the exposition by different ways of transport. After a tiring stroll around the main area, visitors could enjoy an exciting view from the funicular or have a nice ride on small Expotrain or on the rickshaw. The modern attitude surrounded EXPO 58, and what is more, modern attitude could be tried by everyone. All these experiences concurred to build memories for following generations, setting these elements as cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, the last three gates embody, more than the others, the spirit of EXPO 58 and, more generally, the attitude of that specific time period, continuously in progress. They illustrate how shapes can suggest a particular area of interest, a topic, or an idea. Through collective memory, an implicit language is formed, made out of images, simple shapes, colors. People can understand it and use this “code” to communicate with each other. The power of images is strong and it aims to seduce the world, that

“is a work to be observed, its artifacts accumulated in museums and encyclopedias composed as memory theatres, with systematic cross-references and interconnection.”

Quotes:


Plaisir de France, Numero de l’Exposition, Bruxelles 58. Une Machine à Reves


Bibliography:


Images:

Fig. 1: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Fig. 2: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Fig. 3: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 4: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 5: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 6: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 7: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 8: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 9: http://users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/sections/index.htm, 5/04/2012
Fig. 10: L’Architecture, les Jardins et l’Eclairage : Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958
Fig. 11: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Fig. 12: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Fig. 13: L’Architecture, les Jardins et l’Eclairage : Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958
Fig. 14: L’Architecture, les Jardins et l’Eclairage : Exposition Universelle et Internationale de Bruxelles 1958
Fig. 15: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Fig. 16: Nevi, R. (2008). EXPO 58, Nostalgie in 400 Foto’s. Leuven: Van Haelwyck
Signals and Totems

Elisabeth Bonavera

Relationships and tensions are formed in different realms through the presence of signals and totems at the EXPO 58.

Signals and totems are a common appearance among the objects and things at the EXPO 58 in Brussels. The Signals and totems appear in many different forms as a result of different inspirations, meanings and intentions whereby they express relationships between themselves, the public space, the pavilion and the development of man. As Claude Levi-Strauss describes in his publication The Savage Mind (1966), signals and totems are:

“suitable for conveying messages which can be transported into other codes, and for expressing messages received by means of different codes in terms of their own system” (p. 76).

All sorts of totems and signals at the EXPO 58

The totems and signals at the EXPO 58 can be classified into two categories. These are inspired by Saussure who was

“concerned with words as signs”

and goes on to say that

“signs are made up of the signifier and the signified, the signifier refers to form whereas the signified refers to content or meaning” (Leach, 1997, p. 163).

A totem can be classified as a ‘signified’ object because it is signified by the meaning or the content which it holds. This is because
“Totemism is the projection outside our own universe ... of mental attitudes incompatible with the exigency of a discontinuity between man and nature” (Levi-Strauss, 1964, p. 3).

In figure 3 the totem in front of the Mexican Pavilion can be seen which falls under the category ‘signified’ object. Whereas the totem of the Congolese Pavilion (figure 4) can be categorized as a ‘signifier’ (thing) because it is related to the form or rather visual of the totem and not its content or meaning. Germany’s signal is a ‘signifier’ because it also relates to the form. Furthermore a ‘signified’ object can stand on its own and still have a meaning whereas a ‘signifier’ signifies something and in this case the pavilion self.

It is also possible for objects to change in their categorization. The Atomium at the EXPO 58 was a ‘signifier’ but has become a ‘signified’ object today because it has become an icon of Brussels. The same phenomenon is described by Roland Barthes with the Eiffel tower in Paris, France, which was once a ‘signifier’ but has become a ‘signified’ object today. This is because it is the

“universal symbol of Paris” (Leach, 1997, p.172.).

The question remains: What relevance do all these totems and signals have at the EXPO 58? Levi-Strauss clarifies that
“the natural sciences for a long time regarded themselves as concerned with ‘kingdoms,’ that is, independent and sovereign domains each definable by its own characteristics and peopled by creatures or objects standing in special relations to one another” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.138).

Therefore in the case of the EXPO 58 the ‘kingdoms’ could be seen as the representative pavilions definable by their own characteristics and things. The signals and totems distinguish the pavilions due to the

“The practico-theoretical logics governing the life and thought of so called primitive societies are shaped by the insistence on differentiation” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.75).

“Many psychologists have kept themselves busy with the origin of the need to belong to something as well as the wish to be unique” (Fohrbeck, 1987, p. 20).

The totem or signal therefore defines and differentiates what the pavilion is representing.

The relationship between the totem and the public space and the signal and the pavilion

At the EXPO 58 visible relationships are defined whereby the totem is related to the public space whereas the signal is related to the pavilion. As Umberto Eco says so appropriately:

“This was the spoon promotes a certain way of eating and signifies that way of eating, just as the cave promotes the act of taking shelter and signifies the existence of the possible functions; and both objects signify even when they are not being used” (Leach, 1997, p.183).

Just as the signal and totem promote different experiences and relationships. The totem promotes the public space and forms a relationship with it whereas the signal promotes the pavilion and forms a relationship with it.

This notion is further explained:

“From different theories comes forth that totemism developed because of the need for mutual solidarity, the first way is to create a bond through physical proximity and the second is through mutual similarity” (Fohrbeck, 1987, p. 20).

Therefore a totem creates a bond with people and has an affinity to the public and the public realm through the physical proximity. Physical proximity with relation to thing theory is explained by Heidegger who states that a ‘Thing’ or ‘Ding’ is a

“gathering” (Latour, p. 4).

The totem through its nature becomes a place where people come and gather. This is the case with reference to the totem of the Congolese Pavilion where it would be a clear place for the
public to gather and therefore describes the relation the totem has with the public realm.

The relationship between pavilion and the signal can be clarified through Thing Theory and the thingness of an object. A pavilion self is in essence an object, something which we do not notice as Bill Brown describes it (Brown, 2001, p. 5). However, when an object is present, the thingness of an object may be experienced. Therefore with the presence of the signal, the object; the thingness of the pavilion can be experienced consciously whereby it becomes a thing. Signals “activate the space determined by the architect” and their “primary requisite is to attain a complete whole. The harmony depends on the affinity of elements” (Crosby, 1956). It could be said that the affinity of the thing (the pavilion) and the object (the signal) create a complete whole and hence harmony.

The Savage – Civilized World

“Primitive man is known to us by the stages of development through which he has passed; that is, through the inanimate monuments and implements which he has left behind for us” (Freud, 1918, p. 3).

Thus a totems is seen as something primitive furthermore Levi-Strauss explains that

“totemism assimilates men to animals… which allowed the savage, within culture itself, to be isolated from civilized man”(Levi-Strauss, 1964, p. 3).

Therefore totems are seen as primitive and savage.
But, why have certain nations chosen signals instead of totems? The

“Totemic void in Europe and Asia”

may be the explanation;

“there is a remarkable absence of anything with reference to totemism, even in the form of remain. The reason is surely that the latter have elected to explain themselves by history and that this undertaking is incompatible with that of classifying things and beings (natural and social) by means of finite groups” (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p.232).

Therefore the totems which is described to be savage and the signal which is civilized also play a role at the EXPO 58 and may be the reason why western civilizations identify themselves with signals.

Consequently, the principle of the binary opposite: savage civilized can be viewed.

“The principle of opposition is fundamental to structuralism and the world can be seen to be structured according to a system of paired opposites, of binary oppositions, such as male-female” (Leach, 1997, p163).

The same trend of opposites with regard to savage and civilized was visible at the the ‘This is Tomorrow’ exhibition in 1956 where architecture, sculpture and art were placed in a time-perspective.

“Space (was) modulated by plastic sheets, blackboard and plywood, all mass produced materials and within the mass produced environment the sculpture (or totem) represents the imprecise yet recognizable image of the irrational and of chance: non-utilitarian yet necessary, focusing on the environment and the poetic equivalent of man” (Crosby, 1956).

This tension was resolved in the binary structure between the savage and civilized phases of man and hence the notion of structuralism which also appears at the EXPO 58.
The presence of the opposites; savage-civilized, can also be related to Thing Theory where Heidegger’s debated statement says that:

“The handmade jug can be a thing, while the industrially made can of Coke remains an object” (Latour, 2004, p.233).

The totem of the Mexican pavilion is handmade or hand carved and thus a thing as well as the hand painted Congolese signal which is a thing. Whereas the industrially modern made signal of the German pavilion is an object which, in turn, makes the pavilion a thing. Therefore the binary opposites of handmade and industrially made also play a role in the tension between savage and civilized.

In conclusion, signals and totems create tensions and relationships which can be clarified by Thing Theory and Structuralism. The classification of the totems and signals into ‘signified’ and ‘signifier’ defines the relationship between meaning and form. The relationship between the totem and the public space is that the totem is a thing because it is a place for gathering and has meaning, whereas the signal has a relationship with the pavilion and thus the relationship between object and thing is experienced. Tensions exist in the presence of the binary opposites; the savage and civilized world together with handmade or industrially made and hence, Structuralism.
Bibliography


Images


Figure 8: Crosby, T. (Ed.). (1956). This is Tomorrow. Newcastle: Print Partners.
Atomium.
An optimistic vision

Bastiaan Oltwater

How was the Atomium used in this first post-war Expo to reduce prejudices against nuclear power and turn the attitude into a more positive image of nuclear power?

History

After the Second World War Europe was in shambles and needed rebuilding. While the reconstruction was still in progress a general growth in prosperity started. Means of communication improved in speed and quality which gave people a better insight in the world situation. The introduction of regular television broadcast in the early fifties played an important part showing people what was going on in distant places. At home people could witness draughts, floods, famine, disasters, wars. Those images had great impact. They were new. Until then people had heard the news on radio or read the papers. Seeing things actually happen made a difference. People felt a need to help those in poor countries. The atom bomb which had ended the Second World War had unleashed new fears. From 1949 the Russians possessed Nuclear weapons and people generally feared that the so-called ‘Cold war’ would one day turn into a Russian attack. It is hardly surprising that these fears encompassed anything nuclear.

For the World Exhibition of 1958, Belgium wanted to do something special. Come up with a symbol of progress, of the future. Something to mark the Expo, a centrepiece like a crown at the heart of the park. Something to impress the world with. A hyper modern thing that would mark the place and would be seen from far and wide. On top of that it had to breath the ideals and themes that the Expo was based upon; progress in science and technol-
1: Television
Watching television 1958
2: Atomic explosion
Mushroom clouds over Nagasaki
3: Atomium
Present day
ogy with the emphasis on nuclear power. Ideal was
Mondial humanism, a better world for mankind.
This edifice, a symbol of progress and the future,
had promoted the peaceful use of nuclear power.
Nuclear power was thought to save the future. It
had three great advantages. In the first place it
meant a great deal to the medical world. For exam-
ple: radioactive elements were used in the diagnosis
and treatment of cancer. Secondly nuclear power
was important to scientific research. Isotopes were
used to analyse processes of growth. It was to be
expected that agriculture would benefit from the
results.
It was thought that one day photosynthesis would be
mastered so that we could create our own coal and oil.

"The use of energy stayed with the rising prosperity.
People concluded that in the third world more energy
would bring prosperity too: "the new energy is rich in
possibilities. For millions of men living in the underde-
veloped countries it represents a chance of being able
to attain to the standard of living, in the near future,
of the more highly developed countries. The stand-
ard of living is directly related to the consumption
of energy per head... By its exceptional mutability and
the extremely low cost of transport, atomic fuel is the
ideal raw material for the production of power in all
countries which are far removed from other sources of
energy. Not only will this new source of energy render
enormous tracts of desert land fertile, but it will enable
industries to spring up" [1]

Apart from that it was feared that energy would
not be able to keep up with prosterity. A fear
grounded in the Suez-crisis of 1956 which stopped
oil transports from the middle-east.

Planning and design

Baron Moens de Fernis, general commissioner of
the government at the World Exhibition organisa-
tion, thought it would be great if the Expo could
host a monument like the Eiffel Tower. Some great
monument that would catch the eye and show off
Belgian technology and engineering skills. Steel in-
dustry received the request and asked civil engineer
Andre Waterkeyn to come up with some ideas. At
the time, Waterkeyn was economic director of Fab-
rimetal.

Baron Moens de Fernis had visions of a Belgian Eif-
fel tower, which was a symbol of the age of steel. [2]
At one time it was even suggested to do an upside-
down Eiffeltower but Waterkeyn declined the idea[3].

Another inspirational example was the Trylon and
Periphere at the world Fair in New York, 1939-
1940. The tower and the global structures symbol-
ised the future’s technological possibilities. These
examples triggered off a first idea. Waterkeyn’s first
 sketches showed a tower, widening at the top. A
light metal structure, surrounded by eight spheres
which were about half way up. The idea was based
upon television towers. The sketch was rejected be-
cause it lacked originality and wasn’t very striking.
The idea did however triggered off the design that
4: Belgische Frank Shown Atomium

5: Previous design from, Waterkeyn
was finally chosen.[4] Waterkeyn rather liked the idea of using spheres as atoms to form one big molecule. He then chose the iron molecule since it had a steady structure and not too many atoms. And it was an advantage for steel industries. Waterkeyn was a civil engineer, not an architect. His brothers in law were. Andre and Jean Polak suggested he should tip the molecule. Waterkeyn did and that is how it suddenly became a spectacular dynamic design.

The final design was a 165 billion times enlarged atomic model of an iron molecule. Each sphere represented an iron atom. Inside the spheres was room for exhibitions. The spaces were used to promote nuclear power and show how mankind would benefit from nuclear progress.

The Atomium was a symbol for progress, for evolving knowledge in the use of nuclear power for the benefit of mankind. Since each sphere represented an atom the whole construction was a symbolic and solid monument to mark the beginning of the atomic era and the peaceful use of nuclear power for the benefit of all mankind.[5]

Waterkeyn intended to show the progress in fundamental science. To the general public, fundamental science wasn’t very popular. It was the daily news people cared about.

“More science in human culture is to free homo sapiens”

New York Herald tribune called the Atomium

“The dominant theme structure”[7]

Baron Moens de Fernis’s wish had come true. Within the Atomium there were exhibition spaces, dedicated to the blessings of nuclear power on a world scale. Participants could show off their prestigious nuclear projects without any restrictions. Exhibition space in the spheres was rather limited, each floor had no more than 240m2. So the exhibitors had to pick the best of their projects to show. Participants had to pay 2.500.000 BF (about 62.000 Euro’s) rent per floor. Animosity between the United States and the Soviet Union meant it called for diplomacy to get them together involved in the project. At first the Americans weren’t interested, but when Russia accepted the invitation they changed their mind. Then it was quite difficult to assign them equal locations. When it looked like all was settled the Soviet Union backed out because of production delays. Then the Americans decided not to go for financial reasons. Both countries did however host their own pavillion at the Expo.

Among the exhibitors in the Atomium we found the Belgian Congolese nuclear group for the promotion of nuclear power plants in the Belgins colonies, Fiat Montecatini, the German Wirtschaftsvereinigung Eisen- und Stahlindustrie from Dusseldorf,
6: Atomium bird view
Skyline
7: Trylon and perisphere
Expo 1939 - New York
8: Drawing Bipode
one of the possible solution

9: Build Atomium
first sphere
10: Build Atomium
the Comitato Nazionale Per Le Ricerche Nucleari from Italy and Westinghouse Electric Company of Europe. All in all the Atomium was one great promotional exhibition for nuclear power plants in Europe.

**Philosophical background**

The object and the thing. The thing is not an object, and never will be according to Derrida.[8] Objects have a physicality, properties like size and shape. The thing is what’s beyond that physical reality. It is the extra value, the meaning, the ideology. It is how something relates to a subject in time and space. The thing transcends the object’s physical reality through value, fetish, as idol or totem. It can be very personal interpretation but when it comes to edifices they address groups of people, whole cultures.

The way subjects are addressed is culture-bound and to some extent individual. Objects can be created to function as icons, but it can also happen to the ordinary.

Objects can express values. This is a fetish we have seen through the centuries in edifices that have been very important in their day. Such edifices are called icons. The Atomium is such an icon, but from a different origin than the original icons. The first icons were built by the church or the ruler to express there power to the people. Power, religion and conquests were the main themes in these icons. Examples are cathedrals, palaces and triumphal arches.

Some of these edifices had practical use, but not necessarily. They were meant to give a message. They gave rulers the opportunity to portray themselves and to get respect and honour. In the 1950’s a change occurred in the production of such icons. [9] Capitalistic globalisation came up. Churches lost power. Iconic values became an intrinsic part of consumerism. The building of icons was no longer exclusively for churches and rulers, it became a matter of business. By making icons the producers tried to stimulate sales. The consumer society was glorified by the new icons, just like the church had been before. The industry tried to express wealth, power and global and innovative powers in their new icons. [10]

The Atomium fits well in this evolution of icons because it was built to impress and to sell. It had to sell the concept of nuclear power as a benefit to mankind. A tough task only thirteen years after Hiroshima. Apart from that it had to promote Belgium and Belgian industries. To reach these goals an overpowering piece constructed with great technical skills was to be erected. Nine spheres centred over the Expo. Shiny metal, with light shows in the evening. Very futuristic in appearance, almost screaming that the future has begun here and now. A wonderful future! Atoms are the future and nuclear power is a benefit to mankind.

Each sphere represented an Atom, the concept
was enhanced by the name: Atomium. The lights at night gave an impression of electrons moving round the nucleus in the atoms. Within the Atomium the spaces were dedicated to the beneficial uses of nuclear power. Nuclear power and technology were also explicit and implicit themes throughout the Expo 1958. To enhance the visual impact of the Atomium a waterworks was created in front of it. It reflected the Atomium and ensured an unobstructed view. The Atomium was the tallest building in the Expo and could be seen from all directions and far ends of the Expo terrain.

For the exhibition of '58 the organizing committee asked for an object that would mark the atomic age. They got more than they bargained for. The Atomium is a unique structure with evocative power and iconic values that lift it beyond physical reality. A thing indeed.
Bibliography
Anon, Tentoonstelling te Brussel 1958, de wetenschappen (1960).
Debray, F. Expo 1958 De grote ommekeer, (Gent 2008).
Devos R., en Kooning, M. de, Moderne architectuur op Expo 58, Voor een humanoer wereld (Brussel 2006).
Martens, E., Expotopia, De Belgische Expo's (Bruxelles 2008).
Martens, E., Expo 58 (Bruxelles 2008).
Tribot P.J., Bruxelles 58, Annee-lumière (Bruxelles 2008).

Pictures Credits
2) http://www.ictvo.nl/betacanon/afb/09_atoombom1.jpg
3) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx
4) http://www.eduys.com/photo/7d42c078277edd4774905500ae1b4c12/iron-molecular-structure-model.jpg
5) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx
6) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx
7) http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3573/3488683997_818b0bd03e_o.jpg
8) Tribot, P., Bruxelles 58 Annee-lumiere (Brussel 2012) Page 91
9) Tribot, P., Bruxelles 58 Annee-lumiere (Brussel 2012) Page 90
10) Tribot, P., Bruxelles 58 Annee-lumiere (Brussel 2012) Page 90
11) http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jbourj/money4.htm
12) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx
13) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx
14) http://www.atomium.be/#/photostock.aspx

Footnotes
[2] Nota van Waterkeyn van 4 december 1954, bawb, Atomium 1956, 3.52.08
[5] L’Atomium, bawb, Atomium 1956, 3.52.08
When people think about the EXPO 58, they mainly think about one thing: the Atomium. It’s no wonder that the Atomium comes to mind, because it is one of the few tangible objects of the EXPO 58 these days and also, of course, its world famous.

When the Atomium was constructed, it was not intended to survive beyond the EXPO 58, but due to the enormous success and its popularity, it became an important symbol for Brussels and Belgium, so they decided to keep it. The Atomium was reopened in 2006 after a thorough renovation of 2 years. Given the number of visitors, 250,000 a year before the renovation and about 500,000 visitors a year after its renovation (1), the Atomium still is an important monument.

Sadly, this festive opening couldn’t be experienced by André Waterkeyn, who died a few months before the opening. Until then he was still involved with ‘his’ Atomium and he visited the construction site a few times a week during the renovation. (2)

André Waterkeyn was the designer of the Atomium and came up with the idea to make a building that symbolizes an iron crystal. He made this symbolization due to the metal ‘iron’ that was strongly in development and it was symbolic for the new era, the atomic age. (3)

Besides this symbolization it is hard to say what the Atomium actually is, because it is neither tower, nor pyramid, a little cubic, a little bit spherical, half-way between sculpture and architecture, a relic of the past with a determinedly futuristic look, museum and exhibition centre. (4)

So the Atomium as we know it symbolizes an iron crystal, only then magnified 165 billion times and is actually an ‘archi-sculpture’.

Scale

The Atomium designed by André Waterkeyn for EXPO 58 wasn’t the first building that was either magnified or reduced at a large scale. Scale has been a tradition at world expos, so there are more buildings that represent an object that actually is a lot smaller, or maybe larger.
One can wonder why designers choose to design a building that represents an object, or is an exact copy of an object that has been increased or reduced so many times. Why did scale become such a tradition at world expos? Another important question is what it does with a pavilion when it represents an object that has been scaled.

Especially when designing for big events or exhibitions designers need to come up with the most amazing pavilions. It has to draw attention amongst all the other buildings and preferably make a clear connection to what people can expect inside.

When dealing with temporary buildings, as most of the pavilions are for expos, the designs can be more playful and don’t need to be timeless as long as they make a good impression for at least the time the exposition lasts.

A good example of a design that couldn’t be called timeless is the ‘national cash register building’ which was used for the 1933 Chicago and the 1939 New York World’s Fair. This pavilion had a special feature that fits with the context of the building and drew extra attention. It showed each day’s Fair attendance in 2 ½ foot numbers that could be seen from a great distance, even at night when the display was illuminated. Inside the building the NCR had various models of cash registers on display along with a display of the 7.857 parts under glass, which make up one cash register. (5) It’s clear that this cash register has been scaled and used as a building. When you approach this building you would be surprised when the exhibition inside would not be about cash registers. People instantly make the connection with a company that’s dealing with cash registers.

A different kind of building compared to the national cash register building and the Atomium is the Statue of Liberty, the famous statue in New York.

At the Paris exposition in 1878 the completed head of the ‘Statue of Liberty’ was showcased. It was possible to climb inside the statue’s head for an admission fee. The Statue of Liberty was donated by France to the United States to commemorate the 100th anniversary in 1876 of United States independence. (6) The statue became a global symbol of freedom and democracy.

The head of the statue was exhibited at the Paris International Exhibition to raise construction funds. The statue is another example, where scaling has been used to design a construction. The statue shows a robed female figure who has been magnified numerous times.

That is why this statue is more than just a statue, it is a construction, an archi-sculpture, which you can go into and climb to the crown. From there you can enjoy the view and realize that you are in fact in the head of a person who is the global symbol of freedom and democracy. It gives an extra dimension to a building when you symbolize a certain object that you can ‘experience’ from the inside, thanks to the scaling of that object.

This development can vary from pretty global to extremely detailed, depending on what the designer wants to achieve with the building and what purpose it needs to have.

Also, because of the scaling, the statue makes a big impression, and can be seen from a great distance. It’s location at the tip of Liberty Island near Manhattan, contributes to this. There are no other objects or buildings blocking the view that one can have from every direction. This way when you ap
proach the statue you realize how big it is when you get closer.

Scaling of objects is an easy way to ‘design’ and create a construction or a building. It instantly makes clear what the building or the activities within are about. It gives the designer the tools to build a concept around it and this can be used in an abstract way as well, when symbolizing a deeper meaning. This way of designing is not usual for everyday buildings, although certain concepts can be used for special buildings/functions. It’s mostly used for pavilions and other temporary buildings. As mentioned these buildings can be playful and only have to fascinate for a certain while. Because of the playful looks of these scaled objects they bring more joy to an exhibition site compared to a square with only simple rectangular pavilions. The pavilions don’t have to look like a real building or even act like one. Although one can wonder when a building exactly doesn’t look like a building anymore and what it even would matter, as long as it serves its functions.

Thus a pavilion that represents an object that has been magnified or reduced many times gets more attention because of its exterior and the company that exploits the pavilion gets more attention as well. It can make the visit of the pavilion special thanks to the experience of walking through an object. A pavilion represented as an object can also make a direct connection with the product or company, which can mean extra promotion for this product and or company when people only read about or see this pavilion.

Magnifying or reducing an object brings an object to life and gives other insights at this object. By representing an object as a building you can understand and comprehend the object in a different way, which makes you more conscious about it as well. This can contribute to a certain aim that one wants to achieve by representing an object as a building.

Three pavilions of the EXPO 58 that will be discussed briefly here have to do with scaling. The first one, the Atomium has already been mentioned. Then there is the MBLE pavilion, which represented an object that has been magnified as well and the Pan American World Airways pavilion which represents the earth that of course has been reduced.

The Atomium is the main attraction of EXPO 58 and thus the most important pavilion that deserved to have a design that is renewable and makes a big impression. One of the original ideas for the EXPO 58 was to build an upside-down version of the Eiffel tower (7), but André Waterkeyn came up with a better idea. Just like the Eiffel tower, the Statue of Liberty or other main attractions, the fascination for the Atomium was about being the biggest, the highest, the most impressive and the most progressive building.
The name of the Atomium says already something about the meaning of this building. From the view of the exterior it’s hard to see what the Atomium represents. A chemist oriented person can see in the building the representation of an atomic structure, but to see at the first glance that it represents an iron crystal would probably go too far. To see this one would have to lose oneself more into the intentions of the designer and the context of the building and era.

So the exterior can totally give away what the building is about, what the case is at the national cash register building, but it can also have a more or less deeper meaning wherefore one would have to know a little more about the background of the object or the symbolization.

The MBLE pavilion represents an object as well. You can see for yourself whether you can see what object it represents. One thing can be concluded pretty quickly, it would have to be an object that has been magnified to make this pavilion. This doesn’t make it easier, but with an electrical background one would possibly make a really quick connection with an electronic tube.

This tube is a device controlling electric current through a vacuum in a sealed container. The container is often thin transparent glass in a roughly cylindrical shape.

The pavilion made a direct relation to the company, the MBLE, ‘Manufacture Belge de Lampes Electriques’ which was the greatest factory of electronic components in Belgium. The pavilion was designed by the architects Thiran, Wybauw and Lesage. One particularity of this pavilion was that it had one metallic shutter electronically driven was moving under the sun action, forming a screen at every day hour. Inside the ‘electronic tube’ the visitors were guided to the 4th floor by elevator. From there they circled down to the ground floor. At the 4th floor photographs showed the working conditions in the factories. At the 3th floor all application electronic tubes and different components designed by the company were showed. At the 2nd floor visitors could see radio communication appliances and at the 1st floor various shows of telecom equipment were presented.

In the case of the Pan American World Airways pavilion it’s clear what it represents. The pavilion was made of an inflatable balloon made of nylon and blue vinyl. The airline routes were marked on this big globe and people walking on the ramp next to it were able to see were this airline company could bring you to. Inside the pavilion about two hundred people could watch a movie about big world trips.
Alles ist Architektur

Hans Hollein wrote an article in German language in 1967 called ‘Alles ist Architektur’, meaning everything is architecture. “Architecture is a medium of communication” and with all the developments in media and the extension in human sphere “architecture is just one of many means. “Today everything becomes architecture”.

“Architects must cease to think only in terms of building. Today a museum or a school can be replaced by a TV set.”

“A building can become entirely information – its message might be experienced through informational media (press, TV, etc.). In fact it is of almost no importance whether, for example, the Acropolis or the Pyramids exist in physical reality, as most people are aware of them through other media anyway and not through an experience of their own.”

Today, this is still true, maybe even more. Because there are documentaries about everything and the internet is full of information. People may feel that they know a building without even visiting it. As far as they know, it might even not exist.

Like Hans Hollein says “Thus a building might be simulated only”.

“A true architecture of our time will have to redefine itself and expand its means. Many areas outside traditional building will enter the realm of architecture, as architecture and architects will have to enter new fields.”

“All are architects. Everything is architecture.” (11)

The term ‘ArchiSculpture’ has already been mentioned. There are more examples of the so called archisculpture and this also has to do with scaling.

“The interplay between sculpture and architecture is one of the most intriguing phenomena in twentieth-century art. When modern sculpture emerged in the nineteenth century, it received essential impulses from the history of architecture.” (12)

Objects or sculptures can also be used as a starting point for a building, an architectural design. These sculptures must be, most likely, magnified to create a building and they must create spatial qualities. The sculptures can also be an inspiration for shaping (parts of) the architectural design.

“Conversely, in the 1920s many architects began to model their buildings plastically.” (12)

Interesting buildings in relation with this are, for example, Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp and the Guggenheim museum in New York and the sculptures ‘Reclining Figure’ of Henry Moore and ‘Coupes superposées’ of Hans Jean Arp.
As large as an atom, as small as the planet

“The capacity that enables us to see the small as large and to conceive the large as small stems from human perception and imagination. This ability is activated when the automatic estimation of distance is disrupted, or when such a disruption is artificially produced in the interpretation of the seen and the real (or ideal) distance. This occurs, for example, through the absence of presentational scale, through perspective puzzles, and through sculptures that are also intended as or can at least be conceived as architectural models. In this manner, sculpture is effective as a ‘shifter’ of spatiality; as a visible form whose meaning shifts with its context.” (12)

You can leave things to your imagination, put your imagination on paper or even put your imagination in a structure. Everything is possible, everything can be represented, in an obvious way or with a deeper meaning. You can make building or pavilions as large as an atom, or as small as the planet.

Sources:
(1) business.mobistar.be/go/nl/sma/mobistar_voor_u/klanten_vertellen/atomium.cfm
www.brusselnieuws.be/artikel/atomium-trekt-minder-bezoekers
(2) users.telenet.be/nevi/expo58/atomium/index.htm
(3) nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomium
(4) Atomium 2012 the symbol of Brussels brochure
(5) www.1939nyworldsfair.com/worlds_fair/wf_tour/Zone-7/ncr.htm
(6) www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s/1878-1.html
(7) www.worldexhibition.org/worldexpo/1958-brussels/
(8) www.toomp.be/expo58.html
(9) www.radiocollection.be/uk/MBLE1_uk.html
(10) www.radiocollection.be/multi/MBLE_exp01.html

Bibliography:

Images:
1. Atomium: todio.nl/afbeeldingen/atomium.jpg
5. MBLE Pavilion: www.radiocollection.be/images/mble_img/MBLE58_02.jpg
8. Notre-Dame-du-Haut and Reclining Figure: www.wilkhahn.com/3_inspiration/33_archiv/images/archiskulptur_2.jpg
Philips Pavilion
M.M. Konig dos Santos

“I would like you to design the Philips Pavilion in such a way that there is no need to show any of our manufactured articles. A most adventurous demonstration of where technical progress may lead us in the future of sound and light effects.”

Request of Artistic Director of Philips to Le Corbusier in 1956

The Philips company street name meant Light and Sound and they wished to show what Man can do. Therefore for the Expo’58 in Brussels they contracted Le Corbusier to create a pavilion that would transmit their message as well as show what Philips is. After all, the main aim of the 1958 exhibition was drawing attention to the opportunities of the future.

Le Corbusier worked together with his disciple Iannis Xenakis (architecture) and Edgard Varèse (composer) to create the memorable Philips Pavilion.

“The concept was that the audience members would enter in groups of 500 hundred at ten-minute intervals, (...) entering a room that would go into darkness, enveloping the audience in a space of light and sound for eight minutes while an accompanying video displayed images along the walls of the pavilion. At the end of the eight-minute piece, the spectators would exit, digested, through another exit while the new group filed in.”

Oscar Lopez, on Archdaily website

Pavilion for the show, Show for the pavilion

The objective of the pavilion’s architecture was to serve as an empty shell inside which a performance would be staged. The building was first sketched by Le Corbusier and later handed to iannis Xenakis, his disciple. Xenakis had to wait for Le Corbusier’s show plan to be defined before he could start the pavilion’s design.

The show required plane surfaces for film projections and curved, concave and convex surfaces for color
projections. These were the most important facts on Xenakis consideration of the construction technique. To create the best possible physical conditions for the show, the best option would be a self-supporting geometric surface that could be calculated statistically and could be constructed on a normal building site. This structure also had to allow for a curved floor plan with one entry point and one exit point. With some research he came up with a hyperbolic paraboloid and conoid structure. This structure would then be coated with reinforced concrete, the only material plastic and strong enough to hold.

This validates the argument that the pavilion was designed specifically to serve the show. But does the show work if not played in this pavilion? Today we still have the sound and the visual projection of Le Corbusier’s Poème Electronique, and yet the effect does not compare with the spectacle it was 54 years ago.

Therefore we may conclude that without the pavilion the show is not what Le Corbusier, and also Philips, intended to transmit to the public. The message is lost, left behind in the memory of those that visited the World Fair in 1958.

Meanwhile, looking at an image of the pavilion next to a photograph of a mathematical object by Man Ray, it seems plausible where some of the inspiration came from. We could speculate that Le Corbusier had a certain admiration for the mathematical objects photographed by Man Ray and employed this idealism to the pavilion’s project. His love for mathematical things is visible in the whole project.

Things - objects that invoke a reaction from the subjects - objects with memory - objects with meaning.

Projection of images in a 3D Space

Genesis, Spirit and Matter, From darkness to dawn, Man-Made Gods, How time molds civilization, Harmony, To All Mankind. These are the phases of the Poème Electronique that awed so many viewers in 1958. It was a spectacle of light and booming sound delivered by 350 loudspeakers, and of course the video, assembled by Le Corbusier, telling the viewers a story of life, discovery and evolution.
The video was to be projected on the walls and viewed by the standing public. Thus, Xenakis created a pavilion with inclined walls providing a more agreeable projection angle. The projection was not focused on only one point, but rather on several points on different parts of the walls. It was quite a revolutionary scheme that resembles the nowadays dream of owning multiple flat screens spread three dimensionally in a room with different images on each screen. To ensure that the spectator would not be lost, the sound indicated to which direction he should turn.

To relay the message Le Corbusier employed images of beings (human and animal), objects, video clips of human moments and rhythm to symbolize the passing of time.

All the images and clips assembled created the projected video, and yet if viewed as individually, they demonstrate single memories in time. Stills of “as found” things that individually bear little meaning to the masses, but when compiled together deliver a story, they cease to seem ordinary.

““As found” is about the here and now, about truthfulness and reality, about the common and the ordinary.”

Architect is not made with the brain

Where did the inspiration of the projected images, of Le Corbusier, came from? It is a good question since it all seems quite random in a way, as if he went to google and started selecting images related to life, evolution and technology. But a much more plausible explanation would be that he experienced the “The Wonder and Horror of the Human Head” by Richard Hamilton presented in 1953.

“Wonder and Horror of the Human Head was essentially a collection of visual studies of the head (...)”

Tirdad Zolghad

This show presented an array of studies of the human head as well as masks, such as African masks. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, thus wordlessly Le Corbusier conveyed his poem.

Three Objects and the Pavilion

In front of the pavilion stood a sizeable sculpture, the Mathematique that today stands at the University of Technology campus in Eindhoven. The sculpture had a smaller twin that was hanging from the ceiling inside the pavilion. Looking at the pavilion with the sculpture in front, it publicises thoughts of evolution and technology. Besides the opposition of scale between the twin objects of mathematique, there is also a difference in color. In the sculpture outside, there are three planes with the primary colors. The use of these
colors could refer to the elemental, for instance, mathematics is a base for reality, which also leads to developing into the future. They could also refer to the modernist style of Le Corbusier, for which he is known to use primary colors.

As mentioned above, one of Le Corbusier’s probable inspirations were the photographs of mathematical objects by Richard Hamilton. There is a distinct similarity between the two as can be seen on the next page.

On the inside of the pavilion, hanging from two high piques, were two objects, Le Mathematique and La Femme. They hung on opposite sides, suggesting they represent opposite ideas. La femme seems to be a mannequin for which Le Corbusier intended a more complex meaning than just to show the female figure. It appears he intended to transmit that mathematics is not a female trait, therefore there is science and technology, and then there is family and household. Both ideals representing the range of products of the Philips company. This suggests that perhaps, a similar opposition exists between the pavilion itself and the mathematical object in front of it. After all, the mathematical object is all science, evolution and straight lines, whilst the pavilion, though mathematically generated, is mysterious, curvaceous and smooth.

Hence, with three quite simple objects, Le Corbusier was able to relay the intended message in a very abstract and indirect way, avoiding the direct approach made in the American pavilion of showcasing the new products. Although, both pavilions are demonstrating “things”, they do so in very different ways and with different meanings. They are both exciting, but the American pavilion transmitted publicity and had a consumer’s environment, while by contrast, the Philips pavilion transmitted inspiration and pure art.

“Things do not exist without being full of people”  
Bill Brown
References

Books

Websites
http://www.cedesign.biz/expore/pavilions/Philips_pav.swf
https://ccrma.stanford.edu/CCRMA/Courses/154/Varese%20images.html
http://architectuul.com/architecture/philips-pavilion
http://web.mit.edu/lira/www/lira4203.HTM

Figures
Fig.1_ Dichtbij klopt het hart der wereld
Fig.2,3,4,12_Archdaily: AD Classics Expo’58 + Philips Pavilion
Fig.5_http://hyperbolic-crochet.blogspot.com/2011/04/mathematicians-in-paris-iv-mathematical.html
Fig.6 Objectif, bulletin officiel de l’exposition universelle et internationale de Bruxelles 1958, no29, 1957.
Fig.7_Still of the video: Poeme Electronique - Le Corbusier & Edgard Varese & Iannis Xenakis (1958)
Fig.8_VEP project, http://www.edu.vrmmp.it/vep/index.html
Fig.10_http://designfun.net/designfun/node/15593
Fig.11_http://www.flickr.com/photos/centralasian/5624020226/
(Sur)realistic link Salvador Dali/Le Corbusier

Jos Poortman

A story told by objects

This is a story about the remarkable relationship and connection between two men, who on first sight, don’t seem to have any relation at all. The first one is known as Salvador Dali (pic1.), the surrealist, the Spanish artist praised for his extraordinary paintings and of course his Paranoid Critical Method. The other one named himself Le Corbusier (pic2.), a French modernistic, cubistic, even puristic architect, famous for his rational designs.

What is the connection between these two totally different men and how is it possible that the story is told by objects? We’ll see........
Once upon a time

April 17th in the year 1958. Brussels is crowded with people from all over the world, being here to see the first World fair after WO II. Nineteen years have passed since the previous World fair, the one held in New York. Salvador Dali’s pavilion ‘Dream of Venus’ was exposed there and turned out to be a shocking success, making the visitors today very curious about how the EXPO will be this time.

Desperately looking for the work of Dali, some walk straight in the direction of the Spanish pavilion. They pass the British pavilion created by designer James Gardner, architect Howard Lobb & engineer Felix Samuely.

This pavilion is a very beautiful and interesting object. Open and more closed spaces are combined to expose all kinds of things. Or objects………. By the way, what is the difference between an object and a thing?

Bill Brown gave explanations about the differences between objects and things. In one of the examples he used a window: ‘An object is like a clean window and a thing is like a filthy one.’ We don’t look at an object as it is but look through it, focusing on what is behind it, like with a clean window. An object becomes a thing when we don’t look through it anymore but look at it, like with a filthy window. The object becomes a thing in itself.

Another example can be found in the British pavilion. In one of the exposition halls, a wig is exposed. It is a strange sight, a wig exposed on a statue, you can impossibly miss it. But the text under the exposed wig and screen behind it, explain this object was used in British court. Knowing this, and imagining the wig being on top of a judge’s head, you find that while doing its job, it wasn’t standing out at all. You were seeing through it, it was an object. But at this moment, while it’s being exposed in a totally different surrounding, it transformed from an object, an object as found, according to Nigel Henderson into a thing. Of course we saw it when it was an object telling the
story, but the story was dominant. Now the object is being exposed, it becomes more important than the story, it becomes a story telling object to us, it becomes a thing.........

Back to the British pavilion. Besides the wig, there is also a space called ‘Shakespeare Garden’ (pic6.). It’s a room without a ceiling, so both being interior and exterior. It looks quite similar to the rooftop of Charles de Beistegui’s (pic7.) (a very eccentric man who wore wigs from Louis XIV period, remarkable similar to the wig in the British pavilion) apartment in Paris, created by Le Corbusier in 1930-1931, also a space without a roof, being interior and exterior at the same time, combined with Louis XV furniture and in strong relation to the monuments of Paris (pic8). Thanks to a mirror on the roof, you could even be part of l’Arc de Triomphe (pic9). Very strange, it didn’t sound like Le Corbusier at all, but both Stanislaus von Moos³ and Thomas Mical⁴ wrote about the rooftop of Charles Beistegui and le Corbusier’s surrealistic tics.
Le Corbusiers affection for and relation to arches demonstrate themselves even more in his Plan Voisin (pic10), created in 1925, in which he completely demolished a part of historical Paris, but left two arches untouched. This plan, with its anti-skyscrapers was actually an anti-Manhattan plan, explained Rem Koolhaas.5

Koolhaas also showed Le Corbusier trying to convince the world that Manhattan (pic11) was worthless, completely not modern and in desperate need of his modern vision, which it absolutely didn’t, so he couldn’t succeed in his plan which showed remarkable similarities to the Paranoid Critical Method of Dali’s surrealism. Le Corbusier was both jealous and admired by New York. When he in 1935 arrived, all photographers were too busy with other celebrities and when one of them finally photographed him, the result was a blank picture (pic12) because de photographer’s camera was out of film. Like Le Corbusier was invisible on the picture, he was invisible to New York. One of the few things the city and him had in common, was the black smoke painted on Park Avenue’s façade, referring to the characteristic old houses of Paris (pic13), city of Le Corbusier.
Another relation between the French architect and New York was Salvador Dali. Koolhaas wrote about him arriving at the city, also in 1935, like Le Corbusier, bringing a strange 2.5 meters long French, like Le Corbusier, baguette which was totally invisible for the New Yorkers, like Le Corbusier. Dali was both jealous and admired by New York, like Le Corbusier was, and found in an elevator of The Skyscraper a copy of a painting by el Greco and authentic Spanish red velvet, probably of the fifteenth century, reminding him of Spain, the country of his birth, like the smoke reminded Le Corbusier of Paris. But, different then Le Corbusier, Dali became popular in New York in 1939 with his pavilion ‘Dream of Venus’ for the World fair. And today, on the 17th of April in 1958, he again seems to be popular, while visitors of the expo looking for his painting are rushing by the British pavilion in the direction of the Spanish one........

THE END

There it is! A novel with storyline guided by objects: British pavilion, wig, Shakespeare garden, Beistegui’s apartment, mirror, l’Arc de Triomph, French arcs, anti-skyscrapers, skyscrapers, empty photograph, black smoke, French houses, French baguette, Spanish velvet, ‘Dream of Venus’ pavilion, Spanish pavilion, Dali’s painting, all connecting the on first sight merely opposite surrealist Salvador Dali and rationalist Le Corbusier, starting and ending at the EXPO 58 in Brussels. Nice and truthfull story don’t you think? Not just a main storyline, but also details explaining parts of the characters personalites.

But........
Being (Paranoid) Critical

How real is all of this? Do you believe a story that seems to be retroactive? Well, the idea that it is based on true events and real objects with traceable sources, makes it quite acceptable. However, don’t be too sure. The objects might be real, but do the stories they tell really match the objects themselves? Look again at the painting of Dali, exposed in the Spanish pavilion and compare it to the British pavilion. But this time, look temperate, simply observing the objects as they are, as things, and ask yourself: ‘What is the link between the Spanish painting and the British pavilion?’.

Well? The only thing I could come up with is the fact that they’re both exposed at the same World fair and you’re able of visiting them on the same day without putting a lot of effort to it. Because when I look at the painting, I see a work created by Salvador Dali showing a man riding a rearing horse and a lot of other objects.

And when I look at the British pavilion, I see a work of James Gardner, Howard Lobb and Felix Samuely showing a British wig, a Shakespeare Garden and a lot of other objects.

So, seeing relations and understanding the stories objects tell, totally depend on the way we are looking, from which perspective we are seeing objects. When we see the object as object important in itself, being capable of telling a story, we look at the object and for that, it suddenly becomes a thing. But is the story dominant? Then we see a story told by objects, looking through the object.

This is exactly how the Paranoid Critical Method enters our minds. Salvador Dali wants us to look at his work in such a way that we see what he means. Surrealism is a constructed reality that isn’t really out there but starts to become real in our minds, the moment we start seeing what the surrealist wants us to see. Is there a true relation in the story? A real link? No! The story is not correct! We’re just telling ourselves there are links and connections, imagining there are. We’re seeing things that aren’t truly there, not focused on the object as visible thing anymore but on the invisible meaning, or story, we see behind the object. The object as thing vanishes and another thing, the story, behind the object appears.

So the questions, viewed from a thing theory perspective, we can ask ourselves every time we see an object is: ‘What is it that I’m looking at? What am I seeing? Is it a thing, an object just the way it is? Or am I looking through an object, partly the product of a thing in itself and on the other hand the result of whatever my mind comes up with, made up by myself or influenced by others, while seeing through this object?’ In other words: ‘Am I seeing a thing, telling a story? Or am I just seeing a story told by an object that in itself is invisible?’

If we don’t ask these questions, if we don’t look critically, if we only look through and don’t look at objects, we’ll become the toys in a ruthless game of the Paranoid Critical Method, because we’re blind.
for the tools it uses to play with us. We think we’re seeing things that are paranoid, because we don’t understand we’re seeing through an object that simply doesn’t match the story it’s telling. In this way, any object could tell any story because our naïve mind doesn’t see and constructs its own reality. Not only Dali acts in this way of playing peoples minds, Le Corbusier did the same thing when he tried to convince the world and maybe even more important, himself, of the fact that New York wasn’t modern and needed his way of thinking.

Plot

Are objects really capable of telling stories? No, of course not. They can’t do anything, besides being there, being unconsciously noticed and seen through. They don’t possess that story-telling thingness by themselves, it is given to them by our addiction to seeing through objects. We are the thingness of objects (Bruno Latour: ‘things do not exist without being full of people’)6, we provide objects of their thingness. We are the real storytellers, inventors of fairytales, and mad enough letting us be fooled by the paranoia of our own naïve minds. The only significant, and worrying question left is:

Do you see it…………………

2. Parallel of Life and Art by Irénee Scalbert in DAIDALOS nr 75, 2000
3. Le Corbusier Elements of a Synthesis by Stanislaus von Moos
4. Surrealism and Architecture by Thomas Mical, chapter ‘The ghost in the machine’ by Alexander Gorlin
6. INSCRIRE DANS LA NATURE DES CHOSES OU LA CLEF BERLINOISE by Bruno Latour
Movement and sculptures at EXPO 58

Jiazuo Hou

How does a sculpture and its architectural setting interact and have a spatial impact on the movement of the observers. A story of Calder, Guernica and Mies van der Rohe.

The introduction

‘There is a quite interesting relationship between sculptures and their surroundings in the sense that ‘they organize our private and public affection.’ (Brown, B, 2001, p7)

Alexander Calder innovated sculpture by introducing actual movement into static sculptures. We find this opposition stabiles – mobiles is his whole oeuvre. The abstract mobile modern sculpture ‘whirling ear’ (fig.1) he made for EXPO 58 is in huge contrast to the anthropomorphic and static classical sculpture in the Italian pavilion of EXPO 58 (fig.2).

From the Kolbe in the Barcelona pavilion to the Calder on the Park Avenue Plaza.

‘Architecture and sculpture become different but complementary elements.’ (Remix Mies)

Before taking the ‘whirling ear’ in front of the USA pavilion and the sculpture in the Italian pavilion as a case, I would like to point on the analogy that could be made with the Calder before the Seagram building(fig. 4) and the Kolbe that Mies van der Rohe (fig. 3) presented in the Barcelona pavilion (1929).

‘I hope to make my buildings neutral frames in which man and artwork can carry on their own lives. To do that one needs a respectful attitude towards things.’

On the first drawings of the Barcelona pavilion (fig. 6) we can remark that Mies explored several places to locate one or more sculptures in the design. His drawings for the Ulrich Lange House Project II (fig. 5) gives us an insight in the explorations of a respectful attitude towards things. He selected his sculptures very carefully.

‘The things are not the same, but different not only according to their intrinsic nature, but also according to the type and rank of their dignity.’

In the context of thing theory and the relative movement and sculpture he continues with the interesting idea;

‘There is a hierarchy of things, and they are not ready accessible but only if, in stepping in front of them, one is as they demand and assumes a position that relates to them.’

In his notes we can read:

‘To re-establish the meaning of things. To develop things in a new way from the perspective of mankind. To think the service of those things from the beginning.’

(‘Miscellaneous’ Notes to Lecture, 1950, p. 326)

In the Barcelona pavilion the sculpture (fig. 7) of Kolbe represents a classical human figure very precise positioned in a well-defined closed architectural space. The text *Remix Mies* uses the terms of ‘decoding and recoding’: every element of a site is referred to as a ‘code’, and two processes of eliminating original elements of the site and constructing new elements such as a building or a sculpture are respectively called ‘decoding’ and ‘recoding’. They explain:

‘First a ‘decoding’ has to take place, before a new ‘re-coding’ is possible. Decoding has both a physical and mental side. The decoding of Mies is physical because of emptying of space, and mentally because an abstract plane to put commercial and cultural space on a distance.’

Then, the abstract plane (decoding)

‘can be subsequently conquered by the figures of people and sculpture (recoding).’

The walls of the pavilion together with the horizontal plane of water decodes the space, so the Kolbe sculpture is a ‘recoding’ of that neutral space which adds kinetic factors to the space, and provides with pleasure for visitors.

fig. 1: the whirling ear in front of the USA pavilion
fig. 2: the sculpture in the Italian pavilion
fig. 3: mirror-like walls next to the Kolbe
fig. 4: the Calder before the Seagram building
‘To combine one or two simple movements with different periods, however, really give the finest effect, because while simple, they are capable of infinite combinations.’

In opposition to this mobile sculpture, on the collage of Mies we observe, Guernica and classical anthropomorphic sculptures in a space surrounded by a natural landscape. The two sculptures serve as some kind of medium to express thoughts. The sculpture in the back enjoys the peace and beauty of the landscape while the one in the front looks disappointed and in deep introspection about the message of Guernica.

Finally we have the Park Avenue Plaza as an urban positive space inherent to the concept of the Seagram building. Through a horizontal decoding by putting the building back on the grid and a vertical decoding of the facade Mies made the plaza as a space for objects, things and people. In opposite of

For Mies the value of a museum for a small city depends upon the quality of its works of art and the manner in which they are exhibited. In the context of his design for a museum for a small city he explores the spatial freedom the open plan generates. Interior sculptures can now be seen against the surrounding landscape.

‘The architectural space, thus achieved, becomes a defining rather than a confining space’

In the context of his research for a museum for a small city there exist several collages (fig. 9) where he used Guernica. For Mies

‘A work such as Picasso’s Guernica has been difficult to place in the usual museum gallery. Where it can be shown to greatest advantage and become an element in space against a changing background.’ (‘Museum for a small City’ 1943 p. 322)

The active scene with movements and emotions of Guernica was made by Picasso for the Spanish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris World Exposition in response to the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. Calder presented for that occasion his mercury fountain (fig. 8) in front of Guernica. The flow of mercury driven by engine is the dynamic source of this Calder mobile sculpture, and the flow was instantly hitting the iron bar to force the sculpture to move. With a mechanical drive, positive movements can be produced and controlled.
the two symmetrically placed classical sculptures we see on the initial sketch of Mies (fig.10), a wind-mobile sculpture of Calder (fig.11) was placed in the plaza to recode the space. The wind introduces

‘their unpredictable character and the aesthetic possibilities of the unexpected’

into the mobile sculpture which is harmonizing with the of the urban fluxes.

**The anthropomorphic and static classical sculpture in the Italian pavilion**

The static sculpture in the Italian pavilion(fig.12) affects emotions of visitors by creating a specific atmosphere. It is located in a corner against white walls, and its shape is an elegant lady who is looking at her shoulder in a classical dress. Like in the Barcelona pavilion the Italian pavilion is decoding the place in a neutral and well-defined architectural spatial context. The walls are a neutral background to present sculptures and the blue tiles gives an impression of a water surface. Due to its human shape, laying this sculpture in the space serves as putting a figure of people in it, and the sculpture has a direction and spatial position and recodes this neutral space. Performing as an abstract blank

---

fig. 5: plan with furniture layout, sculpture sketches, and elevation of Ulrich Lange House Project II  
fig. 6: the initial sketch of the Barcelona Pavilion from Mies  
fig. 7: the Kolbe in Barcelona Pavilion  
fig. 8: Calder and his mercury fountain in front of Guernica  
fig. 9: Museum for a Small City Project, Interior perspective from Mies  
fig. 10: initial sketch of plaza in front of Seagram from Mies  
fig. 11: sculpture of Calder in front of Seagram
The dynamic element in the sculpture makes it possible for the observer to sit down and observe the turning ‘whirling ear’ and its interplay with the dynamic environment formed by kinetic water of those spouts. The mobile sculpture interacts with its surroundings by its dynamic characteristic.

‘The various objects of the universe may be constant at times, but their reciprocal relationships always vary.’

With its rhythmic dynamics and organic shape, all the movements no matter belong to itself or the surroundings are balanced, so the whirling ear forms a harmonious relationship with contemporary environment. As Calder once said: a mobile sculpture is

‘a matter of harmonizing these movements, thus arriving at a new possibility for beauty.’

Located at the entrance of the American pavilion, it provides a welcoming atmosphere for visitors who would like to experience popular American culture due to the dynamics, and help the pavilion represent ‘democratic vitality and romance’ of American capitalism, at the request of the State Department.’

The whirling ear is such a mobile sculpture which means that the sculpture itself can rotate in a certain rhythm. The abstract mobile modern sculpture ‘whirling ear’ before the USA pavilion

The whirling ear(fig.14) in front of USA pavilion is a freestanding sculpture located in a large fountain with many spouts(fig.15). It is one of mobile works designed by an American sculptor Alexander Calder. As Calder describes:

‘A ‘mobile’ does not ‘suggest’ anything: it captures genuine living movements and shapes them. ‘Mobile’ have no meaning, make you think of nothing but themselves. They are, that is all; they are absolutes.’

The whirling ear is such a mobile sculpture which means that the sculpture itself can rotate in a certain rhythm. The dynamic element in the sculpture makes it possible for the observer to sit down and observe the turning ‘whirling ear’ and its interplay with the dynamic environment formed by kinetic water of those spouts. The mobile sculpture interacts with its surroundings by its dynamic characteristic.

The various objects of the universe may be constant at times, but their reciprocal relationships always vary.’

With its rhythmic dynamics and organic shape, all the movements no matter belong to itself or the surroundings are balanced, so the whirling ear forms a harmonious relationship with contemporary environment. As Calder once said: a mobile sculpture is

‘a matter of harmonizing these movements, thus arriving at a new possibility for beauty.’

Located at the entrance of the American pavilion, it provides a welcoming atmosphere for visitors who would like to experience popular American culture due to the dynamics, and help the pavilion represent ‘democratic vitality and romance’ of American capitalism, at the request of the State Department.’

The abstract mobile modern sculpture ‘whirling ear’ before the USA pavilion
In conclusion, movements of sculptures at the Expo 58 have double meanings which are referred to as emotional and kinetic aspects. For the emotional ‘moving’, the dynamics in the Italian sculpture are emphasized and sustained by the ‘clearing’ surroundings, and creates a specific atmosphere to move people. For the kinetic ‘moving’, the whirling ear tends to harmonize all the movements of itself and surroundings to reach a possibility of beauty with its own mobile characteristic.

Bibliography


Pictures

Figure 1,2,6,12,14,15, from the slides of Presentatie LES 2 EXPO, Karel Wuytack
Figure 3, from http://elzo-meridianos.blogspot.com/2009/08/la-fuente-de-mercurio-que-estuvo-junto.html, Retrieved April 25, 2012
Figure 4, from http://www.flickr.com/photos/cverwaal/1167500310/, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 5, from http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=101658, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 7, from http://www.eikongraphia.com/?p=110, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 8, from http://thelyingtruthofarchitecture.wordpress.com/2011/02/01/empty-vessels-for-soulful-expression-fine-art-and-mies-van-der-rohe/, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 9, from http://elzo-meridianos.blogspot.com/2009/08/la-fuente-de-mercurio-que-estuvo-junto.html, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 10, from Remix Mies
Figure 11, from http://www.pbase.com/image/76733500, Retrieved April 26, 2012
Figure 13, from EXPO 58: Between Utopia and Reality, Retrieved April 23, 2012

fig.12: The anthropomorphic and static classical sculpture in the Italian pavilion
fig. 13: facades and sections of the Italian pavilion
fig. 14: the whirling ear from Calder in a fountain
fig. 15: sketch of the whirling ear from Calder
The Whirling Ear

Marloes Bosman
Finding associations in a sculpture

“I am happy to say that the ‘ear’ looks marvelous with the water splashing over it. It’s like a mixture of a sleek seal or a whale’s tail and really it has life of its own among the twisting jets.”¹

The above is a quote by George W. Steampfl, client and coordinator of the Fine Arts Program at the world expo ’58. He chose the Whirling for the most prominent place of the popular American pavilion: at the entrance, in the middle of the square of nations. The quote discloses the some of the associations that people made with the Ear. ‘A sleek seal’, ‘a whale’s tail’, ‘life of its own’: These delineations have one thing in common. Each of them describes an association of the Whirling Ear with a live creature. How is it possible that an abstract sculpture reminds us of something living?

The Whirling Ear, designed by American artist Alexander Calder, was the eye-catcher of the American pavilion, where it waved to all who came to visit. Both base and head were made of black steel. The sculpture was situated at the converging point of an elliptic pool. Two aspects in particular make this work interesting. Firstly, a crucial aspect of the design was the use of water. The pond is full of nozzles, which are placed almost vertical. These rotate slowly, all in the same direction, creating a revolving movement. The Ear rotates as well, again in the same direction. It appears to be driven by two nozzles that spray water on the sheet, but in fact the sculpture is mechanized. This makes the rotation regular, like the nozzles, with one rotation per minute. However, the regularity and synchronization of both sculpture and nozzles transform them into one unity, and make them dance to the same rhythm. This creates an interplay between a light and ‘lively’ substance like water, and a heavy and coarse object, the Ear.

Mobiles and stabiles
To get a deeper understanding of the Whirling Ear, it is helpful to situate it in Calder’s oeuvre. Calder is an expert at applying mobility to modern art, and he created many so called ‘mobiles’. During his career, he also designed a number of ‘stabiles’, stationary sculptures. When we understand mobiles and stabiles and Calder method of working, it will be easier to judge the Whirling Ear, and to understand the associations we make. As Jean-Paul Sartre states about mobiles: “They are neither wholly alive nor wholly mechanical.”² Now why do we project human characteristics on an object? And so, why is the sculpture not just an object anymore? To answer these questions, the difference between an object, which we see as what it does, and a thing, of which we see relations and make associations, has

Fig. 1

"I am happy to say that the ‘ear’ looks marvelous with the water splashing over it. It’s like a mixture of a sleek seal or a whale’s tail and really it has life of its own among the twisting jets.”¹
to be defined. Bill Brown says in his essay about ‘thing theory’ that an object becomes a thing, as soon as it stops doing what it normally does. Only then we become aware of the associations we make with that specific object. This can be applied to the mobiles. Mobility was a brand new feature in modern art. In Calders works, sculptures stopped being static, and in this way they stopped doing what they usually do. The movement clarifies the associations and relations we make with object, and so it clarifies what makes them things, instead of objects. This can be made evident using some examples.

“They are neither wholly alive nor wholly mechanical.”

An early work is ‘singe’ (or ‘monkey’), for which wire was employed to create a lifelike movement. The monkey is made of a heavy wooden body and head, and his limbs are made of wire. The animal was made to hang from an iron wire connected to its head. When you look at the picture, you can clearly see this is supposed to look like a monkey. Now, when the sculpture moves, a lifelike movement is created as if the monkey was swinging from a branch. The convincing movement of the sculpture amplifies the association we make with a living monkey (fig. 2). Another example is a sculpture of acrobats that he made, called ‘The Brass Family’ (fig. 3). Again, by looking at the picture it will be clear the sculpture looks like a group of performing acrobats. But when you would touch the wire sculpture, it would shiver lightly, and you could see the male acrobat trembling under the weight of his family. Again, the movement amplifies the credibility and the character of the sculpture. Later, in Calders abstract sculptures, movements continue to stimulate the associations we make. In his abstract mobiles, we can see abstract objects that appear to have their own life.

In the movements we see hesitance, a pause as if it made a mistake, it can suddenly twist and turn as if it changed its mind. This gives an object a human aspect. We associate this hesitancy, this mind of its own with a human being.

Later in his career, Calder focused on the design of large monumental stabiles. Around that time he also made a few mechanized mobiles, like the Whirling Ear. Stabiles can evoke associations with things or creatures, but they lack this amplification through mobility. Therefore the associations of a mobile can be stronger than those of the stabile. The stabile is also perceived differently from the mobile. The mobile can visualize a movement, whereas a stabile can only visualize a fraction of the movement (fig. 4 and fig. 5). The mobile shows a variety of compositions, whereas the stabile needs to be perceived from various angles to see the different perspectives.

There is also a difference between mechanized and non-mechanized mobiles. The mechanized mobile tends to lose its sense of humanity, because of its constant direction and speed. The non-mechanized mobile with its random and fluent movements distinguishes itself from the jerking movements of a machine. So the mechanized mobile doesn’t get this sense of humanity from its decisive way of moving. However, mechanized movement can still help to amplify the associations we make with the sculpture. This is also the case with the Whirling Ear. The movement itself does not suggest a live creature, the shape does. The rotation enables the spectator to view the sculpture in different perspectives, which makes the ‘whales tail’ or ‘sleek dolphin’ easier to recognize. And, the movement suggests an interactive play with water, which also amplifies the association with an animal that lives and plays in the water.

A democratic sculpture

We shouldn’t forget that associations largely depend on the historical and cultural background of the spectator. Therefore, we look at the spirit of the expo of 1958, and especially at the message the American pavilion was conveying. There was an important reason for the use of Calders work at the expo ’58 (and the use of his work at many other renowned exhibitions). The unrest between America and the western world on one side, and the Sovjet Union on the other side, made America keen on displaying their democracy, their freedom of choice and liberty for all. In the 50’s, Alexander Calder had become a renowned artist, famous for his motional sculptures. At the time, he was the leading American practitioner of modern abstract art. To
select his work to be a highlight of the American pavilion seemed a coherent decision.

Also, the concept of the mobile added to the suitability for expressing America’s message. Calder had always been interested in nature, in the things that are but which are too big or small for a human being to perceive. The universe fascinated him, how planets attract or repel each other, and rotate around each other. Molecular science intrigued him as well. He aimed to make the rotations, the attraction and the repulsion between the elements tangible. So the mobile praised the wonders of molecular science. At the time, scientific research was making huge progress, and the 50s brought television, the Sputnik, nuclear power plants and more high-tech innovations. Therefore technological novelties were an important theme at the expo ’58. The Americans were not alone in conveying their belief in a high-tech utopia. The war had just ended, and people were in need of optimism and trust in the possibility of a better world. The American pavilion was meant to be a ‘pleasure dome’, showcasing the ‘American way of life’ and the benefits of these high-tech novelties in the American household. A Calder sculpture at the entrance of the pavilion would be an ode to the application of molecular science.

But there was more to it than the celebration of modern technology. The American government praised Calder mobiles for being ‘democratic sculptures’. The element of mobility in sculpture enabled an infinite variety of compositions within one work of art. The sculptures seemed to explore space, and every element appeared to choose its own path. The mobiles danced on the vibrations of the wind, and the sudden determined changes of directions gave it a sense of resoluteness. It is not difficult to imagine how the unconstrained movement of the mobiles promoted individuality, and evoked feelings of freedom and liberty among spectators. We can wonder if Calder really meant for his sculptures to have such an intense political message. Calder said: “I think that at that time and practically ever since, the underlying sense of form in my work has been the system of the Universe, or part thereof.” That proves how complicated the associations we make with objects can be. Calder could not have foreseen that this combination of factors appeared to be the perfect reflection of the self-image that America wanted to communicate to the rest of the world.

Displacement of the sculpture

Now we have seen what associations are made with the sculpture and why, it is interesting to compare the new location to the old one. The Whirling Ear was put away for years and years, before an appropriate location was found in 2001, in the middle of Brussels’ city centre. At the expo ’58, the water evidently played an important role. The nozzles function as a curtain, obscuring a direct view of the Ear. The sightlines between the nozzles then give a peek at the object, showing it fully in all its elegance. In juxtaposition, the nozzles also amplify the movement of the Ear, by rotating in the same direction and at the same speed. The sculpture is placed in an elliptic pool, which is the other function of the water. This creates a distance between the object and the spectator. And, the sculpture stands at the point of convergence of the ellipse, which indicates it as the most important object. In the city center, the role of the water is evidently inferior, in the relation between sculpture and spectator. The water jets are negligible, and there is no play in allowing and obscuring the direct view of the sculpture. The integration of the sculpture in its surroundings is very different at the two locations. In the city center, it’s on the border between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ Brussels, and it functions as a landmark because it’s clearly visible from a big distance when looking up from ‘lower’ Brussels. This is evident on the map (Fig. 6). The Whirling Ear is placed

in a line of sight, that is indicated by the purple line. There are three statues placed along this line of sight, two of which are shown in orange on the map. In this situation, the ‘Ear’ does not attract all the attention, instead it emphasizes the shape and function of its surroundings. This strengthens the associations we make between the sculpture and its surroundings.

At expo 58, the Ear is placed in a pool in the middle of the Square of Nations (fig. 8). Here, the sculpture is not placed in a line of sight, quite the opposite. It is more like the ‘endpoint’ of a line of sight, or the American pavilion behind it is the ‘endpoint’. This makes the sculpture attract all attention, because it is visually the centre, the main point of focus.

In the new surroundings, effects are added to emphasize this difference in height, the transition within the city fabric, which is the main message the sculpture carries. This is visible when you look at the sculpture from the higher side (fig. 7). The bench around the pool is created in a slope. With the height of the bench going up towards the side of lower Brussels, the pedestrian area seems to slope down even more. This dramatizes the transition between low and high Brussels.

Calder created the Whirling Ear for that specific spot on the expo. It is interesting to know his view on site-specific art. The following quote is his:

“I don’t mind planning a work for a given place. I find that everything I do, if it is made for a particular spot, is more successful."

Even though it was created for an entirely different location, the Ear fits in its new surroundings beautifully. The associations we have with the artwork have changed. We wouldn’t describe it as a democratic sculpture without knowing its background. We now associate it with Brussels, and the congregation of the low and high part of the city. We can still associate its shape with a seal or whale’s tail, even though the effect of splashing water is missing. One thing hasn’t changed with the new location. The Whirling Ear is an intriguing sculpture, that attracts people and forms a meeting point, a highlight in its surroundings.

Bibliography


The Whirling Ear

Fig. 6

Fig. 7
Fig. 6: Plan of the Whirling Ear at its present location
At the city centre of Brussels
Fig. 7: View of the Whirling Ear at its present location
Stabile by A. Calder

Fig. 8: Plan of the Whirling Ear at its original location
Square of nations, world expo ‘58
Fig. 9: View of the Whirling Ear at its original location
In elliptic pool, American pavillion in the background
Two superpowers at Expo ‘58
Guido le Pair / Robbert van Bezooijen

The 1958 Brussels World’s Fair was the first universal world expo after World War II. With the Cold War in progress at this time, the world was flabbergasted when the USA and USSR were assigned adjacent lots at EXPO 58

Introduction

The cold war started because of the ideological distinction that divided the post-war world in two. An armed peace between the capitalistic west; lead by the United States of America (USA) and the communist east; dominated by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Two superpowers with contrasting ideologies.

It was no coincidence that the USA and the USSR became neighbors a the Brussels World’s Fair in 1958. This decision, made by the Expo committee, was an attempt to restore peace. Next to the modern humanistic embodiment of the expo, that was set up by this committee, the pavilions were briefed to exhibit their vision of the “ideal city”. Even with these similar guidelines, it was inevitable that the process in design, execution and presentation of the pavilions, would cause friction. Visible on the inside and out, one did not need to have the knowledge of this friction, to see that these countries had contradicting ideologies.

We will take a look at this spectacle, starting at the large scale of the plot and the pavilions themselves, to see where they differ.

After the analysis of the exterior, we will take a close look at the inside of these buildings to experience in what way the two superpowers distinct or interrelate.
Plot assignment

The organizing committee of the expo ‘58 had an own perspective. The aim of the whole exhibition – ever since the first expo – is to come together and let countries show their ideas, technologies and artistic achievements in order to converge these and thus learn from others. All country pavilions were put together and the two rivals next to each other. The USA initially wasn’t that interested in the expo, but after the Soviet Union announced to have planned something big for the exhibition the US couldn’t stay behind and another race started between the two superpowers.

In the early allocation of plots in 1956 the United States and the Soviet Union were already placed together around the centrally located square of nations, the plots of both countries were only penetrated by the Vatican pavilion. In this plan the Soviet Union’s proposal to place socialist countries in each other’s vicinity was taken into account. The USSR aimed to create a socialist bloc with the Soviet pavilion as the main building, something similar as what they had achieved in the outside world already. At the world fair it turned out differently; most socialist countries didn’t follow through on their application and the only socialist pavilions left were the Czechoslovakian and Hungarian. These pavilions also showed more their independency than their compliance to the Soviet Union. For the Soviet Union only their pavilion and a huge budget were left to safe the image.

America saw Brussels as home turf and knew that capitalism was already wide spread within the Belgian culture. Brand pavilions like the ones of CocaCola and Kodak showed capitalism in the purest form, as well as western brands being available everywhere. Capitalist countries outnumbered the communists as well. For America the main goal became to show what America was all about “the American way of life”.

Fig. 5; Map of exhibition area: Red; Soviet allied pavilions, Blue; US allied pavilions
Square of nations

The square of nations was the central square in the international area of the expo ’58. Apart from the American and Soviet pavilion, the French and Vatican pavilion were also major pavilions at this square. The US plot was situated in between the Vatican and Soviet pavilion (or between heaven and hell as one American put it) in the final allocation of the plots. The French pavilion was on the other side of the square behind the pedestrian passage way. This raised passage allowed visitors to cross the exhibition easily from one side to the other and was also connected with a roundabout at the square of nations. It can easily be said that all roads came together at this point. All plot structures and buildings at the square where logically directed towards this junction, with the pedestrian passage way hovering above it. The way in which the plots of the Soviet Union, America and the Vatican were situated gave the US a central position. Edward Durell Stone—the architect of the American Pavilion—placed the pavilion to the back of the plot to create a giant central square in between these major pavilions, with this move the US could claim and conquer the majority of the public area of the square of nations. By creating this giant square the Soviet Pavilion seems suddenly strangely directed towards the junction instead of the bigger US-square. The placement of the by Alexander Calder designed pond in the middle of the square became in the hot summer months a popular picnic area. This area fitted perfectly in the philosophy to show the American way of life, the soft sell method. In contrast there was the raised Soviet pavilion. American flags strategically placed on the tip of the US plot blocked in some occasions a clear view towards the Soviet pavilion. The outside was strictly how the whole building was representing itself and some outside exhibition consisting of large machinery, which was totally in line with the Soviet inside consisting of a lot of technology. The placement in the situation can easily be called a disaster for the Soviets. Next to the two superpowers stood the Vatican Pavilion which was a kind of church. The in pure white plastered building was a sign of serenity at the square which the US created.
Soviet Pavilion

The Soviet pavilion was chosen out of a competition. Krushchev had set a new architecture line in 1954 and had chosen the expo of ‘58 to showcase his view on this subject.

“Monumental and ornate structures and great towers, characteristic of Stalinist socialist realism, were no longer the language in which to proclaim Soviet power and modernity in the post-war world.”

Instead the architecture had to represent the ideology of the Soviet Union. This meant rationality, power and classical rigor but also a more contemporary stance as it had to show their progressiveness. The result was a giant rectilinear formed building which was soon described as “the massive technological greenhouse” and “the refrigerator”.

While the organization requested every pavilion to take less than 70% of their plot the Soviet occupied nearly their whole plot and created a building that seems to be build more to impress than to please. The pavilion was build to represent the new view on the soviet of Khrushchev and to house all the technological achievements. Both the representation and the amount of exhibition items asked for a huge exhibition which in both ways might have turned out a little too much. The exhibition inside might have been too large as well as the representation which impresses up till a certain point where it becomes overkill. Overall though the architectural intentions were met and clearly visible also became the pavilion a popular location at the expo.
US Pavilion

The American pavilion is in a number of ways similar to the Soviet pavilion. Both pavilions are equal in size, both are designed as large exhibition halls and both have a translucent façade. The intentions were as their ideals totally different. Edward Durell Stone—inspired by classical Roman architecture—designed a Colosseum sized round exhibition enterable from every side. This circular form gives openness and while being a strict form it brings something playful to the building which is totally missing in the Soviet pavilion. While the inspiration came from Roman ages the building was obviously contemporary; build from modern materials as gilded metal mesh clad and transparent acrylic panels which gave this a rich flamboyant look. According to Edward Durell Stone;

“In my own case, I feel the need for richness, exuberance and pure, unadulterated freshness”

It represented itself as “Pleasure dome rather than exhibition”. Western press opinions were mixed calling it a fitted representation of America’s “democratic vitality and romance” but also a “big merry-go-round” and “latticed plastic”. Soviet media was predictably negative and named it “a gilded candybox”. Sure the pavilion might have been a bit ‘happy’ but it tried to show positivism and possibilities which allowed these choices. The mezzanine of the dome was cut through by the façade which created a ring around the exhibition used as a terrace. This ring also gives a feel that total building is raised and almost floating. The Soviet building was also raised but instead of the floating feel was chosen for a totally raised platform which created this really strong looking entrance, on the negative this also meant the plinth of the soviet pavilion was closed. The US pavilion was reachable from every side and could be left on every side as well, this was also part of the freedom and soft sell which they wanted to show in contrast to the structured Soviet pavilion.

Both pavilions did exceptionally well in translating their concepts and ideals into pavilions. Both give an excellent representation of the phase these two superpowers were in. Two completely different approaches obviously translate into two completely different results. The Americans show freedom, exuberance and richness to show their way of life while the Russian grandeur is more build to impress, directing attention to the inside.
1937 Germany and Soviet Union

At the expo in 1937 two other superpowers were present: Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. This time both superpowers were positioned opposing each other. During this period Joseph Stalin was in charge of the Soviet Union. As mentioned before were monumental, ornamental towers characteristic during Stalin’s era. Germany’s architect Albert Speer got air of the huge statue (with hammer and sickle to symbolise communism) on top of the Soviet Pavilion and saw it as symbolising a soviet “invasion” of Germany. To withstand this ‘attack’ Speer designed an even bigger pavilion consisting of huge pillars with an eagle with sickle statue as a Nazi Germany symbol.

Comparing 1937 and 1958 is very well possible. Both were superpowers in play wanting to show that they were the one in control. There are a lot of differences as well. In 1937 it seemed to be more about power where 1958 was more a battle of ideologies. This battle of ideologies turned out to be a contest in everything but wasn’t as direct as could be seen in 1937. ’37 the buildings showed more history, permanence where 1958 the pavilions had more contemporary elements; the superpowers wanted to show their progressiveness. In some way both exhibitions show the way history has developed. In 1937 the pavilions showed a war-stance, in 1958 it was a dirty race with no direct winner.
Representation of the ideal city

To suppress a monotone exhibition, organizers set up a number of guidelines. One of those was focused on pavilion aesthetics in terms of diversity.

“The pavilions and palaces have to reflect an architectural character which, with respect to the indispensable freedom of expression, has to be inspired by the national spirit of every country.”

The USA and USSR pavilions are among those in which this vision was also implemented in the interiors. Experiencing the inside space of both pavilions really shows the ideology of the country. The USSR pavilion was represented in a way of power and greatness. An open, central space with two other open areas adjacent on the left and right side. Almost like the base setup of a cathedral, with its centre ship letting light in from the top, and two side ships to support it. Coincidently this supporting principle is actually true and even taken to a higher level: The two ships at the sides of the pavilion are the supports which the central truss construction is laid upon. A homage to Russian engineering, just as the comity briefed when describing the pavilions’ guidelines for architecture;

“power and clarity of ideology”

and construction;

“contemporary and progressive” and “rapid erection and disassembly”.

Unlike the design for the USSR pavilion, which was chosen from a contest, for USA pavilion there had to be chosen an architect or oeuvre which reflected the architectural concepts of the commissioner. In this case, Edward Durrell Stone was the designated designer to give shape to the pavilion and its experience. Logically this experience should be near the opposite of the USSR, when looking at the ideology. This was indeed the case: the main focus was to take the visitor into a day of “the American way of life” which was by most people, experienced as:

“cheerful”, “gay” and “interesting”.

This feeling was supported by the amount of light that was pulled in through the centre, making the overall experience of the pavilion a more pleasant one. A wise design decision by Stone.

The USSR as well as the USA displayed an image of their ideal city. The experience of the pavilions interior is only the start of it. The circulation, and not to forget, the objects, are an important addition to this representation.
Fig 14: The experience of the ideal American city within a vertical panorama of Manhattan

Fig 15: Representation of the Soviet ideal city
Objects inside the pavilions

As well as the USSR followed the comity’s rules concerning the pavilion, as bad they kept themselves to the guidelines concerning the objects inside. They actually achieved to execute an opposite of the rules that were drawn. It was explicitly mentioned not to show any products made in the country. On the contrary the USSR came with a “hard sell” approach, displaying their latest technology in science, physics and industrial development. Promoting themselves as a power, on its way to pass the USA as the most developed land.

“We know quite well that we are still behind the United States in the production of many important manufactured articles. But if the development of industry continues at the same pace - and we don’t intend to slow it down - we will overtake the United States in the next ten or fifteen years.”

Of course, this was seen as pure propaganda instead of a representation of the ideal city that was set as theme, but the crowd was seduced by the pavilion, presenting not only the newest developments in technology, like turbo-engine oil derricks, solar powered mobiles and of course their famous Sputnik.

An international propaganda feast for Russia. Central in this advertising circus stood an object transcending all the others. An object, always within views range from the moment the pavilion was entered: the Lenin statue, placed in the centre hall. Just as he stood central in the lives of the peasants. His body turned to the right, in direction of the atomium, observing it, looking to the future, and looking away from the American pavilion. Propaganda as is seems, this might just be a display of the ideal city for Russia at that time; a country proud of the progress they achieved in 40 years, which took the USA over a hundred fifty years.

In this advertising circus, the USA couldn’t stay behind. Having a budget that was three times less than the USRs had to spend, they needed another approach.

“Less is more”

Like the USSR, also the USA had a form of propaganda, but different. Contrasting to the hard sell approach of the USSR, the soft sell was leading. A kind of camouflaged advertising which was not familiar in Europe yet.

“If we seduce, we shall seduce by understatement”

Objects present, were implying a message, rather than shouting. The casual setting of the pavilion made it a relaxed and home-like environment where people wanted to be. Centered in this space was the oeuvre, made by the American artist Mary Callery. A piece, composed of three wheels, set in motion by the waters of the basin, the central pond. A piece of metal as an oeuvre to the American way of life.
Fig 18: Art pieces inside the USSR pavilion

Fig 19: Art by Théodore J. Roszak in the USA pavilion

Fig 20: Art by José Ruiz de Rivera
Two superpowers at EXPO 58

Static and dynamic space

The space as viewed by the visitor from a certain point is what we refer to when talking about static space. It is the experience of an object of environment by just looking at it. The USSR as well as the USA pavilion, feature a great open space, that with its openness, provides large lines of sight, offering the visitors the possibility to watch through the pavilion with one glance. This triggers the viewers’ curiosity to explore the space. This is the point where the dynamic space arises. This space is created by the interior configuration as well as the visitor, walking through the pavilion, in different patterns and circulations, creating a traffic flow.

Both the pavilions have a similar static space in terms of openness and lines of sight. It is the dynamic space that contrasts. Where in the USSR pavilion a route is set, along which the spectators can view the objects, the USA pavilion is an open space where the people can walk freely. Next to the openness, the multiple entrances and an 8-shape in the floor plan, made a continuous and free routing possible. These forms of dynamic space can be reasoned backwards to the ideologies and themes of the pavilions. The USSR route was fixed, planned and actually had to be followed if you wanted to complete the route; limited freedom. On the contrary, within the US pavilion the visitor could enter the interior at different points, create a route as preferred and leave again through an exit of choice; freedom of choice and movement.
Fig 23: Static space inside the USA pavilion

Fig 24: Static space inside the USSR pavilion
Conclusion

As contrasted as the pavilions look on the outside, as equal is the main thought of seducing the visitors to come and take a look inside, watching what each of them has to offer. Hard sell or soft sell; both are systems for advertising, with the objects as its tools.

In the USSR pavilion the machine; at first, is seen as an 'objet trouvé'; an object taken out of his context into an exposition, making it a piece of art. But when looked upon in its new place, it is merely a dime in a dozen among other pieces of its kind. Just a display of industrialized products.

In the USA pavilion the regular household products; color televisions, calculators and kitchen appliances, placed in a casual context, a recognizable space for the visitors. A space that they feel like as a home in which these objects can be found. A display of products within the largest living room at the expo '58.

Furthermore the materialistic exhibit of objects of the USA and the USSR contradicted the embodiment of the Expo, which was based on humanistic modernism. Modern humanism is about self-fulfillment and autonomy of the individual. Materialism and consumption culture seduce, shock and arouse interest. This results in an individual who rather enjoy the world, than change it. Both countries had humanism interwoven in their ideology differently, but the reference to this concept was completely missed because of the materialistic expositions in the pavilions.

At the end of the expo, nothing changed about the tension between the USSR and the USA. Both countries showed what they had to offer in their ideal city. As fast as the USSR pavilion was erected, as fast it was disassembled and shipped to Moscow. A part of the USA pavilion functioned al office for the expo committee for the next three years, before it was completely removed from sight.

The committee’s attempt to restore peace between world powers failed, but the tension between these neighbors, made this an exposition to remember.
Bibliography

Books
Baltus, A., Algemene wereldtentoonstelling te Brussel 1958. PLANS (Brussels 1961)
Pluvinges, G., Expo 58: Between Utopia and Reality (Brussels 2008)
Devos, R., Power, control and national representation in modern architecture and exhibition design at Expo 58 (Gent 2010)
Reid, S., The Soviet Pavilion at Brussels ’58: Convergence, conversion, critical assimilation, or Transculturation (Washington 2010)
Tribot, P., Bruxelles 58 Annee-lumiere (Brussel 2012)

Websites

Pictures
4) Debray, F., EXPO 58 le grand tournant. (1999, January) Page
5) Baltus, A., Algemene wereldtentoonstelling te Brussel 1958. PLANS (Brussels 1961), Overview maps
6) Desclée de Brouwer, S.A., Panoramic plan Expo 58.
25) Own work
Sputnik and DS

Yi Liu

Victory of socialist and democracy of capitalist

Abstract

The meaning and people’s perception of an object are closely related to a specific society and culture in a specific time, which is known as material culture. In this essay, the Sputnik and the DS in EXPO ’58 will be discussed: their meanings, how audience perceive them and how they convey their significances, to see the ideologies of socialists and capitalists.

Introduction

“The environment that man creates becomes his medium for defining his role in it” [1]

Objects are the explicit form of abstract contents, of social and cultural altitudes of a specific period. By altering the environment, they evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions.

“The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act - the way we perceive the world” [1]

In this paper, two objects – the Sputnik replicas and the DS at Brussels ’58 will be discussed to understand how people’s relationship to and perception of the world relates to materiality of object and its environment.

EXPO ’58, the fair’s slogan was “for a more humane world”. It requires the participated nations to address this theme in their own ways, to demonstrate their perception of happiness and scientific progress that could improve human life in future. Since the emergence of “cultural Cold War” in post war era, the fair became the battleground between socialists and capitalists.

Sputnik – the socialists’ victory

The EXPO ’58 served as the best arena for USSR to display its scientific and technological achievements and the first artificial satellites, the Sputniks were recognized as the one with most advanced technologies in the field of industrial development.

In 2008, an article - EXPO ’58 judged the Sputniks as “its highlight, the trump card.” [2]

However, Sputniks were more significant to Soviet politically and militarily. Launching a satellite before US defined the Soviet’s dominant position in space technology. The success of Sputnik was selected for a series of propaganda to demonstrate the socialists’ victory and it continued to the display of Sputniks in Brussels. Beyond the launching of Sputnik itself, what the Soviets were more proud of was the delivery system - the ICBM, its capability of sending a ballistic missile within a field of 4000 miles. Moreover, the display of Sputniks indicated another official theme “progress in service of man”.

86
Zakharchenko, who had the most far-reaching effect on the proposal of USSR pavilion, suggested presenting realistic but lively biographies of people from varied walks of life—workers, students, artists, disabled veterans.[2]

It was a determination to show the better living standard, to show the socialist humanism.

How viewers received these underlying message inscribed in the display of Sputnik? For a world public idea, it dramatically challenged the US’s political and technical pre-eminence. The image of Soviet was revolutionarily changed and its power was re-estimated. It reinforced the belief among the global audience that the Soviet was not only the nation of Lenin, Stalin; it was the nation of Sputnik, of technical giant in the world. By making this object into the form of popular consumption, this technic had come to the every day’s life. It gave the feeling of pleasure, the feeling of better living standards and ability to consume. Furthermore, soon after the launch of Sputnik, the news was widely reported in America, but the Americans preferred the Milwaukee Newspaper that only put the event into the small title. 60 percent of them thought they could make a more ambitious project. Americans reacted vigorously rapidly that the president Eisenhower enacted a bill called National Defense Education Act. The tuition fee would be paid, for the students who will go to college and study math and science. It relatively changed the education system.

“I signed up and was accepted at a special summer program,” Wheeler, the former head of the National Science Teachers Association, recalled. “I was able to choose my filed, I choose physics, and we covered a full year of high school physics in six weeks.”[3]

The new focus on science brought the new way of thinking in America: technology equals super power.
DS - The GODDESS (Déesse) comes to the world

When the supreme and magical car, DS first showed up in the 1955 Paris Motor show, it astonished the public by its futuristic shape, more like a space rocket. Visually, it was the creature coming from another planet. Owners would later discover a car full of unheard technologies, the technics from an unknown planet in space.

*It is obvious that the new Citroen has fallen from the sky inasmuch as it appears at first sight as a superlative object.*[4]

Today, most automotive historians recognize the DS as the most technological advanced car (compare with contemporary cars) ever appeared in mass production. The ID, cheaper version of DS, was a ubiquitous French taxicab. The DS helped the French to regain their confidence during the economical reconstruction year after the Second World War. In the same year of its production, Classic & Sports Car Magazine announced that the DS beat out Ferrari and they have chosen it as the “Most Beautiful Car”. The DS became the symbol of French ingenuity and it gave the nation identity in post-colonial period, a nation of DS.

Since the speed was expressed by this less aggressive and athletic form, this futuristic shape was selected as an instant design principle for over 20 years.

*James Elliott, the editor of Classical & Sports Car Magazine, said: “The Citroen is a benchmark design, but we were still astonished that it came out on top when you look at the sexiness.”*[5]
The interior space was more homely, more attuned to this sublimation of the utensil that one also finds in the design of contemporary household equipment.[4]

The DS, the cars then, were extensions of houses. Housing territory was expanded to an area where you want to drive to. The parks in America became popular as if they were the extension of private back gardens. The mobility and convenience of car contributed to the change of social patterns. Instead of experiencing a walk, the social contacts were by implication, we chatted in the spaces on wheels. Bringing a new kind of freedom, it also led to human alienation, by altering the urban areas to satisfy its requirements.

A new sensibility grew when we see the city with disproportionate street, a new style of landscape, settlement shielded noise of movement and mechanism, dwellings protect in a way so that they may enjoy benefits of “nature”. [6]

Conveying the Message

Although both objects contain political and technological significations, a majority of viewers received the political message when looking through Sputnik replicas. The explanation of this discrepancy lies in the different feeling viewers had when they visited USSR and French pavilion.

Kandisky wrote: “Feeling is the spiritual vehicle of inner necessity of an object.” [7]

The Soviet pavilion made claims for an architectural image that reflected the powerful capacity of the Soviet Union, by an integrated, simple and clear spatial arrangement.

Catherine Cooke recalled: “straightforwardly factual, showing concrete technical and scientific achievements.” [2]

French capitalists made clear that the effort would lies in the field of values, ideologies and meanings. They aimed to show want they presented instead of what they had made. The French authorities took every opportunity to present the freedom that the people of capitalist society had. By producing a walking experience in a street of capitalist world, they give audience much freedom to make their own visiting route and choose the “future they wanted to see”. The distribution of displayed objects evoked a sensation of equal opportunities, goods distributions and comfortable living stand-

Fig 4: Citroen DS - the extension of house.
Fig 5: The symbols of France - Eiffel tower and DS
The message branded in the objects may not be fully received by the global public. However, their perceptions were greatly influenced by the surrounding environment. As the USSR pavilion gives an entire positive image of Soviet success, Soviet democraticism, they aimed to convince citizens to come back home, to the country universally recognized as the leading country in scientific and technological progress. The role the statue of Lenin and the socialists and the Sputniks played in the pavilion implied a centralized power that would guide citizens to a better future; an indication of social and cultural structure, of a culture that was rather aggressive, tried to assimilate others. By contrast, the French pavilion emphasized to cultivate the feeling of openness and naturalness, the feeling of ease, freedom and equality, an implication of peoples’ economical and political autonomy, an implication of capitalist democracy. A policy advised that the technology was a means to an end instead of the end itself, a mean to promote the peoples’ health assurance, living standard, job opportunities; advised the “materialism” was the way to humanism. It is the ideology that the specific society and culture endow us to make an object meaningful when we look through the materiality of an object and its mutual position with the surroundings. The message under an object and the way an object alters the environment disclosed the way we think, we act and we behave.
Bibliography


Pictures

Fig 1 Made by author
Fig 2 Made by author
Fig 3 http://www.sciencephoto.com/media/129449/enlarge
Fig 4 http://www.australiaforeveryone.com.au/world/classic_citroen_ds.htm
Fig 5 http://www.australiaforeveryone.com.au/world/classic_citroen_ds.htm
Fig 7 Made by author
Fig 8 Made by author
Modernity & Lighting

Geert Krüsemann

A Quest of Utopia

The Expo of '58 is in many ways a declaration of moving forward. The war has past; most of the damage has been restored and people are looking for a new “modern” way of living. Some famous examples of progress on the expo are the Sputnik, the sculptures of Calder and the Citroen DS. Lighting is comparable to these subjects. In this essay I’m trying to expose the influence of modernity in lighting on the basis of two examples.

So how did lighting evolve and why is it so tangled up with modernity? I would like to illustrate this on the basis of two short movies.

The first movie is from 1927 by Eugene Deslaw named “Nuits électriques”. The movie is made in a period where many people can still recall a time without artificial (electrical) lighting, therefore it might have had a special meaning to people as a thing in his whole, which nowadays might have been lost in the ever present and abundantness of lighting. Deslaw makes a sort of poem for all the lighted objects on the streets of Paris, Berlin and Prague. He presents the illuminations as a sort of firework display, which happens every night. Deslaw writes: “the modern night, which really does not resemble any other night in history, is photogenic as much or even more so than the face of a beautiful woman.”

From my perspective this quote reveals a desire for the lighting and through that for the progress and modernity it resembles. “The modern night” might be seen as a symbol, for the less fortunate, of better times coming.

Another interesting part about the movie and period in time is the choice of illuminated objects. Outside of the functional street lighting, which provides a feeling of safety at night, and traffic lights most lights seem to be placed in a way to outline an existing object or building as to abstract a form to its most basic shape. The goal seems to be to collect a memory of what is known and seen by day. The object hereby transforms into a thing as a few lighted contours makes a reference to a memory of what is already known.

But what does it mean for an object to be illuminated at night? In anyway it symbolizes an importance as given by its owner, but I don’t think that in this period the lighting in itself can classify as a thing, as it needs a building or object to follow or shine on. Light in itself is still something immaterial.
The second movie, a totally different one, is “Broadway by Light” by William Klein made thirty years after “Nuits électriques”.

Broadway, in the beginning of 20th century nicknamed “The great white way” as one of the first lighted streets of America, has in the fifties been transformed to an international symbol for capitalism and the ever-evolving society. It hereby is by far the best known example of lighting and modernity being unresolvably bound to each other.

In “Broadway by light” the lighting no longer needs another object to exist, it is colored and geometrical: pop culture in New York. If Deslaw’s Paris was a firework show, than Klein’s New York is a circus. Everywhere you look you see movement, big screaming advertising signs.

Lighting in the thirty years, between the movies, has transformed from an ornament to a thing in itself. In contrast to the twenties the object is no longer there when the lights go out. I would even go as far as to say that the big advertising racks, which can be seen by day, strike a memory of the lighted objects of the night.

“Broadway by Light” is made in the same period as the expo in Brussels, therefore the scene is comparable, also on the expo terrain in ’58 you can experience that objects become things when the sunsets.

With two examples on the expo terrain, I will try to explain the importance of lighting in de age of modernity

1: Still from Nuits Electriques (1927) 
Showing the night illuminations of paris, which outline a building.
2: Still from Nuits Electriques (1927) 
Showing the night illuminations of Berlin.
3: Still from Broadway by Light (1958)
4: Still from Broadway by Light (1958)
5: Still from Broadway by Light (1958)

Showing the advertisement signs as they can be seen by day.
Pavilion of Electrical Energy

Electrical and Hydraulic energy stand at the basis of a modern society, therefore it is no surprise that a special pavilion is dedicated to this subject at the expo, which had as a slogan “a vital aid to life”. This industrial looking building stored huge generators, which delivered a big amount of the expo’s energy need. Besides this many innovative technologies were shown in the pavilion, which gave its visitors a glimpse into the hopefully near future.

On the façade facing the avenue of Belgium an enormous neon-sculpture was hung. As we have already seen in the movie “Broadway by light” neon lighting had become very popular in the ‘50s, because of its great potential to create different shapes.

The sculpture seems to portray a sort of machine, wherein light of the sun is transformed into energy, which can later be used to create heat. A technique that wasn’t yet developed at the time of the expo. I think it therefore symbolizes a sort of quest for an utopia which, in a different form, still exist today, but was very new at the time.

So what makes this sculpture a thing? To my opinion apart from being an interesting object, which must have captured the attention of people visiting the expo with the novelty of the way neon lighting was used. It was also a gateway to modernity. It symbolizes a new way of making energy but further than that it symbolizes the progress that is being made in the field of technology and the possibilities that are still endless.

I also believe that the sculpture on the energy pavilion is a good example of what lighting meant for modernity at the time. They were very much tangled up into each other, new forms of lighting represented an on going developing technology, which was made visible with light. Since the ‘20s ways of illumination had changed dramatically, the technology had advanced, which people could see in the Atomium, the Sputnik and the Citroen DS, but definitely also in the lighting of this pavilion.
The Obelisk

An obelisk in the classic sense is a squared, monolithic tower, with a pyramid ending, first constructed by the Egyptians to be placed near temples, later other cultures used them as a sign of victory over a won battle or war. The obelisk could be seen as a sort of remembrance and as a sign of power. The Romans also used them as sundials (existing example: Horologium Augusti, Rome).

On the square of world co-operation on the expo terrain also an obelisk was placed. The meaning seems obvious as a sign of power, but maybe also as a victory statement for the (global) peace after World War II. The big difference with the classical obelisk, is that it wasn’t monolithic anymore but build up in obvious blocks, so a modern obelisk and maybe a sign of modern victory.

So what makes the expo obelisk a thing? During the day it was already an impressive structure, people could associate with its form and meaning. At night however the obelisk became more. As the only lighted object of the international square it became a beacon, a point of requignition, whereby people could see that global co-operation en peace where still there, although the pavilions around it might have been closed.

In comparison with the obelisk on the expo terrain, I would like to discuss a project by Yves Klein called “Blue Obelisk” on the Place de la Concorde in Paris. Also in 1958, Klein wanted to illuminate the obelisk on the square in a blue light, but leaving the base dark, so the point would become a mystical floating object, like a rocket going to space. The obelisk on the Place de la Concorde shows the same atmosphere/meaning as the obelisk on the expo, but how did Klein’s project change it, what happened with the meaning by illuminating it in blue? (Side note: Klein’s didn’t realize his project in 1958, later in 1983 it was eventually realized)

At first why blue? Yves Klein writes about it:

“All the colors arouse concrete, material, or tangible associations or ideas in a psychological manner, whereas blue, at most, recalls the sea and the sky, which, after all, is what most abstract in tangible and visible in nature”
For Klein his blue symbolizes a balance between day and night, wherein it’s the only color without dimension. Through this color he came to the idea of air architecture, an architecture where all the building materials should be immaterial.

So it seems that Klein wanted to immaterialize the monolith, to make it fade in with the night sky. How different would it be if the obelisk was illuminated in red? Thinking about things, this might be it, it shows something you might drive by everyday without really looking at it, but Klein’s project makes you think, makes you notice. The blue light blurs the details and sharp lines, but leaves you with the essence.

So how do the two obelisks compare as things? The meaning seems similar, but where Klein’s obelisk immaterializes to a mystical object in the night, the expo the expo obelisk materializes as the last sign of world co-operation when all the other lights have gone out.

Bibliography


Exposition de Bruxelles 1958
L’architecture, les jardins et l’éclairage

MAK centre for art and architecture. (2004)
Air Architecture, Yves Klein
ISBN 3-7757-1407-3

Centre Pompidou. (2010).
La Ville Moderne. Paris, France.
- Nuits électriques, Eugene Deslaw, 1927
- Broadway by Light, William Klein, 1958

Expo 58 fansite. retrieved on March 15 2012.

Website of architect electrical energy pavilion.
retrieved on March 15 2012.
http://www.jacquesdupuis.be/

Various YouTube movies of the neon sculpture expo 58,
retrieved on March 15 2012.
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfdE-428Jw
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov57DVSQJ3E
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udHv1Kn6Y
Lighting at the Brussels EXPO 58

Auke Kroon

How lights presented the fast changing world and ideas.

Introduction

The Expo’58 was built in a time of fast changes in architecture, technology and society as a whole. Advances were not limited to the airspace above and beyond. Recent developments in physics and chemistry changed the industrial world on the surface as well. The lighting industry was one of those industries which was visibly changing and opening new possibilities. Because of this the lighting at the expo becomes extra interesting, this was the place where large experiments and showcases could be built.

Global concept

The global concept for the lighting of the expo was to keep the clear site plan that was visible during the day. The large avenues which are so important in defining the outdoor space remain very visible at night. This is achieved by the various fountains along these avenues. These fountains are lit, mostly from the inside, to either define points in the landscape or to trace the walking ways. The most visible fountain in the plan defiantly is the long elongated fountain through the middle of the central avenue, with the Atomium in the center. These walking ways are also defined by more traditional ways of lighting such as lighting posts. Though it has to be said that these lighting posts usually are not standard, they are designed per area they are placed in. This gives a way of recognizing were a visitor is, making navigating the expo easier.

To further strengthen this concept the buildings need to be separate objects, and not connected to the buildings next to them. So a type of expo campus is formed, with a clear grid with separate objects in between. Besides lighting the pathways, the crossing and the buildings themselves, there also were a number of places which were of importance and received extra lighting. An example of this is the large square in the Belgian section, which lies at the West end of the central avenue.
Different objects/effects

To get a good impression and overview of the lighting of the Expo it is useful to categorize the different kind of object and types of lighting. The main categories of objects or lit places are the roads, the pavilions, the gates, and the different pieces of public art such as the totems and fountains. Manners of lighting can be categorized into multiple groups as well. First of all, it is possible to make a distinction between dynamic and static lighting, both of which are used at the expo. Secondly, there are objects which are lit from the inside or the outside. What is important as well of course is the experience of the viewer. It is not only a question about if an object stands out of its environment, but also if it’s the object you experience, or if the lighting itself becomes the experience. Lighting objects completely or only parts of it for example can have very dramatic effects in the experience of the viewer. To make this story even more complex for a quick overview is the fact that all these effects can be achieved with different kinds of lights such as light bulbs and fluorescent lights.

Lighting of the outdoor space:

A good place to start looking for the different manners of lighting is at the Belgiumsquare. This large square was primarily lit by the then relatively new glowing neon fluorescent tubes. The light came from objects, in the shape of high rectangles with integrated fluorescent tubes, around the perimeter of the area. Also the buildings around the square emit a substantial amount of light, with the dominating Grand Palace as the most important building. This façade was also lit around the edges with fluorescent tubes, and contained an artwork of a peace dove in the center (which was lit indirectly). There are two pieces of lighting on the square itself as well, these artworks, shaped as large stars, also have fluorescent lights around its upper edges. All these light emitting objects on and around the square together generate enough lighting that no further lighting objects is necessary. Other art objects which were enhanced with the recent lighting technology could be found in the Ossegem Park. There were a number of artworks here which also had fluorescent lights integrated in them or were lit from nearby. These pieces of art represented the three seasons in which the expo was opened. The pathways here were lit by light concealed in the plants and trees adjacent to these pathways.
If an visitor would continue his or her travels from this park over the elevated walkway, which runs through the center of the international section of the Expo’58, another interesting manner of lighting the path is seen. Large star shapes, again with fluorescent tubes along their edges, support these walkways in all their lighting needs. Also these lighting fixtures really become objects to pop out of their surroundings, forming a long trail of glowing stars which one could follow over the walkway. While walking over this walkway the visitor would also get a good view over the buildings in the international section of the world fair. On the Kreupelboslaan there was another unique way of lighting the path. The trees on and adjacent to this road were covered by flakes of gold colored material. By lighting these trees with the gold flakes caused them to have a golden glow which also lit the pathway.

**Lighting of buildings:**

The centerpiece of the Expo, the Atomium, for example is covered in small omnidirectional light bulbs which go on and off. This creates twinkling stars over the surface of the building. These stars represented the electrons which orbit atoms at an atomic scale. Because these lights are arranged in a particular pattern over the spheres they remain roughly recognizable to the viewer. Though the experience of the surface of the Atomium completely changes from the closed reflective aluminum skin at day time into moving or flashing points of light at night.

Another example for the lighting of buildings is the Spanish pavilion, instead of using the object as a mounting for the lighting, the inside is lit and made very visible from the outside through the clear glass skin. This has the result that the objects inside, not the lighting, remain the subject.
Lighting from the inside, such as with the Spanish pavilion, is also capable of creating a completely different effect. The Soviet piece was also lit from the inside but because of a curtain directly behind the glass façade, the light coming out of the building is more diffuse. The result is that the viewer cannot clearly see objects on the inside of the pavilion, only very fussy shapes and silhouettes. So no longer are the objects and architecture of the inside the objects you can experience (like in the Spanish pavilion) but the large box of diffuse light becomes the experience itself. It detaches itself from its surrounding as a large dematerialized glowing box. This effect was also achieved at the French pavilion which had a golden glow at night. The pavilion of the United States, which was another large object in a triangle of three with the USSR and France, was also lit from the inside. Though its glass façade was clear and made it possible to look inside. But the round shape of building still attracted attention and made sure the building was experienced as a whole.

A completely different form of lighting was found at the pavilion of electric power. Obviously it had a lighting system to present the possibilities of electric technology at the time. This was achieved by using fluorescent lighting which was dynamic. The moving figures, symbols and lines which lit up made sure that this lighting installation popped out of its surroundings and became an object itself. This also had the effect that the building itself was detached from the lighting and became part of the surroundings. The light becoming an object on its own here really was something new and interesting. The light moved seemingly on its own over an invisible surface, what really only was possible in this manner due to the recent advances in lighting and electrical technology. This made this pavilion and lighting system a true symbol for times to come, as we all know the large advertisement screens in various cities such as New York.
Other objects:

Besides these buildings, which were probably the most interesting ones in respect to the lighting on the expo, there were a lot of lit objects and gates around the expo as well. Not all of these will not discussed individually, instead it is possible to group them in an efficient manner. First of all there are the various totems, which during the day are obviously markers of certain places. They were all well lit at night, some with integrated lighting, usually the fluorescent tubes which were so popular around the expo, and some with lighting from spots around them. The same story holds true at the different gates, though one gate stands out. Gate of the Nations as it is called was composed of three large V shapes, which were connected by wires, to seemingly float above each other. Because of the way it was designed there were no rigid structural pieces connecting them, making the object appear very light during the day, though the wires remained visible. During nighttime though, the darkness concealed these wires. Lighting the V shapes made them pop out, now, even more than during the day, the objects seemed to be floating freely. So it might actually true to say this concept was only completed at night, with the help of smart modern lighting.
Fig. 10, A map of the most interesting illuminations at the expo

References and sources

users.skynet.be/rentfarm/expo58/expobynight/index.htm
Anon, Tentoonstelling te Brussel 1958, de wetenschappen (1960).