

A Fun Palace: A Mixed Reality Event Through the Looking Glass of Cybernetics

*Patrick Pennefather,¹ Patrick Rizzotti, John Desnoyers-Stewart,
Katerina Stepanova, Bernhard Riecke, Leonid Danenkov,
Vladislav Ryzhov, Julie-anne Saroyan, William Beltran, Riya Chak*

This article depicts a reimagining of the *Fun Palace* (Littlewood, Price, Pask and others, 1960s) as a mixed reality event through the eyes of a newbie to the field of cybernetics. The Fun Palace thrived on having multiple definitions. It was an idealized, utilitarian, educational, anything-goes, communal, co-constructed participant-citizen playground existing within an architectural design that resisted a singular definition. Of particular relevance to our mixed-reality event, was the idea of the *Fun Palace* as an adaptive ecosystem dependent on context, time and the needs of those who would occupy it. The one-day mixed reality event was produced with this in mind. Our version of a fun palace took place in a 10,000 square foot hanger at the Centre for Digital Media in Vancouver, Canada on June 25th, 2019. The event consisted of several interactive installations inspired by some elements of cybernetics across a variety of disciplines and historical time periods. This article delicately proposes an examination of several of the installations that made up the *Fun Palace: Carnival of Mixed Reality*, through the polysemic lens of cybernetics.

Keywords: *Fun Palace*, mixed reality, cybernetics, installations, event

Introduction (or) a Way into a Reimagining of a Vision that Never Manifested

The content of the article depicts several installations that contributed to a one-day live production held in Vancouver on June 25th, 2019 called *The Fun Palace: Carnival of Mixed Reality*. As newbies to the field of cybernetics the team and I knew that we were not re-pitching an architectural idea designed in 1961—undertaking studies to gauge the feasibility of a fun palace being constructed as was the case between 1962-1964—nor including the idea within a larger development plan in the city of London, as in 1965. We wanted to create a one-day event that embodied much of the spirit of the original vision.² Characterizing the spirit of the event was interpretive, inspired by the changing vision and characteristics of the original *Fun Palace* as conceived by Price (an architect), Littlewood (a theatre producer), Pask (cybernetician), and others in the 1960s. Our goal was to create impactful interactions, “a laboratory of pleasure, providing room for many kinds of action” (Salter, 2010, p. 310), with a persistent attention to designing a one-day event for a large audience. This was our priority whether or not each installation adhered to any singular

1. Email: patrick.pennefather@ubc.ca

2. Bearing in mind that the initial idea to remount the *Fun Palace* was provoked by colleague Tom Scholte to be offered as a satellite event to *ACTING CYBERNETICALLY: 2019 Conference of the American Society for Cybernetics*.