

Anne-Marie Desjardins

Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA)

Intro

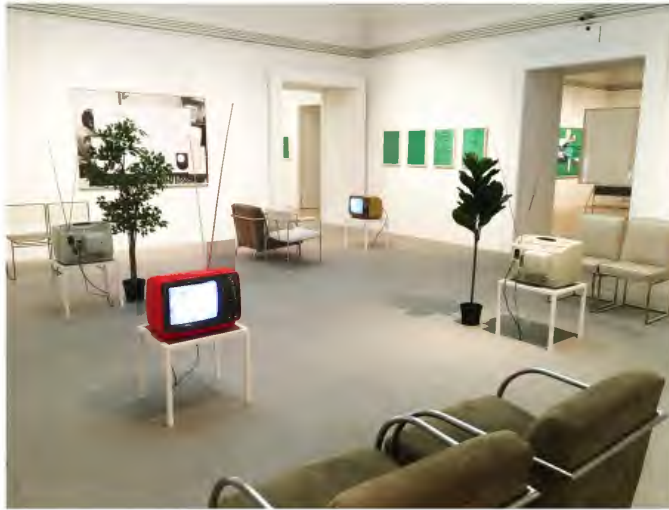
The CCA is a research institution aiming to promote the public awareness of the role of architecture within contemporary society. Situated in Montreal's Golden Square Mile, it produces publications, exhibits, and various public programs contributing to education as it pertains to the concentric circles of contemporary cultural studies and architecture.

I visited this institution midday on Wednesday, March 14th, 2018. Some external information/conditions to note are that Montreal schools' spring breaks generally fall the week before (March 5th-9th) and that the weather on the day that I visited the CCA was extremely snowy and cold, as the city had been through a snowstorm the day before. That being said, I was expecting these conditions to affect the number of visitors at the museum on that day.

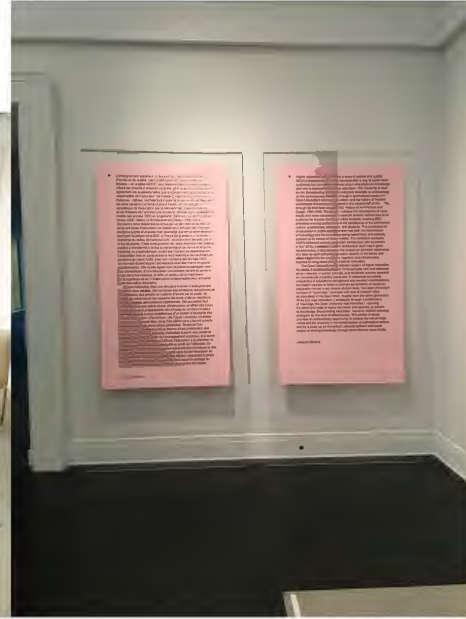
Exhibit

The exhibit that I saw is entitled "The University is now on Air: Broadcasting Modern Architecture" and its lifespan is from November 15th to April 1st. In an attempt to raise questions about today's access to higher education via massive open online courses (ex: who disseminates knowledge?), the CCA offers a close reading of a pioneering case study: A305, History of Architecture and design, 1890-1939. This class was offered as part of Open University via television and radio broadcasts in 1976 and 1982 and is known to have been a "radical project for sharing knowledge through the convergence of mass media and mass education" (CCA).

The exhibition contained a central room in which visitors are encouraged to walk around amidst a display of television monitors and chairs relevant to the time of the Open University (1976-1982), creating micro-living rooms in an open space. Each monitor played segments of the broadcast architectural class in question. In the rooms surrounding this centrally curated space were areas of study. What is meant by this is that there were long tables full of publications, small monitors and headsets as well as artifacts of the program. On the walls were tall glass panels with information inscribed onto them (in opposition to the classical museum approach of having small information black and white panels beside artworks or other objects). Each room also had a floating screen with moving images (the broadcast class) projected onto it, which will further be discussed in the appropriate section below.



Central exhibit space



Informational Panels

Visitors

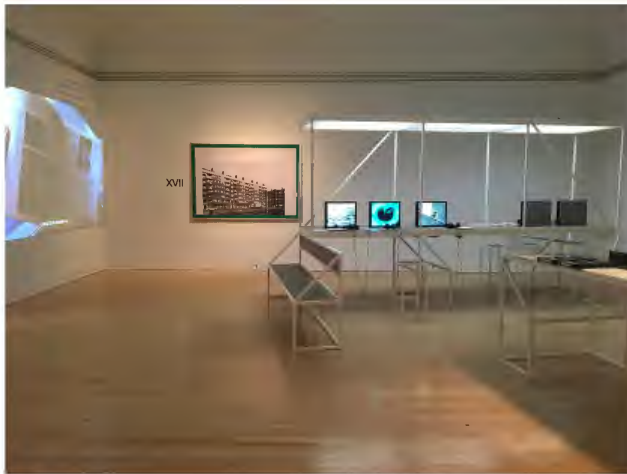
As noted in the introduction, it was an extremely quiet day at the CCA, probably due to the fact that I visited mid-week during the day, on a day that was probably favorable for staying in due to weather conditions. It was also not a holiday, so most people were either in school or at work. That being said, I was able to record each visitor that I encountered in the exhibit space: Two men who looked like they were in their mid sixties, each visiting alone. My assumption is that they were probably retired. Then, there was a girl in her early twenties visiting with her mother. They were not speaking english or french, which indicates to me that they might have been tourists. The girl was explaining each panel to her mother, which also suggests that she understood english or french and might study architecture in the city. Finally, included in the visitors is myself and my significant other, both students in our early twenties. That being said, there were three women and three men and half were older adults while the other, young adults, making the demographic of visitors quite evenly parted. This was rather surprising to me, as I expected more students to take up the population of visitors at this institution seeing as the cost of entry for them is free. Even though it was not a holiday,

While the mother and daughter took their time in every room, in front of nearly every panel and every monitor, even putting on the individual earphones to listen to the programs, the two individual men zoomed through the exhibit, stopping in front of most but not all panels and not putting on any of the earphones to view the single screen monitors. However, these two men did stop in front of the larger screens to view parts of the projected programs. That being said, the single visitors (the two older men), spent far less time in the exhibit than the mother and daughter, who were still there when I left.

The room that was the least popular was one that had a large table filled with booklets that visitors were encouraged to look through. While I saw most visitors reading the large panels that lined the walls, none of them sat down to read the books.

Digital Technologies/Moving Images

As previously noted, the exhibit's rooms contained single monitors with headsets as well as large floating screens with programs projected onto them. What was rather ingenious was that the benches facing these larger screens were part of the display table in the middle. This design element is in line with the institution's area of expertise: architecture. These benches were generally empty as this was a quiet day. In addition to these elements of moving images were the central room's multiple monitors and chairs/couches. These served a double purpose: aesthetics and practicality. Though the interaction with moving images was scattered, with the two women viewing nearly everything, and the two men skimming the material, they were an integral part of the exhibit as they demonstrated the medium in which the subject (broadcast open classes) was manifested.



Multimedia bench set-up

Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MAC)

Intro

The MAC is a contemporary art museum located in the heart of Montréal's "Quartier des Spectacles". The current main exhibit is "Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything", and celebrates the life and works of this montreal artist following his death. The exhibition's span is from November 9th to April 9th. I visited this exhibit twice. The first time was on Tuesday, January 9th (midday) and the second, was on Thursday, March 15th (midday as well). Interestingly enough, though the first visit was prior to this assignment and I was therefore not recording my observations, it is my understanding that both days were extremely similar. The conditions were the following: it was not a holiday, and it was extremely cold and snowy. Leonard Cohen is a prominent figure in Montreal, so this exhibit promised to be extremely successful at reeling in visitors.

Exhibit

The exhibit was part of the official program for the 375th anniversary of Montréal, which has been very popular. The style of the exhibit is extremely performative, with little to no text. The museum commissioned 40 artists from 10 different countries to work on 20 different art pieces, needless to say, there is a lot to see and it is almost entirely multimedia. In fact, nearly each room is mounted with some kind of projection and seats for visitors to stay and listen or watch. This can sometimes be problematic when the exhibit is packed with people, some lining the walls and squatting on the floors. There is one room which is a single viewer experience and calls for a long wait time, depending on the time of day. The experience is 10 minutes long, so you can calculate how long of a wait there is depending on the number of people ahead of you. Needless to say, a lot of people skipped it because not many people want to wait even thirty minutes in a museum line within a very large exhibit. The set-up is quite disorienting and almost feels like a maze of rooms through which visitors might not always know which way to exit from.

Visitors/Digital Technologies/Moving Images

Leonard Cohen is a prominent figure in Montreal, so this exhibit promised to be extremely successful at reeling in visitors and the subject matter suggests that the majority of the visitors would be Montreal locals. In fact, in stark contrast to the CCA, this exhibit is packed. The first time I tried going was a Saturday and the person at the front desk suggested that I come back another time if I can permit myself to, as it was incredibly packed at the moment.

When I returned both times, the exhibit was packed with people, most of which were middle to older aged adults ranging from 50-90 years old, approximately. In fact, this is one of the first times that I have seen so many elderly visitors in an art exhibit. There seemed to be as many men as women, and no one seemed to be alone. This demographic was perhaps more relevant to Leonard Cohen fans more so than the specific museum goers. There were no skimmers in this exhibit. People entered a room and stayed there to contemplate Cohen's performances and artist's works based on these for a minimum of 10 minutes each time.

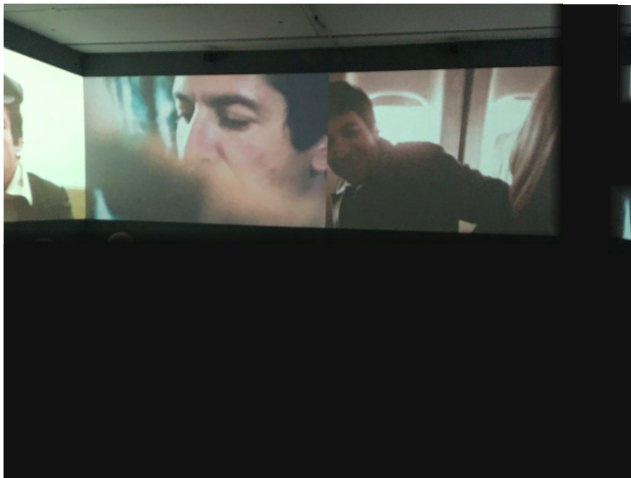
The more participatory exhibit spaces were the more empty ones. For example, there was a room in which a piano was mounted and visitors were invited to play it. Each note played a sound recording of Cohen's voice either in conversation or singing. In this room, there were only about 5 people, all of which were much younger than the ones in the other rooms. In addition to this, a staple piece of the exhibit is a wooden temple inside of which microphones hang and visitors are meant to hum the tune of "Hallelujah" in unison. This one was also quite empty and my presumption is that the demographic that was visiting was less interested in participating during their visit, and more interested in watching the archival reconstructions of Cohen performances, or

sitting inside the listening room and hearing artists cover his legendary songs. That being said, multimedia was extremely prominent and successful. It seemed people just wanted to come together and watch Leonard Cohen and reminisce together.

Crowd interacting with multimedia
Less popular participatory installation

General comparisons

Visitors: Both exhibits reeled in a specific visitor as opposed to one that would simply want to visit any museum for fun.

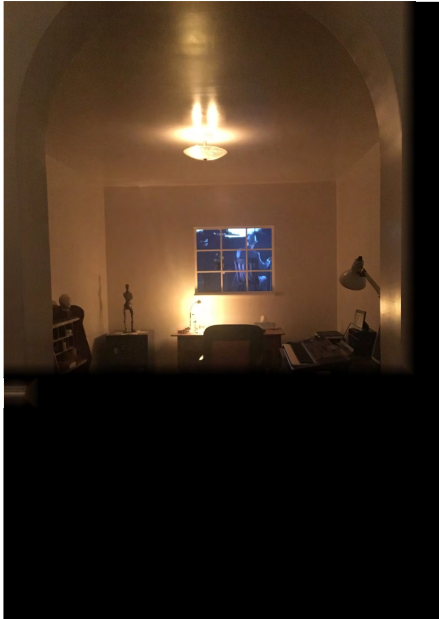


The CCA attracts people who are interested in architecture, most probably students because of the free charge. The MAC exhibit brought in Leonard Cohen fans from Montreal but also probably from outside the city as well, considering the stature of this artist.

Moving Images: Both exhibits were multimedia heavy, though the CCA's approach was more educational, whereas the MAC contained entertainment and art pieces. The CCA's multimedia was generally neglected, though it is difficult to make such assumptions with so few visitors to record. The MAC's multimedia kept visitors captivated for an average of 10 minutes at a time, which I gather is a lot for exhibits.

Security: I did not encounter one security guard at the CCA. In addition to this, when sitting in the central area that was comprised of multiple monitors, I saw no panels prohibiting visitors from toying with the tv sets. However, I also did not encounter anyone who tried to either. The personnel included two front desk workers handing out pins to visitors, and a bookstore clerk. In contrast to the CCA, there were security guards all over the place at the MAC. Every room had at least one guard making sure that viewers were not tampering with the art pieces, as well as helping elderly people with canes and so forth find a seat, which was often the case. There was one installation that involved the reconstruction of Leonard Cohen's Montreal apartment, you

were welcome to enter but you could not touch or cross certain lines. The guard in this area was particularly firm in ensuring these rules.



Reconstruction of Cohen's apartment with high-level security.