

**20<sup>th</sup> Interuniversity Charrette**  
**November 2015**  
[www.cca.qc.ca/charrette/2015](http://www.cca.qc.ca/charrette/2015)

## Archipelago

### GENERAL THEME

The 20th Interuniversity Charrette invites young designers to explore possible futures for Montreal's St. Helen's and Notre-Dame islands. 50 years after Expo 67 - the big-bang of hopes, dreams, convictions and projects that reinvented this tiny archipelago - the archipelago is seeking a renewed imaginary able to recognise and activate its legacy, its potential and its pertinence... a new imaginary that feeds on nostalgia to move forward into new modernities. This project is about looking back 50 years at the spirit of Expo 67 and the legacy of the islands, and looking ahead 50 years to explore possible futures for the archipelago.

### CONTEXT

50 years ago, the future was thinkable. Montreal had the audacity to think big and to look forward. Montreal had hopes, dreams, convictions and projects. The city was diving head first into modernity with a sense of euphoria, following in the footsteps of cities like New York. Expo 67 was the clearest manifestation of this new spirit. The event aspired to open the city to the world, seeking to assert its place in the constellation of world's leading modern cities. For Expo 67, the city found new freedoms in its island. Expo 67 exposed 50 million visitors to modernity and catalysed a new wave of modern design in Quebec. Beyond the pervasive cheerful optimism of the spectacle, Expo 67 was a carefully crafted pragmatic utopia and a shrewd political tool for inducing modernity.

Rather than a spectacular beginning to a lasting passion between Montreal and modernity, Expo 67 proved to be a mere one-night-stand. Orphans of this flirt, the islands declined. As cheerful optimism of the 60's gave way to the growing cynicism and disenchantment of the 70's, utopia and modernity became mistrusted. Taking the brunt of the blame for the perceived excesses of modernism, the architects withdrew into the role of sheer technicians of the capital. Architecture was no longer seen as a relevant mechanism for engaging important social and political questions.

## CHALLENGE

Five decades after Expo 67, the archipelago is in desperate need of a renewed imaginary able to recognise its value, its potentials and its pertinence.

Designers possess a remarkable set of skills and tools to investigate, think and represent imaginaries and possible futures. Prospecting the future with a 50 year horizon, groups are invited to explore possible futures for the archipelago. The 2015 Charrette solicits a range of imaginative, speculative, critical, strategic and pragmatic design scenarios for the future of the archipelago in 50 years. We are looking for architectural, urban and landscape design projects exhibiting creativity, clarity and pertinence. The scope and type of intervention can range from overall strategies to tactical localised projects; from highly speculative to pragmatic; from process to form; and from abstract to concrete. The site for the project is St. Helen's and Notre-Dame islands within the broader archipelago.

This exploration can be conducted through scenario building. The objective is not to predict what the future will be, but to explore what the future could be if we follow the logic of certain considerations, hypothesis and scenarios. It is up to each group to elaborate what factors they consider pivotal for the scenarios they are building.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Utopia as a tool

*Sometimes reality is too complex. Fiction gives it form.* J.L. Goddard

*A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.* Oscar Wilde

The archipelago is set as the conceptual canvas and natural habitat for utopia - a design thinking tool capable of formulating critical alternatives to the status quo. A renewal of utopian modes of thinking rehabilitates the intensely critical, social and political impetus that was the motor for the development of modern architecture. The reclaimed freedom and relevance in engaging important social, political, economic and environmental questions through the critical lens of architecture allows designers a renewed role in thinking, debating and proposing an urbanity for today and tomorrow.

Challenging naïve messianic pretensions and dogmas, new forms of utopia seek pertinence, strategy, agility, resilience and a healthy dose of pragmatism. Exploring speculative imaginaries and new forms of utopia certainly carries risks as we are constantly on thin ice. The search process will inevitably take us down many wrong paths. Nonetheless, we need positive models and conceptions of tomorrow's world. Amidst claims that the future of our cities and of our planet is getting out of hand, exploring strategic paths forward is more pertinent than sticking our heads in the sand. Architecture is inherently a practice of critical optimism and a workshop of the future.

## Archipelago as a model

The archipelago is the ideal setting for thinking fiction. It is both a territorial condition that describes an underexploited reality of Montreal's islands, and a productive metaphor for a distributed network of distinct urban nuclei. This metaphor describes a constellation of associated, yet radically different, autonomous worlds, conditions and objects. The archipelago offers an imaginative model of urban legibility, explored namely by O.M. Ungers and Rem Koolhaas [see references]. This model is echoed in a biological metaphor of a set of different organs within the body. The notion of relational dynamic between living things - the very essence of ecology and urbanity - casts the archipelago as the ideal setting for exploring ecological and urban models.

## PROJECTIVE SCENARIOS – 'What if...'

A few prototypical scenarios are outlined below to illustrate possible lenses and to accompany groups in thinking the future along thematic conceptual pivots. These speculative explorations exacerbate and radicalise specific conditions, hopes and tensions of today and tomorrow. They push their respective logics to their limits. They posit, investigate and amplify the catalysts of change, and curate the dynamic and passive dimensions throughout the five-decade process between the worlds of today and tomorrow.

Occasional overdoses of criticality may lead into negative reversals of scenarios and into dystopian narratives forewarning of the horrors future may have in store for us. These may arguably have value as shock therapy to raise awareness, provoke polemical discussion, and reveal the contradictions, paradoxes and threats.

## [1/5] Environmental Vectors

Environmental crisis is the most significant predicament humanity is facing. Dooming narratives of loss seem to have little impact on our pervasive inertia and status quo. If design is a practice of optimism, designers can explore and propose positive models aiming to rally society around a positive, collective project and an enchanted vision of the planet and of the future.

What if we took the islands as a canvas for the search of environmental success stories? Beyond manicured naturalist visions, how can we orchestrate forms and processes of life that generate sustainable, productive habitats for animals and plants? Can we think of productive synergies that reconcile the key forces and contradictions at play? What is the place, the role and the experience of humans in this 'new harmony'?

Resources. Our civilisation is using and depleting earth's resources at a rate far beyond sustainable levels. There is a growing consensus that we are heading into a wall, yet there is little evidence of meaningful, structural change in our consumption and lifestyle patterns. What if we were to see the islands as a laboratory for a lifestyle using less resources and with optimal ways of (re)using resources? What if we explored self-sufficiency?

Waste. The outcome of the society of consumption is a society of waste at all scales. What if we sought new impetus for the archipelago in productive synergies between waste and other social, political, economic and environmental processes?

Entropy. Key components of the mythology of the islands are left in ruins. What if this entropic process of ruins was conceptualised and seen as a catalyst for new forms of ecosystems and new forms of sublime?

Water. Montreal is an island and an archipelago, but that's almost a secret. One is rarely made conscious of it. Water is treated as a problem rather than an opportunity. Water's edges are the richest eco-systems and the most desired urban situations, yet Montreal's archipelago celebrates none of that. What if the relation to water was radically amplified to inform the archipelago's urban form and experience, as well as its ecosystems?

Food. No urban model can be sustainable without incorporating food. Food impacts and synthesises all aspects of ecology, from water and energy to transportation and waste. Food is also a pivotal cultural trait, a powerful social lubricant and a significant economic vector. Yet, very few urban models start from, or even significantly incorporate food production, transformation and consumption processes. What if the food was to feed the imaginary of the archipelago and to be a catalyst for its possible futures?

#### [2/5] Socio-Economic Vectors

Tool. What do you want Montreal to be, and how could the islands be a tool for that?

Creativity. Montreal is branded as a 'creative city'. What are the conditions of urbanity that foster the creative class, creative economy and creative city? What are the anchors, places, manifestations and practices of creativity in the city that could inform the logic and the experience of a creative archipelago? What if we deployed those conditions on our archipelago as a possible incubator for the 'creative city' urban model? Or is creativity and creative city something entirely different?

Spectacle. Montreal's 'Fun City' reputation relies on its culture of spectacle and permissiveness. As this aspect of Montreal is constrained by urban revitalisation, the islands are increasingly coveted by the culture of spectacle. What if this logic was followed and exacerbated, and if the islands were to become a place of total, non-stop spectacle?

Arts. Remnants of Expo 67's 'symbiosis of art and life' are afloat throughout the archipelago. What if Expo's art legacy is rehabilitated, revalorising what remains and extending the logic of art as a catalyst for the life of the archipelago?

#### [3/5] Technological Vectors

Technological paradigms are in constant flux. If the future is digital and information-based, how could we think the digital city on the archipelago? Is the future of the archipelago related to "smart city"? What if we see technology as a broader set of processes operating

within the anthropocene? What if the views and paradigms of technology inform a projective model for the archipelago? How could ecological crises and technological advancement share the same future? How can we think new synergies and symbiosis of technology, environment and humans?

#### [4/5] Play Vectors

Leisure. Leisure is both a product and a promise of modernity. It is pivotal in determining our lifestyles and patterns of use of time and space. Yet, it has an elusive, evolving and multiple nature. What if the promise of modernity came true, providing us leisure time and the islands were imagined as a canvas for the joys (and/or horrors) of a leisure culture?

Play. If creativity is intelligence at play, we perhaps need more play. Montrealers have been sporadically playing on the islands since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What if we rethink the islands through the lens of play, as Montreal's true playground and an autonomous habitat for *Homo Ludens*?

#### [5/5] Glocal Vectors

International. Mayor Drapeau called the islands '*Cité internationale*', promising them a future. Openness to the world is in these islands' DNA. How can we think and enhance the international character of the islands as a catalyst of both their past and their future?

Pluralism. How do we think space and the city for a pluralistic society? Diversification of values and lifestyles, together with increasing migration and globalisation will keep changing the city. Should we idealise differences or edify common grounds? How is pluralist city thinkable within the archipelago model? What if the archipelago becomes a platform for new forms of citizenship and new collectives?

Local. What are the specific traits of Montreal's urban character? How can the Montrealness of Montreal inform the logic of possible evolutions of the archipelago?

Global. Conversely, as cities simultaneously compete and learn from each other, how could possible futures of the archipelago be informed by lessons from other urban logics?

Difference. If the archipelago is by definition a set of differentiated parts, how different Notre-Dame Island ought to be from St. Helen's Island, or from Montreal or the rest of Montreal archipelago?

City. As City spreads, the islands are not on the edge but at the centre of the metropolitan area. If the idea of an urban core is thinkable, what if the archipelago is to be rethought as the core of the city?

## REFERENCES

### EXPO '67

Lortie, André [ed.]. *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big*. [Montreal: CCA, 2004]

Cormier, Anne. 'Expo '67 Revisitée'. *ARQ* 69 [october 1992] 24-27.

Richman Kenneally, Rhona and Johanne Sloan [eds.] *Expo 67: Not Just a Souvenir*. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010]

Lownsbrough, John. *The Best Place to be: Expo 67 and its time*. [Toronto: Allen Lane, 2012]

Grenier, Raymond. *Regards sur l'expo 67*. [Montreal: Editions de l'Homme, 1965]

### Archipelago

Ungers, Oswald Matthias & al. *The City in the City – Berlin: A Green Archipelago*. 1977 [Zurich : Lars Muller, 2013].

Koolhaas, Rem. 'City of the captive globe.' in *Delirious New York: Retroactive Manifesto for New York*. [New York: Monacelli Press, 1978]

Callejas, Luis. *Islands and Atolls*. Pamphlet Architecture 33 [NY : Princeton Architectural Press, 2013]

### Utopia

Utopia, c. 2016. *Journal of Architectural Education [JAE]* 67:1 [March 2013].  
[articles by Antoine Picon, Inderbir Riar, Christina Contandriopoulos and Ruth Levitas]

Van Schaik, Martin and Otaker Mácel [eds.]. *Exit Utopia: architectural provocations, 1956-1976*. [Munich: Prestel, 2005]

Tafuri, Manfredo. *Architecture and Utopia; Design and Capitalist Development*. [Cambridge: MIT Press. 1976].

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. [1516]

Heynen, Hilde. 'The Need for Utopian Thinking in Architecture.' *Hunch* 6/7 [2003]

### Work

MVRDV, OMA, LCLA Luis Callejas, West8, Office [Geers+van Severen], Philippe Rahm, BIG, Cedric Price, Superstudio, Point Supreme Architects, InfraNetLab.