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**ST. LAWRENCE BLVD. AS 'THIRD CITY': PLACE, GENDER AND DIFFERENCE
ALONG MONTRÉAL'S 'MAIN'**

JULIE A. PODMORE

**Department of Geography
McGill University
Montréal**

August, 1999

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

At the end of the nineteenth century, St. Lawrence Boulevard, popularly known as 'the Main', attained mythical status in Montreal. Due to its particular location in the social and cultural geography of Montreal, the Main, which symbolically divides the working-class Francophone east and the Anglophone bourgeois west, has developed as a mixed-use commercial artery, an eclectic border zone of a bilingual, multi-ethnic city. The heterogeneous character of the Main is reflected in its material landscape -- with its old and now largely re-used garment sweat-shops and labour halls, theatres of the red-light district, cafés, and the shops and restaurants of the mid-twentieth century immigrant shopping corridor. Shaped by the diversity of the populations that came to live, work, protest, shop or be entertained in these sites, it is an example of the social and cultural diversity of the metropolis. Such heterogeneous sites have often been interpreted as liminal spaces, but this research demonstrates that the construction and experience of the Main as a border zone have rarely been gender neutral. While physical, social and cultural heterogeneity are components of this landscape, these sites also attest to the importance of gender relations in the experience of the Main as a place of work and social life and, ultimately, as a space of representation. Its border status has often been represented through discourses and images of 'marginal' womanhood, articulated in terms of social, occupational, political, sexual and/or ethnic identity. Many of its locales, moreover, have been sites where women entered urban public life in contentious and distinctive ways.

As a place that highlights the social and cultural heterogeneity of a supposedly 'divided' city, the Main is an ideal site from which to explore how ethnicity, language, class, occupation and sexual identity intersect with gender in the experience and representation of urban life. This thesis examines how a multiplicity of female gender identities have been defined and contested along the Main over the past century. It contributes to a broad literature on geographies of gender, difference and urban public cultures through an analysis of the relationships between feminist spatial metaphors and the material production of urban space. Through a series of events that move through time

and sections of St. Lawrence, I examine how portions of the landscape of this boulevard have been marked by the enactment of specific sets of gender relations and forms of representation that became central to civic debates regarding gender. I argue that the construction and experience of the Main as a border zone has involved the production of specific relations of gender, alterity and space.

A variety of qualitative methods and archival sources are used to illustrate the importance of representations of gender to the production of this place and to illustrate how women have experienced and made use of material sites to express their specific occupational, cultural, religious, social or sexual identities. This thesis demonstrates the crucial role played by the border zones of urban public cultures in the construction of female identities that depart from dominant gender norms in the expression of social, cultural and sexual differences.

RÉSUMÉ

A la fin du 19^e siècle, le Boulevard St-Laurent à Montréal, plus connu sous le nom de 'la Main', atteint son statut d'artère mythique. En raison de son emplacement particulier dans la géographie sociale et culturelle de Montréal, la Main, qui divise symboliquement l'est ouvrier et francophone de l'ouest bourgeois et anglophone, s'est développée en artère commerçante mixte, en zone frontière éclectique dans une ville bilingue et multiethnique. Le caractère hétérogène de la Main se reflète dans son paysage architectural -- dans les vieux ateliers de confection et lofts rénovés, les bourses du travail, les théâtres du 'red-light', les cafés, les petits magasins et les restaurants des communautés immigrantes. Formée d'une diversité de groupes sociaux qui y ont habité, travaillé, manifesté, magasiné et qui s'y sont également divertis, cette rue devient alors un exemple de la diversité sociale et culturelle de la métropole. Ces espaces hétérogènes furent souvent interprétés comme des espaces liminaux, mais cette recherche démontre que la construction et l'expérience de la Main comme zone frontière furent rarement neutres en ce qui concerne des relations de genre. Alors que l'hétérogénéité matérielle, sociale et culturelle constitue un paysage mixte, ces lieux nous rappellent également l'importance des relations de genre dans l'expérience de la Main comme lieu de travail, lieu social et, finalement, comme espace de représentation. En effet, la dimension 'frontière' a souvent été définie par des illustrations de féminités marginales, et articulées autour d'appartenances sociales, politiques, sexuelles et/ou ethniques. De plus, plusieurs de ces lieux ont été des espaces où les femmes sont entrées dans la vie urbaine publique de façon contestée et distincte.

En tant que lieu qui souligne l'hétérogénéité sociale et culturelle d'une ville dite 'divisée', la Main est un site idéal pour explorer comment l'appartenance ethnique, la langue, la classe, l'occupation professionnelle et l'identité sexuelle interfèrent avec le genre dans l'expérience et la représentation de la vie urbaine. Cette thèse examine la façon dont une multiplicité d'identités de sexe féminin a été définie et contestée sur la Main durant le dernier siècle. Cette recherche contribue à une vaste littérature sur les géographies de genre, de la différence et des cultures urbaines publiques par une analyse

des relations entre les métaphores spatiales féministes et la production de l'espace urbain. A travers l'étude d'une série d'événements qui se déroulent à différentes périodes et dans différents secteurs du Boulevard St-Laurent, j'examine comment les différents espaces de la Main ont été marqués par des mises en scène particulières de relations de genre et par des formes de représentation qui sont, par la suite, devenues centrales dans les débats civiques concernant le genre. Ainsi, j'argumente que la construction et l'expérience de la Main comme zone frontière ont été constituées par une production de relations spécifiques entre genre, altérité et espace.

Une variété de méthodes qualitatives et de documents d'archives est utilisée pour illustrer l'importance des représentations de genre dans la production de cet espace et l'expérience de femmes qui ont profité de ces lieux pour exprimer leurs propres identités occupationnelles, culturelles, religieuses, sociales ou sexuelles. Cette thèse démontre le rôle déterminant que joue les zones frontières des cultures urbaines publiques dans la construction des identités féminines qui s'écartent des normes de genre dominantes en exprimant des différences sociales, culturelles et sexuelles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis has benefitted from the intellectual and financial support of many people and institutions. First words of thanks go to Brian Ray, my thesis supervisor. Prof. Ray was not only an astute, committed and tireless reader, but also a very supportive advocate. The combination of imagination and precision that he brings to geographical research greatly enhanced my own project. His confidence in my work also made it possible to surmount the many intellectual hurdles that I encountered while drawing together disparate literatures and applying them to my study site. Sherry Olson (McGill University) was a very active committee member, editor and guide through Montreal's archival records. Long before I embarked on a doctoral thesis, Prof. Olson suggested that a landscape interpretation of St. Lawrence Boulevard would bring together my research interests. I thank her for this insightful suggestion and for the many discussions we have had regarding this fascinating street. Finally, Annick Germain (INRS-Urbanisation), Warwick Armstrong (McGill University) and Audrey Kobayashi (Queen's University) have played important roles in my graduate studies. The conceptual framework of this thesis, with its interest in understanding how a space of difference is gendered and produced in an historical context, bears the particular imprint of Prof. Kobayashi. Although she was not specifically part of this project, she was one of the most important members of my audience.

Funding for this thesis was primarily provided by the Social Science and Research Council of Canada. I am also grateful for the many teaching assistantships that I was granted by the Department of Geography at McGill. Warwick Armstrong, Annick Germain, Audrey Kobayashi and Brian Ray also supported my studies through their research projects. In particular, Prof. Ray provided funding for the interviews in Chapter 7 through the FCAR-Quartier project at INRS-Urbanisation. These work experiences greatly contributed to the subject matter and ideas in the thesis. While working with Prof. Armstrong on regional cultural identities, I had my first exposure to 'dialogics', folk cultures and populist resistance movements. This body of literature and Prof. Armstrong's

commitment to writing geographies with the everyday lives of ordinary people in mind, had a great impact on my early objectives.

To compile the material included in this thesis I have relied on many sources. First, I thank all the women who agreed to be interviewed for Chapter 7 regarding their experience of urban space as lesbians. They willingly gave me hours of their time and went to great lengths to introduce me to their friends and acquaintances. I also thank the staff at the following archives and research centres: Archives gaies du Québec, Archives nationales du Québec, Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Centre de recherche Lionel-Groulx, Cinéma Québecois, McGill University Archives, the National Archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress and the National Archives of Canada. Most of my time was spent at the Archives de la Ville de Montréal, wading through newspaper collections, police commissions and the minutes of various committees. Archivist Mario Robert was especially helpful and his assistance was crucial to locating the documentation for Chapter 2. I also thank staff members Ginette Denis and Lucie Pelletier for their help on a daily basis and for their patience with my language skills in the early stages of my research. The search for archival materials is also guided by secondary sources, by scholars who go before us and provide maps to archival possibilities. I owe a great debt to the following Montreal researchers: Jean de Bonville, André Bourassa, Jean-Paul Brodeur, Line Chamberland, Danielle Lacasse, Jean-Marc Larrue, Andrée Lévesque, Tamara Myers, David Rome and Thomas Waugh.

As all of my graduate studies have been in McGill's Department of Geography, over the years I have exchanged ideas and support with many of its graduate students. While a general thank-you is in order, I would particularly like to thank Kate Boyer, Thomas Fletcher, Jason Gilliland, Jocelyn Guidon, Aurélie Lebrun, Kendra McSweeny, Roopa Nair, Katie Pickles, Jeanne Schoenwandt, Rosalyn Trigger and Steven Tufts for our many discussions regarding our research and our discipline. The feminist scholarship of Kate Boyer, Aurélie Lebrun, Katie Pickles and Jeanne Schoenwandt has always been challenging and motivating. I thank Jocelyn Guidon for the invaluable discussions we

have had regarding gay and lesbian geographies over the years. Finally, through his commitment to sharing ideas, references and projects, Jason Gilliland helped me to make the transition into historical research. He gave me invaluable technical and methodological advice that made Chapter 2 possible.

Finally, few doctoral dissertations are produced without an entourage of friends and family members that provide support, love, recreation, laughter, distractions and hope. Colleen Ayoup has shared her life with me throughout two graduate degrees and has been supportive through the financial strain and the stresses of writing each thesis. She also provided a great deal of assistance with the illustrations and photographs and proofread most of the chapters. I am thankful for her grace, independence, empathy and especially her grand sense of humour. Anick Druelle, Andrea Kwan and Aurélie Lebrun assisted with editing and translation, and often on short notice. Dancing and performing with the Mambo Drag Kings (Caroline Boll, Johanne Cadorette, Sarah Gibson, Jeannie Jay, Andrea Kwan, Cindy Mancuso, Isabelle Saillard, and Cathrin Winkelmann) has provided a great escape for me over the past four years. I thank them for their camaraderie and the sense of experimentation our project has brought to my life. I have also been fortunate to share a very constant friendship with Namta Gupta who has kept me running and thinking about life outside my thesis. I thank all of the other people who have animated my daily life in Montreal during this degree, including Daniel Anaka, Gwen Ayoup, Raymond Ayoup, Robert Ayoup, Angel Beyde, Sarah Cartwright, Pierre Dalpé, Kiloran Disten, Anick Druelle, Thomas Fletcher, Aurélie Lebrun, Katie Pickles, Andrew Reid, Lourdes Rodriguez, Jeanne Schoenwandt, Deanne Saunders and Nancy Saint-Germain. Finally, my friends and family in Vancouver have also been close to my heart. I thank Peggy Clarkson, Debbie Dewar, Heather Lane, Bill Podmore, Helen Podmore, Michael Podmore, Suzanne Smythe and Janice Wormworth for their love and encouragement.

Throughout my formal education I have been fortunate to have the unconditional support of my parents, John and Gail Podmore. I thank them for their willingness to help me reach a goal that they had perhaps never seen in my future. I am also thankful for

● gifts that they gave me early in life. Without discipline and self-confidence I doubt that I would have had the stamina to complete this process. Final thanks go to my maternal grandmother, Ruth Beddeson, who has always appreciated that this task required more industry than intellect. I hope that my diligence in my education is a testament to her lifetime of hard work.

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INTRODUCTION

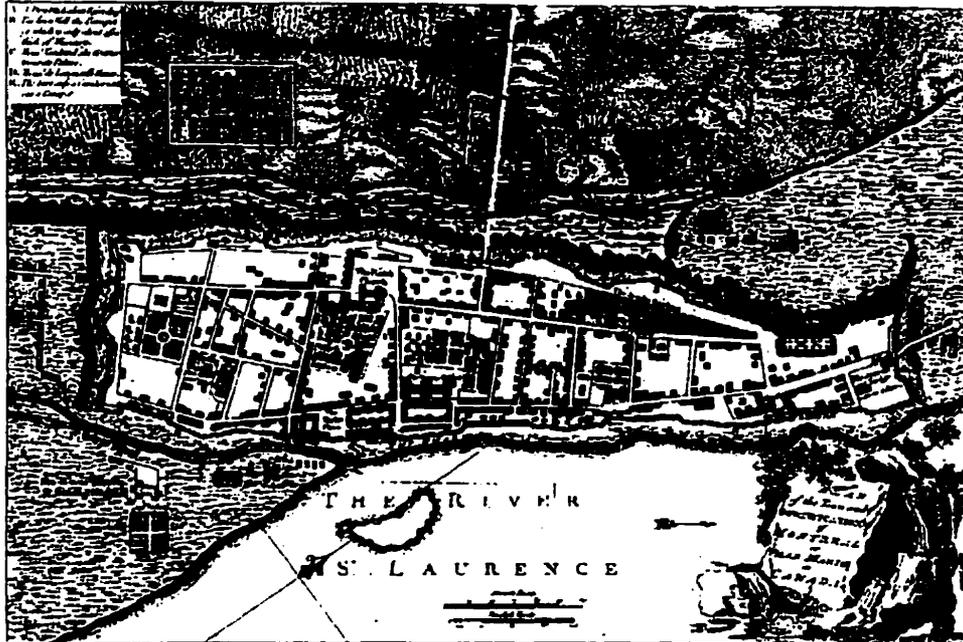


Figure 1: St. Lawrence Boulevard Extending Northward from the Fortified City. Source: Thomas Jeffreys, *Spy Map* (London, 1758), in Linteau (1992a).

You're a woman. It's the present. You take a walk along the dividing line. You begin at the port, now so clean and green. You walk northwards along the sidewalks of old Ville Marie, the memory of worn cobblestone beneath your feet. Coming down St. Lambert Hill, you hit the outer wall of the old city, gone for almost two centuries now. Carefully, you traverse rue Saint-Antoine, and pass over the new line, the booming expressway, and again, dodge the cars streaming along rue Viger as they merge with the autoroute.

You are now in 'Chinatown' and the remains of 'the Main' begin. Two words come to you: cleansed and restricted, on all sides. The new pagoda gates at either end tell you that this is a territory, and you knew it, whether you can read the signs or not. The boulevard is wide but, after you navigate the lights, the median and the crosswalk, you're on the other side, standing on a corner where other women, maybe even you, laboured male pleasure to survive the city. How many times did she escape? Did she ever enter the

Monument National, learn to read, see a French play? These things, you'll never know. There are no texts, no 'discourse'.

As you pass the Cabaret Cléopâtre, you ask yourself, why her? Thinking about Michel Tremblay's 'Hosanna', and the dozens of imitations, you ponder the name and the many men who have played her. When you get to the corner of la Catherine, Tremblay's there again, and so is Sainte-Carmen's dream, to awaken the people of the Main, to show the 'butch' Bec-de-Lièvre that she's beautiful, and you look up to the pool hall, see her shadow in the window, and feel strong.

After that, things are not so interesting, not so destabilizing. You know that the army surplus store with its drab aluminium facade and barred windows was once the Scala theatre. You've seen pictures. Five cents for a silent view of other worlds, and later, ten cents for Yiddish vaudeville. You who have only known the private city, the city of television, suburbs and ordered Hollywood cinema complexes. If only to peek through the curtain, and then, lift up your long cotton frock to mount the tramway homeward, to a quiet cold water flat full of siblings and other kin. An apartment you have rarely seen in the daylight.

You put your new boots back on. There are more army surplus shops, a few taverns and empty lots. The big loft building at the corner of Ontario catches your eye. Drawn up to the big windows, you see drafting tables, sofas, mirrors and beds. You really can't imagine that there were ever any picket lines here. The shops were small, too small and too dispersed for the unions. Everyone just continued on. Sewing, cutting, pressing and stuffing cigar shells with American tobacco. The men arrived at 7:00 am and were already up in the shops when the women, having navigated the dark icy streets of February, took the elevator up to the eighth floor.

Once you're up the hill and across Sherbrooke street, you turn around and look down on your footprints from the top. Turning around, there are now people, trucks and movements to dodge. If it were night, large bouncers in tuxedos would be rolling out red carpets, welcoming visitors, people not from here. They stop at Italian bistros that also serve sushi. They throw their car keys to the valet as they enter, at once avoiding and consuming the Main. You ponder your reflection in the windows of Benetton, just next door. Noting the utility of your shoes, the age of your clothes and your stance, you decide that there is no carpet that would be quite right for you.

Fleeing the scene, you race up the street to Prince Arthur, where a crowd spills out onto the Main. No one really notices you standing there. To the tourists, you're not as shocking as some others. They mostly look for identifiable markers: kool-aide hair, pierced orifices, hungry dogs sitting on the sidewalk mark danger,

violence. And so you avoid detection as you watch them. So clean, so closed, so out of place. But what really gets you is her. She turns the corner, walks along the street, looking through the glass, taking her time here, hurrying by there. There aren't many clues. It's not certain, but that's okay. You tell yourself it's a game anyway and watch your gaze and your feet.

And so, you follow far behind, hands in your pockets, ambling, but just then she appears, a familiar face in the blue café. She's pondering, scribbling, bursts of words. She speaks both of your languages, feeds your thoughts, but they trigger so much that you can't get them back on the page. You let her do that.

When it's dark here, there are more visitors. Up above the stores there is dancing, aftershave and excitement. It's not just the music that tells you. Long lines block your path, waiting to get in. Men and women, all young, all looking for something on the boulevard. Brief encounters with their city, the city they do not know. Sometimes you go in too. But you wait till the long lines move elsewhere. Then you go in, take some of your friends, because the beer is cheap.

Finally, another familiar face. "Eh, toi, salut, ça va?" You always see her here. Her and many others, and you expect it. You can count on it and it's important, even if you just smile.

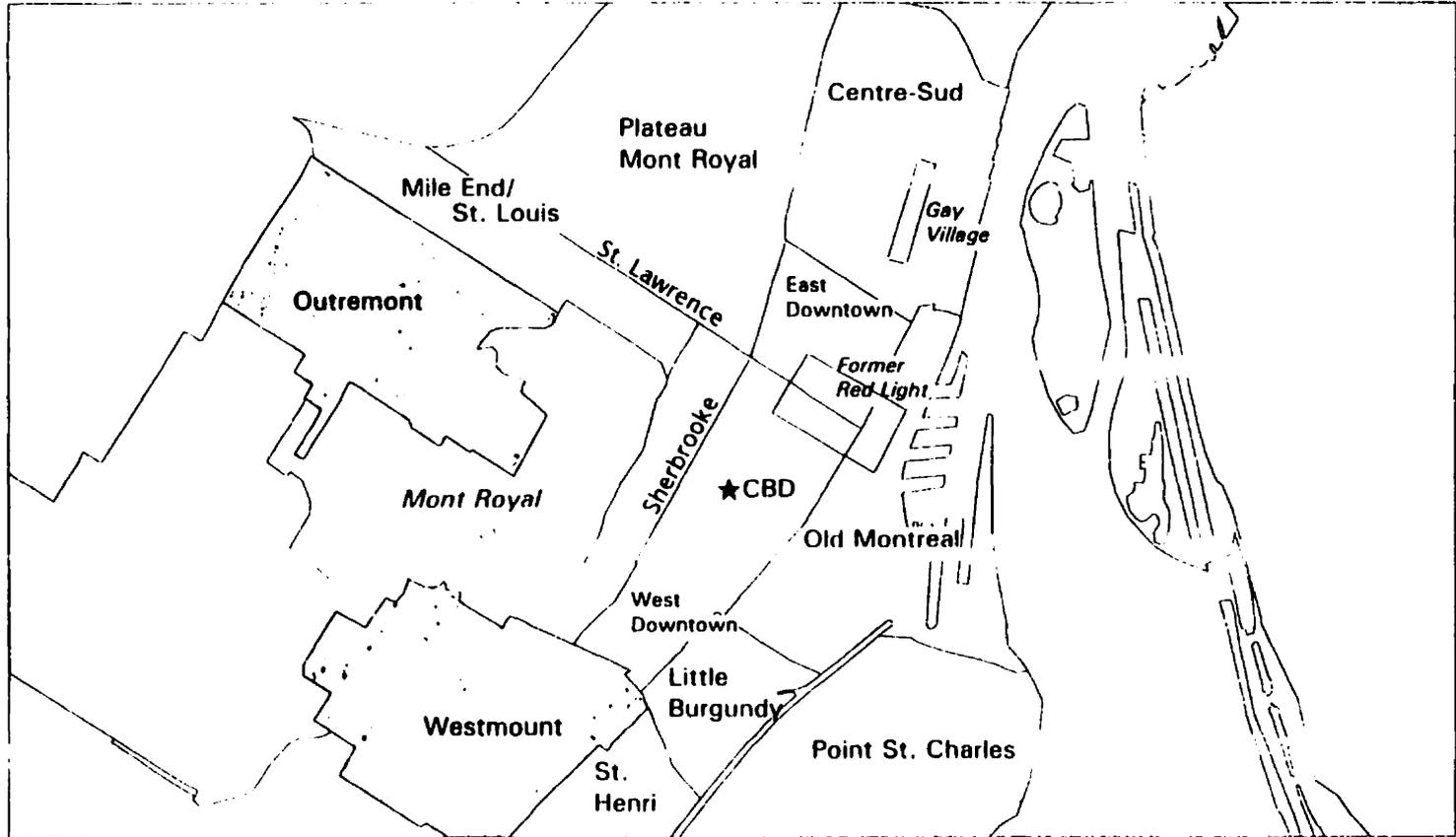
Further north, you buy a few groceries: some apples and an eggplant from the Moroccan fruit store -- cheese from Holland, sausage from Slovenia. Years ago, when the sign read 'grocery' and not 'marché', you'd have had a pram to push and you wouldn't be wearing the same shoes. Higher, but sturdy. A moving skirt. The women of Richler's 'harsh wonderland'. Here, you would find news from home, from Galicia, Poland, Austria, the Ukraine or Hungary. Tasting home was possible, but other things faded into the low facade of the street. But as you walked along, collecting the things that kept your house in order, you heard familiar tongues, and, most of the time, you knew what they were saying.

Today home is still a short walk. At Rachel street you move off the sidewalk. Many years ago, this was another place where the triplexes of the new world met the village markets of Europe. The Marché Saint-Jean-Baptiste, the place to buy vegetables, live chickens, rabbits, to see Mrs. Rosa de Lima, and talk to each other in broken English. Today, you enter the plaza, clear of walls and open to the sky. It's pretty desolate and has two views: the short skyscraper across the street and the huge textile factory that screams out Paris Star and blocks the old fire hall from view. Escaping the Saturday afternoon traffic, two women bring coffee and pastries. They organize their shopping bags on the bench, sit down and start to talk. It's a small pleasure to end the day telling stories of family, work, another continent, in Portuguese.

I look up at the sky. It's bright and harsh. The clouds are being pushed around by an autumn wind. Soon it will be dark and she'll be waiting. I stand up, walk the beaten path northwards, and finally, turn west, just slightly. I'm at the door.

St. Lawrence Boulevard, popularly called the Main, is a street that has played an important role in the social and cultural geography of Montreal throughout the twentieth century. It developed as the primary north-south access route to the central area extending from the seaport, through downtown, and into the northern rural hinterland of the island. By the late nineteenth century, it was among the most important commercial streets and transportation corridors of the Dominion's largest metropolis. Commercial expansion, immigration, and industrialisation in the late nineteenth century, however, would permanently define the social role of this street in the internal spatial divisions of the city. The expansion of the metropolis coincided with an Anglo-capitalist dominance of industry and the migration of thousands of rural, French-speaking people to work as labourers in the city. The social polarisation of the city's two dominant populations created by industrialisation translated into a symbolic division of the city along class, religious and linguistic lines. This 'dual city' has become one of Montreal's most central imagined geographies, with the Anglo-capitalists living in the northwest elite suburban district of Côte St. Antoine (today's Westmount) and the Francophone proletariat and petit bourgeoisie inhabiting the city's eastern industrial parishes (Figure 2). Situated roughly at the intersection of this emerging dichotomy, St. Lawrence Boulevard, has had a particular role to play in this well-worn tale. As the city expanded, this street became the symbolic dividing line at the axis of a bilingual and multicultural industrial metropolis. It emerged as the Main street of a 'third city', a border zone where people and activities that did not fit into either half of the 'dual city' found their own space in the metropolis. The result is a geographical location that represents the social and cultural multiplicity of a supposedly 'divided' city where the diverse populations of the metropolis met on the edge of Canada's 'two solitudes'.

Figure 2: MAJOR DISTRICTS OF CENTRAL MONTREAL



Critical urban research involves questioning established spatial categories and interpretations. This thesis explores the notion of Montreal as a 'dual city' from its frontier, St. Lawrence Boulevard, by examining both its representation as a border zone and the fluidity and complexity of its own material and social landscape. This polemical interpretation of Montreal as a linguistically and culturally divided city is at best a fiction and, at worst, a brutal generalization that strips the city of its internal social and cultural complexity. It is a story that overemphasizes the spatial polarisation between the English and French speaking populations and constructs the Main as a residual container of 'ethnic differences' with inflexible boundaries. At the same time, this imagined geography has on some level reflected existing conditions and shaped material outcomes. The role played by this border zone in the constitution of the gender geographies of Montreal and women's experiences of this space is the framework for this project. This research is an attempt to deconstruct this dualism by illustrating the centrality and permeability of this supposed 'border zone' and by considering the multiplicity of female identities that have been constructed and experienced in this place. In response to the spatial metaphors of marginality and the reconsideration of urban life as an ideal in feminist literatures, the objective of this thesis is to reconsider the importance of material border zones of urban public cultures in the constitution of female gender identities over the course of the twentieth century. I focus on the multiplicity of female identities that have been associated with the Main as a place of residence, experimentation, work and social life in order to undermine the boundaries of the 'dual city' and initiate the project of remapping the social and cultural geography of Montreal from a feminist perspective.

The representations of feminine identities and women's experiences of this supposed border zone throughout the twentieth century illustrate the complexity of identity and place involved in the production of the Main. In order to capture these material and discursive processes, I describe the Main as a border zone within the many overlapping 'urban public cultures' of Montreal, the collective -- but uneven -- civic cultures found in the city's newspapers, the physical public spaces of the city, and in the non-residential sites that line the city streets. As Ruddick (1996) has shown, the social

and cultural differentiation between public sites in the city is a discursive and often exclusionary process that operates far beyond the local level. Strong emphasis, therefore, has been placed on the discursive processes that shape the meaning of the Main and the identities that have been constructed within its realm. I use the discourses that surround the women of the Main to unravel the notion that urban public space is universally democratic and uniform (Domosh 1998; Goheen 1994, 1998; Mitchell 1995, 1996; Ruddick 1996; Ryan 1991, 1992, 1997) and to show that border zones provide a realm in which social and cultural groups that have been marginalized can contest their exclusion and construct their own social worlds. More than simply a static, physical and universal concept, 'urban public culture' implicates the many social and cultural groups that occupy space in Montreal and their overlapping discursive practices that shape urban politics and imagined geographies.

The border status of the Main makes it an ideal site for such an investigation because it raises important issues that lie at the interface between feminist theory and the postmodern use of spatial metaphors. More specifically, it is a site where the discursive use of metaphors of urbanism collides with feminist concerns regarding the representation and experience of gender and urban life. As the twentieth century progressed, the Main acquired a reputation for irrepressible complexity, for cosmopolitanism, for anomie. With its red-light district, varied 'ethnic' enclaves, tourist rooms, synagogues, sweatshops, vaudeville houses, pre-Stonewall 'queer'¹ bars and the presence of visibly different subjects on the street, the area has served as a representation of the differences that are central to the modern urban experience. Due to its border status, cultural critics have

¹I use the term 'queer' in varied contexts of the thesis. It is a term that denotes a definition of sexual identity that extends beyond simply gay or lesbian and usually refers generically to people and groups marked by dominant cultures as 'other' on the basis of sexuality. In categorizing marginalized sexualities and identities, 'queer' includes gay men and lesbians, as well as people who identify themselves as bisexual, transsexual, transgendered and/or sadomasochist. 'Pre-Stonewall queer bars' on the Main were, therefore, places where gay men and lesbians, sex trade workers and performers of both sexes and a marginalized heterosexual men such as transient labourers congregated. 'Queer', however, is also a theoretical strategy that subverts a clear distinction between homo- and heterosexualities, the critical dimension being marginality from heterosexual mainstream definitions of 'normal' sexuality.

frequently inscribed 'the Main' with characteristics that are often attributed to ideal urban social spaces: it is a place of constant movement, of shared anonymity and multiplicity, where transgressions are an integral aspect of the experience and production of 'place' (Allor 1997; Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Chassy 1993; Harel 1989; Kish 1974; Marcotte 1997; Rocheleau 1995; Simon 1991). Many of these descriptions of the Main resemble attempts to define 'urbanism' by North American urban sociologists earlier in the twentieth century (Jacobs 1961; Lofland 1973; Sennett 1970, 1977; Wirth [1938] 1969) and the descriptions of European cities with the dawn of the modern metropolis (see Berman 1982; Germain 1997; Remy 1990b; Ross 1988; Simmel [1950] 1969). Due to these characteristics, I describe the Main as a space of difference. It is a 'place' that epitomizes the recent fascination with difference among social theorists, not in the French feminist sense of *la différence* that refers to 'biological sex', but in terms of the multiple and shifting categories of identity such as 'race', class, gender and sexuality, which shape how individuals and groups enter and participate in city life (Fincher and Jacobs 1998). In this sense, it is a concrete illustration of the radical pluralist ideal of urbanism which informs many postcolonial, postmodern, feminist and even 'queer' theories (Bhabha 1994; Golding 1993; Knopp 1995; Probyn 1994; Sheilds 1991; Soja 1989, 1996; Soja and Hooper 1993; Wilson 1991; Young 1990a, 1990b).

Spaces of difference such as the Main present feminist researchers with as many challenges as they do opportunities. The category of 'difference' downplays gender as one form of embodied experience among many, while places where identities intersect offer the possibility of studying women in contexts where the multiple aspects of their identities are highlighted. Indeed, 'city life' and 'difference' are both contested terrains of feminist urban studies (Young 1990a). While poststructural and feminist spatial metaphors of 'city life' have been important discursive strategies for feminist and anti-racist scholars, the limitations of these ideals have often been revealed when they are viewed in the material context of women's lives in specific urban places. Feminist urban research has generally focused on the limitations to women's mobility produced within the urban environment, and most recently researchers have shown how different groups of women have been

'spatially' entrapped by the patriarchal structure of gender relations in the North American metropolis (see Gilbert 1998). If, as Young (1990a) has argued, the heterogeneity of urban social spaces such as the Main offers an important feminist ideal, material studies that consider the complexity of 'real' urban geographies are important projects in the study of gender, identity and city life. Feminist historians, while recognizing that urban space is structured by patriarchal relations, have recently provided a plethora of examples of how the complexity of modern urban life has provided women with the opportunity to question and produce constructions of gender and space (Copelman 1994; Deutsch 1994; Ewen 1985; Meyerowitz 1993; Peiss 1986; Ryan 1994; Ryan 1990, 1992; Squires 1994; Stansell 1986; Swanson 1995; Wilson 1991). These findings suggest that reconsidering spatial metaphors such as the urban ideal in relation to the representational and material production of particular urban places might offer a challenging framework for feminist urban analysis. Class, ethnicity, religion and sexuality have been particularly important forces shaping how women have experienced the Main, as well as how they have been represented in relation to its material sites. By developing a relationship between spatial discourses and the 'placement' of women in a particular urban place (Pratt and Hanson 1994), I highlight the multiple relations of identity involved in women's experience of urban life and their centrality to the construction of the Main as a site of difference. Throughout this thesis, these important tensions between limits and possibilities, representations and experiences, oppressions and transgressions in the urban experience are underscored by my analytical framework and the events and spaces under study.

With this challenge in mind, the thesis provides a series of case studies of the relationship between geographies of gender in Montreal's urban public cultures of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the construction of the Main as Montreal's 'third city'. While historians and other social scientists view 'city life' itself as bringing about opportunities for women, I turn my attention to the significance of a particular place within the city where new ideas about identity have been expressed and constructed (Pratt and Hanson 1994). I contribute, therefore, an understanding of the importance of a specific locale in the construction and experience of a multitude of female gender

identities, and reconsider the ideal of urban life through a material case study. In the late nineteenth century the Main emerged as a centre of commerce and transportation at a time when women were participating in working- and middle-class urban public cultures on a new scale (Barth 1980; Benson 1986; Peiss 1986; Ryan 1990). Women were present as shopkeepers, servers, garment workers, market vendors and entertainers, making up a significant portion of the labour force. For other women, the Main has been a site of consumption and pedestrian activity, an everyday place of shopping and entertainment that falls between more rigidly defined spheres such as the home and the workplace (Benson 1986; Peiss 1986; Swanson 1995; Zukin 1995). Due to these conditions, it is a place where women have participated in a variety of urban public cultures through the practice of their everyday lives as workers, shoppers, entertainers and/or spectators. While the Main has been an accessible space where norms could be disrupted, the shared nature of the space created new parameters and limitations. Many of Montreal's 'morally' contentious activities, for example, were confined there. The dance halls, cinemas, shooting galleries and night restaurants were part of the city's permissive night world, but the women who worked in the cabarets and brothels of the district were drawn into a world of commerce that reinforced their marginality. Although these sites were not separated from larger institutions that structured behavioral norms along gender lines -- indeed, in some spaces, norms were reinstated through regulation and commercial exchange -- they have been spaces where different groups of women have forged new identities in the ever-changing culture of modern city life.

This thesis, therefore, addresses two central questions: 1) how has the heterogeneous character of the third city provided opportunities for women to contest a gendered organization of urban space, and 2) how has this space been implicated in the communication of new and oppositional female identities? I specifically address recursive relationship between gender, representations of the Main, and the activities of particular groups of women. While contemporary readings of the Main underestimate the importance of gender and class and give primacy to 'ethnic' difference, I highlight other structures at play in shaping the symbolic meaning of the Main by turning to spaces in the present

landscape that embed histories of people and place. Many contemporary theorists have stressed the importance of undermining linear narratives of historical evolution to restore social and cultural multiplicity to urban landscapes of the past (Hayden 1995; Lefebvre [1974] 1991). Interpretations of contemporary urban places might be dramatically altered by reconsidering the material landscape and the clues that it can provide to the past agency of these less visible subjects (Lefebvre 1991). By reconsidering past relations of gender and difference embedded in the current landscape, I demonstrate that 'ethnicity' was but one form of identity that resonated within and from this border zone. I, therefore, attempt to recast the contemporary meaning of the Main, by selectively returning to its past to demonstrate that relations of gender have been integral to its production as a border zone (Lefebvre 1991). I begin with the present construction of the Main as a space of difference centred around consumption, and then return to the late nineteenth century to reexamine the production of the Main as a border zone with the rise of the modern industrial metropolis. Here I ask how changes to the material and symbolic landscape with the expansion of the industrial city transformed the ways in which women participated in urban public cultures of the Main.

The remainder of the thesis retraces the relationships between representations of female gender identities and the paths of various groups of women as they participate in the street's locales. The contemporary built environment of the Main has its roots in the previous cycle of capitalism -- its heterogeneous functions, variety in experience and populations are products of the industrial metropolis. Therefore, the spaces and events are limited to the period between 1880 and the present. The morphology of the present-day landscape led to consideration of four important forces that have shaped the gender relations along the Main: the expansion and concentration of the garment industry, commercial entertainments, prostitution and the impact of immigration. Each of these forces made the Main contentious within the dominant geography of gender in Montreal. The women whose lives were conducted in the clothing factories, the red-light district and the immigrant enclaves, moreover, were subject to regulation and surveillance in ways that produced broader discourses regarding gender and space. Drawing from these

historically constituted constructions of the Main, the thesis concludes by exploring how lesbians, women who live one of contemporary society's most contentious forms of gender alterity, make use of the Main as a site of social interaction and desire. For this group of women, the historically heterogeneous character of the Main has created a landscape through which they can contest heterosexual norms of gender by openly participating in broader urban public cultures in contemporary Montreal. In each case I ask how the morphology, cultural location, and activities of the Main's past produced gender geographies that have contributed to its construction as a contemporary space of difference.

To set the framework for this project, I begin by discussing established interpretations of the Main in relation to contemporary feminist and geographical research. In Chapter 1, I make the case for considering the Main as a place from which to reinterpret 'city life' from a feminist perspective. I present the specific characteristics of the Main as a space of difference, where gender constantly intersects with other forms of identity, producing complex discourses and a multiplicity of possible experiences. I also outline the methodological framework of the study and describe my primary sources. Chapter 2 is an analysis of how the development of the modern metropolis transformed the Main in ways that had important implications for the gender identities that were constructed in this border zone. Changes to the morphology, economy and residential population of the area in the late nineteenth century intensified the border status of the Main. The destruction of the mercantile economy and the rise of industry, popular entertainments and ethno-social segregation altered the ways in which women were represented in relation to the street, as well as in how they experienced its material sites. During this period, the locales that form the Main were established and the street's future as a space of difference was cast.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I analyze the formation of the garment district and show how the development of a multiethnic working-class culture centred on the Main created the conditions for women workers to contest their conditions of work, and more broadly, their

social position in the industrial city as factory workers. Chapter 3 focuses on the integration of women into the public sphere of work in the garment industry, and the relationship between the garment district and the labour movement. Conflicts over 'the sweated district', 'subcontracting' and women working in factories raised gender issues that were central to the political and social character of the Main in early twentieth century Montreal. Multiple constructions of gender, ethnicity, and religion intersected in labour halls and during strikes, May Day and Labour Day parades. In Chapter 4, these intersections are examined further through two industry-wide strikes in the early twentieth century. The 1910 cloakmakers' strike illustrates the importance of the street's working-class institutions for negotiating the roles played by working women in the industrial city. For both male unionists and early feminist reformers who tried to organize a female garment workers' union, women workers represented changes in gender norms among the working-classes in the industrial city. The tailors' strike of 1912 provides a more subversive example of how female garment workers used street spaces to contest the conditions of their labour and, more broadly, their assignment to a disenfranchised social status as 'women' workers.

While the Main offered opportunities to transgress dominant arrangements of gender and urban space, the power relations of gender were often more polarized than elsewhere in the city. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the commercial entertainment district of the Lower Main, a bright lights district that served as the front door to Montreal's red-light district for over sixty years. In Chapter 5, I build a relationship between the protected residential red-light district and the commercial entertainment spaces of the Lower Main during Montreal's 'open city' era from 1920 to its dismantling after World War II. I analyze the role of the Main in the economy of the red-light district and new meanings of sexuality and gender that are associated with the Main as the red-light was dismantled. In Chapter 6, I continue to explore the shifting alignments between 'feminine bodies', the public spaces of the street and the moral order of post World War II Montreal. The rise of striptease and transvestite shows, an emerging working-class 'queer culture', and male prostitution rings aggravated the sexual contentions, coding all spaces

and bodies along the Lower Main with a threatening form of sexual marginality. In the public imagination, the Lower Main emerged as a sensational container for the city's sexual 'others'.

Finally, in Chapter 7 we move up the hill to the 'multiethnic' shopping street of the Upper Main. Although the history of the street's European multiethnic enclaves lies beyond the scope of this study, the cultural pluralism and history of 'non-traditional' households does form an important, if subtle, backdrop for this chapter about lesbian desire along the Main. Chapter 7 takes the story into the realm of the contemporary experience of this portion of the Main from the perspective of one of the many subcultural groups that use the street as resource for social interaction and participation in urban public cultures as part of everyday life. Although lesbians are by no means a dominant subculture, the women interviewed demonstrate the importance of this border zone for women whose access to public space is restricted. Like the sex trade workers, servers, performers and garment workers before them, the Main serves as a rupture in dominant arrangements of gender and space, a place where they negotiate access to an urban public culture and locate their desires. As the final case study, Chapter 7 illustrates perhaps most clearly the cumulative effects of the production of this border zone over the course of the twentieth century, and how the Main functions for contemporary women living a contested form of gender alterity.

I began this introduction with an alternative story, my own mapping of the social and cultural geography of the Main and what it signifies to me as I stroll its sidewalks and trace its history. This thesis is full of such interpretations by other women and men who experienced its spaces and interpreted them through their own lenses of gender, sexuality, class, language and ethnicity. Each story attests to the complexity and fluidity of this border zone and the gender relations integral to many of its past and present locales. Granted, these stories are interpreted by me and bear the mark of my objectives, but they

are also informed by a broad literature in feminist and postmodern theory, urban studies and geography that are outlined in the following chapter. After building a framework of analysis for the thesis, in subsequent chapters we enter the many social worlds of the Main at selected points in the historical record. Many pages later, I conclude by returning to the story of the 'third city'. I reconsider the boundaries of the 'dual city' by highlighting the fluidity of the Main as a border zone and its centrality in the construction and experience of a multiplicity of female identities over the past century.

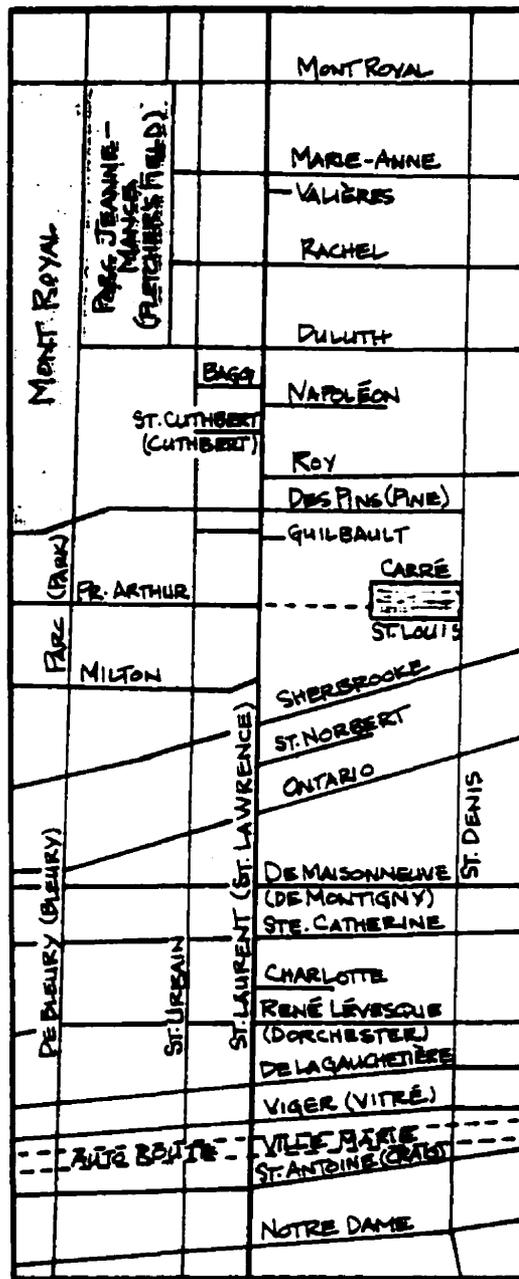


Figure 1.1: The Main, Intersections and Surrounding Areas.

CHAPTER 1

RE-IMAGINING THE MAIN

Dusk after a June rain. Suddenly some laser rays of setting sun between low clouds cast oval masks on a group of cyclists racing up the Main. Pedalling high-kneed into the narrowing beams aimed almost horizontally along the street. Their bare legs in socks folded at the ankles, flashing past a bar-café.

They flash past (inside, a pair of eyes watches, astonished at how the sun has pressed its oval stamp on knees, foreheads, chins), cycling toward another century. Past the last pickle barrel, over which Mr. Simka bends, a light beam through his chest; past the artist's building, now transformed into expensive noisy condominiums; past the Portuguese photo store with the bride standing in the window. Her soldier's X'd out. But even if he weren't, she'd be standing there in her white lace with everybody looking; the Main thing in the picture for a single minute of her life. The cyclists pedal fast. Their intense faces like eclipsed moons with only the forward part lit-up...

The bar door opens. The woman's gaze shifts, eyes intense with light reflected from the street, to another woman entering, dressed like a mandarin (raised collar, thin shapely mouth). Then back to the teenager: the girl's hand, gripping a café au lait glass; high cheekbones, dark eye-circles; yet young enough to be fresh at the turn of the century¹.

The Main has figured as a rupture in the urban fabric within the feminist literary imagination of Montreal, a place from which to write a counter-narrative to the masculine city. In the above quotation, drawn from Gail Scott's novel *Main Brides* (1993) the narrator sits in a café on the 'Main', examining the streetscape, imagining the lives of various women who enter her field of vision, and uses her observations to restore her sense of presence and to resist annihilation. Like Baudelaire or Benjamin decades earlier, the narrator is jarred by the intersection of speed, light and time in the landscape as history forces the turning of the centuries (Ross 1988). *Main Brides* is a testament to the possibility of the *flâneuse*, a narrative laced with a woman's agency as narrator, café patron and observer of urban life. As a *flâneuse*, the narrator has a different 'way of looking'. She chooses a marginal urban location and uses its female subjects to recover

¹Gail Scott, *Main Brides: Against Ochre Pediment and Aztec Sky* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993) 9.

a sense of historical continuity, writing a 'history of the present' rather than mourning the annihilation of space by time (Berman 1982; Harvey 1989; Munt 1995; Wilson 1991, 1995). She imagines her brides -- lesbian lovers, a rebellious Portuguese teen, a traveller and a Spanish radio announcer -- in complex portraits rather than depicting them as one-dimensional characters who contribute to the disorder of urban life. By writing these lives, the narrator gains a sense of historical continuity and connection, and finds "the courage to face the next century" (Scott 1993).

The Main is not an incidental back drop to Scott's (1993) stories of multiplicity and identity in Montreal. As in many of her other essays and short stories (Scott 1987, 1989), it is the place where the boundaries of Montreal, Québec and Canadian society overlap, a place to explore the complexity of identity and place. Using both the French and English to symbolize these shifts and collisions, Scott (1989) explores other facets of identity that arise along the Main as she sits in the blue-café. Through her narratives, the Main emerges as a contested border zone with a distinctly cumulative texture, characterized by a subversive combination of present and past, anomie and presence, marginality and centrality, restrictions and possibilities, a social space that incorporates characteristics that post-structural feminists have explored as ideals (hooks 1990; Rose 1993; Young 1990a, 1990b).

Like Scott, I view the Main as a site of possibility, a potential site from which to rewrite the city by highlighting the multiplicity of 'female' identities associated with its production as a space of difference. Although the street extends over a far greater physical distance, and the stories of difference embodied in its spaces are more numerous, I ground my examination of this street in a particular set of localities. The portion of St. Lawrence Boulevard that I refer to as 'the Main' extends from the walls of the old city, Ville Marie, north to Mont-Royal Avenue, corresponding precisely with the route of the first electric streetcar in 1892 (Figure 1.1). The contemporary built environment of this portion of the street still recalls the social and spatial divisions of the industrial metropolis (Figures 1.2 to 1.5). To the south, between Viger and René Lévesque streets, lies Montreal's



Figures 1.2 to 1.5: The Main looking north from rue St. Antoine (formerly Craig) (top left), south from rue Ste. Catherine (top right), south from avenue des Pins (formerly Pine Aveune) (bottom left) and north from avenue des Pins (bottom right), 1999.

'Chinatown'. Across René Lévesque and extending to Ontario Street are the remnants of city's red-light district, a testament to Montreal's reputation as an 'open city' throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the most fashionable restaurants, nightclubs and clothing stores in contemporary Montreal are between Sherbrooke and Prince Arthur. Between Prince Arthur Street and Mont-Royal Avenue, many of the loft buildings that once formed the centre of the Canadian garment industry have been divided into residences and studios, and the small shops that line the street are a melange of activities: European specialty shops, grocers and cafés, small restaurants and taverns, avant-garde used clothing stores and hair salons, and some upscale bistros and clothing stores.

THE DILEMMA OF 'DIFFERENCE': THE 'THIRD CITY' HYPOTHESIS

À travers la ville circulent deux foules qui se croisent dans les rues, se mêlent dans les véhicules de transport en commun, mais n'ont l'une avec l'autre ni contact intellectuel ni estime réciproque. En fait, Montréal contient deux villes; on pourrait même dire trois².

Montréal is after all a city divided (or thinks of itself as such) into the more affluent and Anglo west and the traditionally working-class Francophone east. If this generalization is already disturbed by the middle class and mainly French-speaking quartier of Outremont to the north or by those working-class and linguistically mixed ones to the south, as a topological statement it then breaks open on the line of the Main, Boulevard Saint Laurent, the street that comes up from the river and is scored by the marks left from its flows of immigrants: Jewish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek³.

Montreal entered the twentieth century as Canada's largest metropolis, an expanding commercial hub undergoing dramatic internal growth and restructuring. Industrial expansion, suburbanization, immigration, and rural to urban migration in the late nineteenth century transformed the industrializing city to an expansive metropolis with new spatial divisions. According to established interpretations of Montreal's history, this restructuring process strengthened the spatial and social polarisation of the city's English- and French-speaking populations, the English moving to the West and the French to the East (Blanchard 1953, 1992; Linteau 1982; McNicoll 1986, 1993). Consequently, Montreal has often been described in terms of its dual social order, what McNicoll (1993) has described as "deux villes en une", a city shared by Canada's 'two solitudes'. As I have argued, St. Lawrence Boulevard has an important role to play in this imagined 'dual city' in that it constitutes a border zone, an implicit 'third city' with its own characteristics. It not only represents linguistic divisions in this tale of two cities, but like many other cities, it is a street that symbolizes the class division of the modern metropolis. From the east, St. Lawrence Boulevard once represented the entrance into a world of English capital, symbolized by the Sun Life Insurance Company tower, the mansions of Westmount and

²"Throughout the city two crowds circulate and cross each other in the streets, mix in public transit cars, but there is no intellectual contact between them nor respect for each other. In reality, Montreal is made up of two cities; we could even say three" (author's translation) (Raoul Blanchard, *Montréal: esquisse de géographie urbaine* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 1992) 211.

³Elsbeth Probyn, *"Love in a Cold Climate": Queer Belongings in Québec* (Montréal: Research Group on Cultural Citizenship, 1994) 32.

the Golden Square Mile, and Anglo-Canadian department stores where English was the language of consumption. From the west, this dividing line was seen as the entry point to the working-class districts of the east end, a district of social contrasts; lined with the homes of the French mercantile elite and grandiose parish churches, its grand boulevards such as St. Joseph and St. Hubert were only the facades of a densely populated district of workers' homes, factories, taverns and small stores. Despite the complexity of the relations surrounding this dichotomy, the interpretation of Montreal as a 'dual city' with rigid divisions has been a powerful force in the local geographical imagination with important material outcomes.

As a dominant discourse, the notion of a 'dual city' is less a spatial ontology than a cultural trope that masks both the ethnic diversity of the populations living on either side of the dividing line and the diverse character of the Montreal population in the twentieth century. The notion of a 'dual city' poses these two landscapes as equal halves of a single dichotomy based on language and class, not considering the diversity contained among the residential populations within these portions of the city⁴. At the same time, ethnic divisions become apparent by the turn of the century, particularly during the era of mass migration (1890-1914) (Gilliland 1998; Lewis 1991; Olson 1989; Olson and Hanna 1990). As Figures 1.6 and 1.7 show, between 1901 and 1911 the bilingual and culturally pluralistic population of industrial Montreal added an ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity to its asymmetry of class. While there were some exceptions to the rule, the census districts of East Montreal were extremely homogeneous. It was almost completely a Canadian-born, Francophone, Catholic region of the city, inhabited by a very low proportion of the city's growing number of foreign-born residents (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). The west-end, on the other hand, had its own class boundaries, with the Anglo-elite living above the escarpment along the lower ramparts of Mont-Royal and working-class

⁴See: Sherry Olson and David Hanna, "The Social and Cultural Landscape of Montreal, 1901", *Historical Atlas of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) Vol. 3, Plate 30. For studies of social and ethnic residential segregation and mobility in nineteenth and early twentieth century Montreal see: Gilliland (1998), Hanna and Olson (1983), Lewis (1991) and Olson (1989).

ORIGINS BY DISTRICT 1901 and 1911

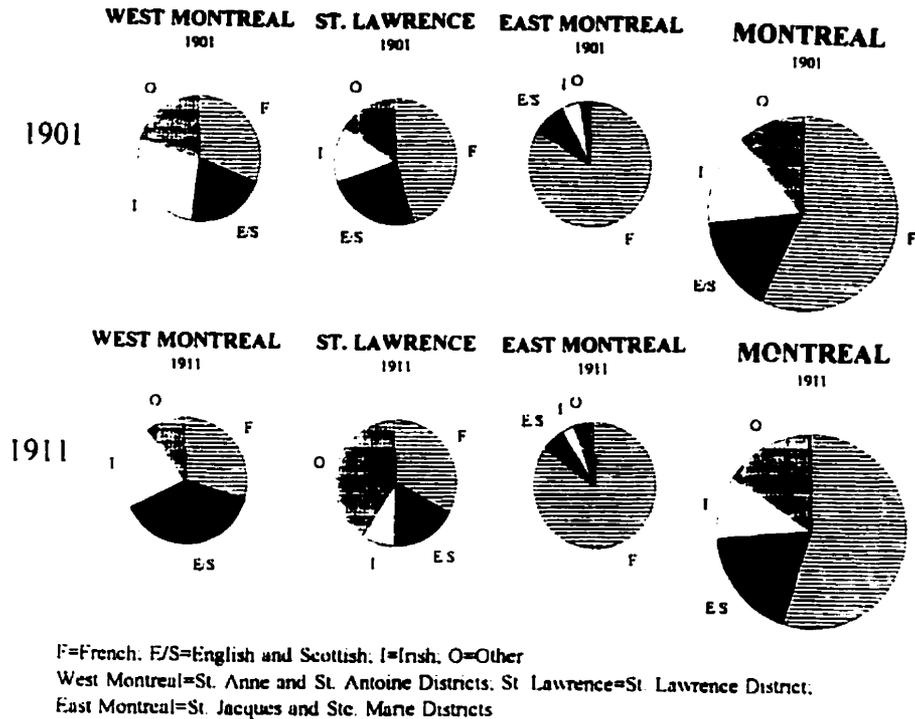
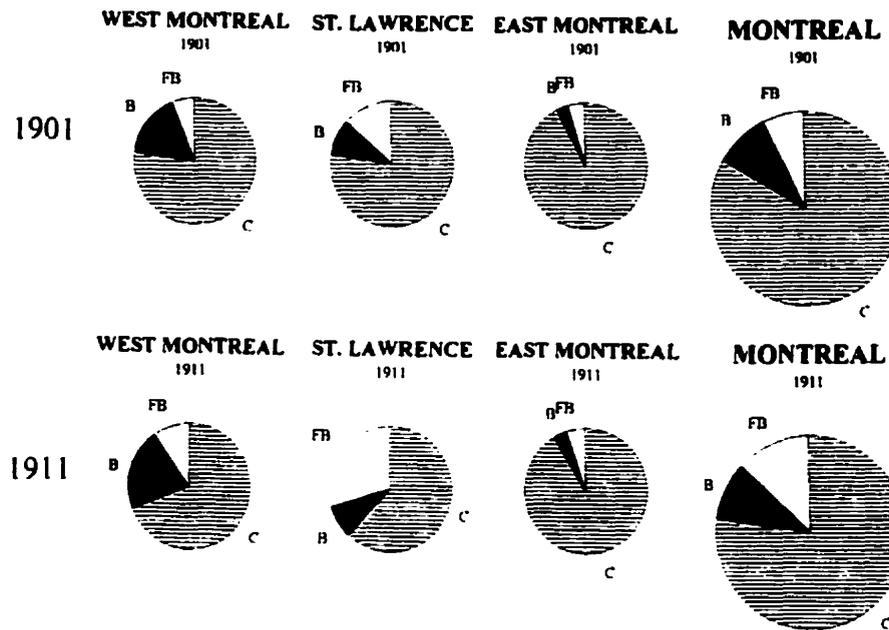


Figure 1.6: Origins by District, Montreal, 1901 and 1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1901 and 1911.*

populations of diverse ethnic groups living in ethnically defined neighbourhoods on the industrial flatlands below (Ames [1897] 1972; Linteau 1992b). In contrast with East Montreal, this area was far from homogeneous. Large proportions of the French, Irish, English, Scottish, and foreign-born populations inhabited West Montreal in 1901 (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). Between 1901 and 1911, however, there was an increase in the proportion of the Anglophone population, which might suggest that the English and French populations were moving in opposite directions. By 1911, moreover, the proportion of the foreign-born population in this area only paralleled the city average and the proportion of individuals of 'other' ethnic origins living in the district had decreased despite an increase in this category for the city as a whole.

Imagining Montreal as a 'dual city', moreover, has meant that some districts are

PLACE OF BIRTH BY DISTRICT
1901 and 1911



C=Canada. B=British (including British Possessions). FB=Foreign Born
West Montreal=St. Anne and St. Antoine Districts. St. Lawrence=St. Lawrence District.
East Montreal=St. Jacques and Ste. Marie Districts

Figure 1.7: Place of Birth by District, Montreal, 1901 and 1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1901 and 1911.*

understood only as remainders. Populations that did not fit into this dichotomy occupied the St. Lawrence District⁵ surrounding the Main, creating what has sometimes been called the 'third city' (Blanchard 1992; Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gubbay 1989). Considering the ethnicity and place of birth of the residents of this district during the same period, there is material evidence of this 'third city' (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). The St. Lawrence District was the most ethnically diverse census district in the city between 1901 and 1911, and had the highest proportion of foreign-born residents. Over this period, there was a marked decline in the population of French origin in this district, which also attests to some spatial polarisation occurring between the populations of the industrial metropolis.

⁵Before 1921, the St. Lawrence Census District was comprised of two wards, St. Lawrence and St. Louis, which were divided by St. Lawrence Boulevard. The north-south boundaries of the St. Lawrence District were Craig and Duluth and the east-west were Durocher and St. Denis.

These figures also provide early evidence of the ethnic diversity and immigrant history of the St. Lawrence District. While in 1901, this area was no more diverse than the census districts in the West Montreal, by 1911 more than one third of the population reported ethnic origins other than French, English, Scottish or Irish and the foreign-born population was the largest in the city. From the colonial gaze of the Anglo-elites in the west, St. Lawrence Boulevard might have represented the ethnically diverse gateway to the social world of the Francophone proletariat, but when seen from the east it may also have signalled an entrance into a world of ethnic and social diversity, yet another asymmetry in the binary of the 'dual city'.

As the main street of the 'third city', St. Lawrence Boulevard has been understood as a place where populations that were 'remainders' in the dual spatial order of the city were often concentrated. Most interpretations, therefore, read the diversity of the Main as rooted in, and structured around, asymmetrical relations of ethnicity and class. This characterization of the Main as the 'third city' refers to the association of this district with immigrants, specifically with the Eastern European Jewish immigrant enclave that developed around the street from the turn of the century until the post World War II era (Gubbay 1989; Tulchinsky 1984). The Jewish population was the city's third largest ethno-cultural group between 1901 and 1951 (McNicol 1993; Linteau 1982, 1992b). The Main became identified as 'Jewish space' during this period. With the development of a smaller Italian enclave to the north (Ramirez 1980, 1984; Boissevain 1970) and a 'Chinatown' at the intersection of St. Lawrence and de la Gauchetière (Chan 1991; Helly 1987) in the early twentieth century, the district incorporated the most significant ethno-cultural differences in the modern metropolis. In the language of the first half of the twentieth century, the Main was seen as a 'cosmopolitan space' where working-class French and immigrant populations met and interacted on the edge of the Anglo-capitalist city (Anctil 1988, 1997). In the early twentieth century, for example, English guide books

depicted the Main as part of "the populous, cosmopolitan and noisy east end"⁶. Its western class boundaries were fixed, while its boundary to the east was much more fluid. The ethno-cultural specificities of the Main, moreover, certainly made it the 'third city' in the minds of outsiders.

Asymmetrical relations of class and ethnicity on the ground have not been the only reasons for the construction of the Main as a space of difference. Its 'third city' status derives as much from an association with specific ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identities as from the types of activities that developed along the street. St. Lawrence has been occupied not only by a diversity of 'other' ethnic groups, but also by the populations, institutions and economic activities that were not welcome by economic and religious elites in east or west Montreal. The association of the Main with the sweatshops of the garment industry, 'immoral' activities like prostitution, gambling and organized crime, transient lodgers and working-class popular entertainments are central elements in the construction of the Main as a border zone within the imagined and lived geography of modern Montreal. As a central thoroughfare and primary commercial artery, the character of the Main is not solely defined by the surrounding residential population. Its role as a border zone is perhaps more importantly derived from its physical location at the centre of the city and the mixed character of land use. Due to its centrality as a place of work, entertainment and consumption, men and women from all over the city participated in the many social worlds of the Main.

An economic or ecological interpretation would perhaps provide a simple explanation as to why the institutions and businesses of new immigrants, cheap popular entertainments, sweat shops, rooming houses and shops filled with cheap consumer goods have lined the Main throughout the twentieth century. Low rents and flexible building layouts, the proximity of the street to the port and railway station, and its location on the

⁶Charles W. Stokes, *Here and There in Montreal and the Island of Montreal* (Toronto: Musson Book Co., 1924) 57.

fringes of the city's primary business districts have been important factors in explaining the activities that have developed along the Main. The accumulation of these activities along the Main has not, however, been simply a 'natural' process whereby prostitution and illegal taverns, for example, were part of the immigrant enclave purely because rents were low and residents transient. As Marxist and poststructural scholars have argued, space is produced (Harvey 1989; Lefebvre 1991) and this production includes ideological, institutional and discursive forces that give sites within the city social and cultural meanings that do influence material outcomes (Lefebvre 1991; Zukin 1991). The suggestion that there is a relationship between the Main as the territory of the city's 'ethnic' others and the 'natural' accumulation of contentious entertainment and economic activities is also extremely problematic (Anderson 1991, 1998). While few contemporary historians would interpret the coexistence of the red-light district and immigrant enclaves of the Main as a product of the 'immoral' practices of immigrants, there remains an assumption that the 'ethnic' difference of the Main positioned it beyond the realm of control by hegemonic legal and religious powers. Bourassa and Larrue, for example, have suggested that due to its ethnic character, the Main "...a en effet échappé à la vigilance des clergés catholique et protestant et, surtout, à la surveillance des autorités policières municipales qui s'y sentait comme en pays étranger"⁷.

The Main, however, has never been outside the social order or beyond the limits of control. As I will demonstrate, the Main was subject to intense levels of police surveillance, scrutiny by religious authorities and reformers, and public debate. It has always, therefore, played an integral part in the production of the internal social and cultural geography of Montreal and the maintenance of its specific relations of power. Lying at the centre of the third city, the Main has in some ways been the city's permissive edge, but it also plays an integral role in the production of cultural, social, gender and sexual boundaries. Like most border zones, the Main has been produced through "a

⁷...it, in fact, escaped the vigilance of the Catholic and Protestant clergy, and, especially, the surveillance of the municipal police authorities who felt that it was a foreign country"(author's translation) (Bourassa and Larrue 1993: 14).

complex process of social activity and cultural work" (Shields 1991: 4) through which activities and populations have both assumed and been assigned to the Main. As Stallybrass and White (1986: 201) have argued, "Cultural identity is inseparable from limits; it is always a boundary phenomenon and its order is always constructed around the figures of its territorial edge". Through discourses that depend on the building of cultural myths about which bodies and activities in the city are assigned to the margins, the Main has played an integral role in the maintenance of the dual city (Kristeva 1980, 1982; Probyn 1994; Shields 1991; Stallybrass and White 1986; Stam 1988).

This process of building cultural myths about which bodies and activities are 'marginal' through an association with the Main is gendered. For example, if the Main was a zone of sexual commerce and experimentation for the French-Canadian working-class to its east in the mid-century, the figure of the female prostitute in the cabarets of the Lower Main was its discursive body. In another context, the female garment worker occupies the Main as a social and ethnic margin at the turn of the century, as she aligns herself with the international union movement germinating in the labour halls and taverns along the Main. In each case, these female identities represented broader cultural anxieties about gender, sexuality and space that, although they were positioned on the margins, were discursively central in the negotiation and definition of other hegemonic spatial arrangements. Because the Main remains an imagined border zone, contemporary subversions of norms of gender and sexuality are also seen as an integral element of the Main as 'place'. Although they are minor figures in the crowd, female participants in youth subcultures are a visible presence along the street. Lesbians, female squeegee punks and young students often occupy the street from the margins of gender, domesticity and sexuality, and they use their bodies and sites along the Main to contest gender norms and participate in its many urban public cultures.

This vision of the Main as margin, however, is limited. Although feminist theorists in the late 1980s and early 1990s have sought to reconfigure margins as 'sites of resistance' to hegemonic and singular definitions of identity, the use of margins as an

analytical tool or an ideal now appears problematic. Feminists and postcolonial theorists originally used the subversive and resistant nature of the margins to expose the limits of identity politics in liberal democratic political systems that, it was argued, strove to incorporate margins into the centre and depended on notions of fixed identities (Bondi 1992, 1993; Ferguson 1990; hooks 1984, 1990, 1992, 1994; de Lauretis 1990; Rose 1993a, 1994a; Spivak 1988, 1990). hooks, in particular, reimagined margins as "sites of possibility" in the early 1990s:

There is an intervention, a message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as a site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. (hooks 1990: 343)

In spatial terms, feminist geographers also began to stress the importance of "crossing boundaries" (Bondi 1993) to subvert dominant categories that define real and imagined geographies, moving into spaces where one's identity is odd or beyond representation because this position creates the displacement of the boundaries between margins and centres, and refuses categorization within the language of the dominant system (Bondi 1993; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Rose 1993a, 1994a, 1994b). Many of these same political theorists have, more recently, recognized the problems of 'idealizing' the margins as sites of resistance (Lorde 1984; Trinh Minh-ha 1989), and Probyn (1994) has even argued that the closed nature of the centre-margin dichotomy is no longer a useful political tool.

This centre-margin dichotomy broadly informs the interpretation of the Main in this thesis. Not content to limit my interpretation of gender, place and difference on the Main to this framework, I seek to deepen an understanding of material border zones. The production of the Main as a border zone depends as much on the construction and assignment of what is considered marginal at given points in the historical record as it does on copresence, mixing and juxtaposition, characteristics that have often been understood as the hallmarks of modern urban life (Berman 1982; Germain 1997; Remy

Most Cosmopolitan Street on Continent Is the Famous 'Main'

When any citizen is in need of entertainment wants to go to places and see things, is fond of surprises and mysteries, wants material for a novel, or a thrilling short story, longs to hear foreign tongues and observe foreign customs, yearns for foods as they are cooked in Paris, London, New York, Moscow, Vienna, Timbuctoo, Port Said, Yokohama, Belgrade, and a thousand other places, let him betake himself to the "Great St. Lawrence Blvd."

This street never sleeps, it is awake at all hours of the night and day. It seethes with humanity of all races, creeds and colors.

Stately banking institutions, great wholesale and jobbing houses, scores of factories, hundreds of shops and markets, private dwellings, laundries, broiling houses, labor exchanges, questionable dives, known underworld [], gambling joints, communist secret meeting places, fortune tellers, shooting galleries, peep shows, bits of the circus; in fact, there is everything on St. Lawrence Blvd. more commonly known as the "Main St." to most people, which [the] human mind might conceive or desire.

The Occidentals and the Orientals are intermingled. It is a street of mysterious odors; some pleasant, others nauseating.

St. Lawrence Blvd. is a combination of bits from every city in the world. No street anywhere on the American continent is so colorful, interesting and fascinating. To know the "Main" as it is, one has to enter into its spirit.

You can buy anything in this thoroughfare; priceless diamonds, Bibles, dope, opium, bad liquor, clothes, luxurious furs, motor cars, and a thousand and one things. You can rub shoulders with gamblers, dope fiends, pick pockets, wealthy merchants, clergymen, bankers, shysters, and every other type and kind, which go to make up the human race.

Mysterious doors open only to those who have the necessary password. Selling is an art, and it is practiced here with all the frills, and knowledge of human faults, known to science.

It is a street of bargaining whether the transaction runs into cents, dollars, or thousands of dollars.

Children cry, scream, laugh, chatter and play here in their hundreds.

Here and there it is a veritable farmyard, hens chuck, cocks crow, turkeys gobble, pigs squeal, dogs bark and cats miew.

One can meet more characters within a distance of two hundred yards, on the Main street during a busy part of the day, than any other street, of any other city in Canada.

It is a study of things: authentic, heart breaking; elevating, educational, mystifying; cruel, kind and brutal.

Robberies and murders have been planned and plotted in some of the dives which go to make up St. Lawrence Blvd.

Some of the largest contributions from charitable appeals come from this street. A big percentage of what Montreal manufactures originates from the up-to-date factories also on this thoroughfare.

London has its "Peticoat Lane," New York its "Bowery," but Montreal has its "Main St."

When Montreal has outgrown itself, when places we know today have been obliterated, the Main will always be there. It has a niche in this great city all to itself; time will never change it.

How few in Montreal know St. Lawrence Main, and yet it is the boarder line twixt East and West. Visitors appreciate a trip down Main street, because it conveys to them something different, so diversified are the interests, and attractions which it offers. Wealth and poverty live next door to each other.

People live there and love it; people die there, and dying, love it. Sons follow fathers in the small and large businesses, heritages handed down; nothing can wean the inheritors of the main's magnetic pull.

The Great St. Lawrence Blvd. is a remarkable place to explore; the more one sees of it, the less one knows of it.

It is shrouded in a cloak of disguise, which only its inhabitants truly peep behind, and surely what they find is very human, for no one seems anxious to leave it.

Inquisitive folk are allowed to see just enough of what St. Lawrence Main presumably wants to hide, to make them more anxious and eager to see more.

"That is good business."

Figure 1.8: Newspaper description of the Main from the 1930s. Source: *Standard* 13 June 1931.

Échoppes, viviers, poulaillers....

La rue St-Laurent est notre tour de Babel!

"Excusez-moi, monsieur. La rue Marie-Anne, c'est loin?"

Le passant au teint basané me répond avec un terrible accent italien, illustrant sa réponse d'un geste de la main: "C'est la troisième rue". Si l'on ne m'avait pas prévenu, l'accent du passant m'aurait étonné. Mais on m'avait dit que je verrais des choses qu'on ne voit pas ailleurs, boulevard St-Laurent, et c'était vrai.

En déambulant par "le boulevard", on est frappé par la diversité des devantures et des vitrines des magasins et de ces échoppes sombres, dépourvues de réclames tapageuses, où gisent pêle-mêle les objets les plus hétéroclites: une guitare d'origine douteuse voisine avec une vieille machine à écrire. Pas de néons, ni d'enseignes voyantes, on passerait sans voir.

Bazar de Mille et Une Nuits

Ici, un restaurant hongrois vente sa spécialité "goulash": plus loin, des vendeurs de "pizza"; de quoi satisfaire les palais les plus exigeants.

Mais ce qui m'a le plus surpris, ce sont les myriades de produits offerts. Il y a de tout, des complets à deux pantalons aux stèles mortuaires, en passant par les tapis au morceau et les perles cultivées.

Au-dessus de toute cette promiscuité d'humanité et d'objets plane le concert bruyant d'un trafic turbulent. On s'arrête devant un magasin qui affiche une pancarte en trois langues. La vitrine est littéralement envahie de stalactites de saucisses de toutes grandeurs. Des cornichons dardent leur reflet vert à travers des bocaux énormes. Juste à côté, un coiffeur préconise une coupe de cheveux "sanitaire". Plus loin, c'est une boucherie "kosher" voisinant avec un magasin de fouritures.

Des morceaux de pays

Viennent ensuite les épiceries grecques ou syriennes. On y trouve les spécialités importées, introuvables partout ailleurs dans la ville: olives de Kalamat baignant encore dans leur huile, légumes du Moyen-Orient, pains plats, sans mie (appelées syriens) qui vous laissent au toucher une poussière farineuse, café moulu très fin du Yémen. Un mélange d'odeurs douces et âcres des diverses épices émane de ces boutiques, comme autant d'effluves subtiles de contrées exotiques. Ici, c'est plus que des produits que l'on vous vend, ils sont des morceaux de pays, des costumes.

De tout, moins cher

Un chahut de voix, une foule grouillante; nous voici au marché, devant les négoce de légumes et de fruits. On peut se procurer ces denrées à des prix bien inférieurs à ceux des "supermarkets". Ainsi les tomates se vendent à 10c.; la livre au lieu de 19c.; les citrons, 39c. la douzaine au lieu de 50c.; les raisins, à 25c. les deux livres au lieu 29c.; et l'on pourrait énumérer indéfiniment. Quant aux viandes, on note également un décalage de prix entre le marché de la rue Rachel et les "supermarkets" les plus achalandés. Évidemment vous ne payez pas la présentation: pas de cartons imperméabilisés, ni de papier cellophane, c'est le produit seulement, quelquefois meilleur, en tout cas moins cher.

On peut "marchander"

Une odeur de poulailler vous saisie à plein nez: c'est le marchand de volaille. Ici on égorge le poulet de votre choix, on y vend également des oeufs du jour et autre produits de la ferme. Un peu plus loin, ce sont les marchands de poisson (qui n'est pas toujours frais). Mais chose surprenante on trouve, chez certains, des poissons vivants s'ébattant dans des viviers; d'autres, alimentés directement par des pêcheries, vous garantissant la fraîcheur de leurs produits. Il y a là de quoi satisfaire le client le plus difficile. Les palabres vont leur train; on discute, on insiste et finalement le client emporte son paquet, assuré de l'avoir obtenu à vil prix. Il faut dire que cela fait la joie d'une grande partie du "popolo", surtout des ménagères qui peuvent exercer leurs capacités d'achats et se vanter d'obtenir les meilleurs prix, alors qu'aux "supermarkets" cette joie leurs est supprimée, les prix d'affichés ne souffrant aucune discussion.

Du temps et du souffle

À condition d'avoir du temps et le souffle long, le boulevard St-Laurent est incontestablement la rue des aubaines.

De prime abord on trouve un peu choquant ce mélange d'échoppes accotées l'une à l'autre, mais ce désordre n'est pas sans charmer par la suite. Et puis il y a les gens, la diversité des langues et des costumes, autant de choses variées et surprenantes qui ne vont pas sans plaire. Il est dit qu'à chaque fois que vous passerez par le "boulevard" quelque chose de nouveau attirera votre attention.

Le soir, le décor change. Seule la lueur crue des néons dignants, c'est la règle des nocturnabules qui commence.

Figure 1.9: Newspaper description of the Main in the 1960s. Source: *Petit Journal* 16 Oct. 1960.

1990a; 1990b; Ross 1988; Sennett 1970, 1977, 1990, 1994; Young 1990a, 1990b). A closer look at the popular discourses surrounding the Main over the last century indicates that it has been understood as a dynamic site where segregation, identity and boundaries are contested (Figures 1.8 and 1.9). The ways in which they are contested, however, depend less on a binary opposition of margins and centres than on an uncontainable heterogeneity, copresence and juxtaposition of goods, identities and activity spaces. Each of these newspaper portraits, drawn from two very different periods in the twentieth century, shares this characterization of the Main as a dynamic space where differences in land use, consumer goods and populations define the landscape and are integral to the nature of social interaction. Separated by a span of thirty years and written for mainstream consumption by journalists from the two dominant linguistic groups, each article stresses the mixing of cultures, classes, goods, accents and languages found along the Main. The 1931 English press clipping asserts that the Main "seethes with the humanity of all races and creeds" and describes the Main as a collage of activities from cities all over the world. The 1960 French language article similarly stresses how "[des] morceaux de pays" [bits of countries] from all over the world can be found along the Main, and emphasizes the diversity of languages found on the signs of the street. Both describe the Main as a site of surprising juxtapositions of poverty and wealth, traditional family values and underworld activities, and a wide range of economic and land use activities -- from factories to 'ethnic' shops, housing to tattoo parlours. Finally, both emphasize the coexistence and proximity of a diversity of people and goods that converge in the display windows and on the street in haphazard and, at times, in indiscriminate ways.

These juxtapositions, often used to characterize the experience of the metropolis, continue to be foundational to the ways in which the Main is imagined and understood in the post-industrial metropolis. In the 1980s and 1990s, newspaper columns and campaigns to "Save the Main" have focused less on the static preservation of the street's very functional buildings and more on the conservation of social and cultural diversity. In the 1980s, for example, heritage activist Christophe Caron wrote an article for the *Gazette* in defense of the Main against revitalisation schemes and reiterated the age-old

celebration of the Main as a site of copresence, interaction and juxtaposition of social and cultural differences in Montreal:

St. Laurent is the sort of social space where pretence and social polarisation are -- at least for the time being -- out of place. Along most segments of the Main, highbrows and lowbrows mingle with ease. What was once the dividing line for the two solitudes has become, *par la force des choses*, the foremost crossroads and meeting ground for Montreal's dozens of races, nationalities and subcultures⁸.

This interpretation of the Main as a singular site of heterogeneity and multiplicity, the unique location of 'other' Montrealers, however, strips this place of the varied and fragmented cultural and social practices that make up its past and present. The particular celebration of the multiethnic history of the Main, as it coincides with an increase in specialized consumption of 'ethnic' foods and goods, erases the specificity of social worlds that have been lived along the Main. Absent in most contemporary interpretations, moreover, are its spaces of resistance and the sites that do not fit into a version of the ethnic shopping street cleansed for middle-class consumers. Labour halls, Zionist and socialist bookstores, lesbian community centres, radical feminist art galleries, dance halls, tourist rooms, night restaurants and sweatshops have been the foundations of the Main's social and cultural meanings. Finally, as these absent spaces indicate, with the celebration of the multiplicity of the Main has come a tendency to relativize gender as an important category of identity. Even when writing about the declining red-light district, for example, Sypkes has argued, "...The Main is still essentially The Main. It is the multi-ethnic, multi-purpose, *non-gender*, layer cake it has always been, and, barring large scale grandiose intervention, it will likely remain so, by virtue of its diversity rooted in history"⁹ (my emphasis). Moreover, the fact that the Main was constructed as a border zone in relation to the identities of the women who inhabited its locales, such as the red-light district, the

⁸Christophe Caron, "The Main's renewal threatens its diversity," *Gazette* 27 Sept. 1986.

⁹Pieter Sypkes, "The Main," *The Fifth Column* Winter 1982: 22.

garment sweat-shops and the shopping street of the 'ethnic' enclave, is minimized by this emphasis on 'difference'.

Many locales and identities that have been constructed along the Main involve an intersection between gender and other forms of identity. The red-light district involved specific understandings of gender roles and identities. These identities often had a particular 'ethnic' signification in the popular imagination. The most infamous madames, for example, were Ida Katz, Emilie Beauchamp and Lucie Bissantti (née Delicatto), all women who emerged from a multiethnic working-class culture and acquired great wealth during the Depression and the Second World War (Plante 1950). Prostitutes working in the red-light district, both male and female, were constructed as French rural migrants or the fallen children of the French working-class. Representations of the overlords of this district, American outlaws who had curly black hair and wore flashy ties and pointed shoes, are portraits of a morally threatening form of masculinity that refer indirectly to a specific ethnic identity (Plante 1950). Labour leaders who met with workers in the labour halls of the district were constructed as Americanized Jews corrupting 'Canadian' workers. The socialist women involved in May Day parades and the garment workers unions were also constructed as Jewish, while the immobile female labour force of the industry was depicted as French-Canadian. Competition for the control of the third city was expressed through anti-semitic attacks on Orthodox Jewish men by French-Canadian male youths using the gender and ethnically specific practice of pulling on long beards (Rome 1978). Finally, the Main has a gender-neutral signification in the present, where gender is levelled by the diversity of other forms of identity and space.

Drawing on recent examinations of scale, identity and place (Gilbert 1997; Gregory 1994; Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Pratt 1998; Smith and Katz 1991), I suggest that grounding the study of gender in the various locales and social worlds that make up the Main can provide a more complete understanding of its production that includes the construction and experience of gender identities in place. Allor (1997: 48) has highlighted the problem of understanding the Main as a place where "...present' pasts of different

groupings, of different communities are subsumed within more or less foundational or ontological groundings of one cultural history". His interpretation of the Main positions it as a place of conjuncture where the shifting fragments of its 'present pasts' and various micro-spaces meet and come into relation (Allor 1997). Similarly, in Probyn's (1994) exploration of 'belongings' in Québec, the Main figures as a place where languages and identities are constantly shifting and coming into contact. For Probyn (1994), the Main is an exemplary site where the singularities of belonging are undone, where hierarchies of identity are disrupted, displaced and inverted. Each of these perspectives provides an entry point from which to reimagine the Main. Disrupting the monolithic and singular interpretation of the Main as a space of unique and segregated differences -- a space separated by its third city status -- the Main is implicated in the unravelling of broader alignments of identity in Montreal that include gender. The Main moves from a space that represents differences, to a place in which differences are constantly produced, negotiated and come into contact. If, as Probyn (1994) argues, border zones are important because their liminal character strips subjects of their singularities and builds relationships between a multiplicity of other 'ways of being', the Main can be framed as a material site of feminist interest, a landscape from which to reimagine the city. The Main becomes a 'place' where a plethora of 'other' possibilities have been, and might be, imagined, lived and communicated.

THIRD SPACE: GENDER, SPACE AND DIFFERENCE

Almost all of the thinking we do about the values of community gives greater value to the geographical centres of community life than to the boundaries between communities. The community seems strengthened, its identity revealed, by defining the center. The center as a place of life, and the edge as a weak zone, seems indeed a sort of natural order. Yet in the ecology of most natural systems, the greatest biological activity occurs where different zones meet, as in a swamp or a forest, species congregate at the boundaries where they interact with other species¹⁰.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Main has been a place where the closures and certainties upon which many spatial boundaries depend are uncertain and incomplete, and

¹⁰Richard Sennett, "The Powers of the Eye," *Urban Revisions: Current Projects for the Public Realm*, Russell Ferguson ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994) 69.

therefore, has provided a contrast to, and disrupted supposedly secure boundaries between, populations and activities (Allor 1997; Genocchio 1995). The Main is, in this sense, not just the remainder in the city's binary oppositions such as public and private, English and French, and Catholic and Protestant, but also the boundary zone where these binaries collide. Bringing together an assemblage of marginal sites and populations, the Main has been constituted through its opposition to hegemonic and homogeneous identities. In this way, the Main resembles what Foucault (1980, 1986) has described as a *heterotopia*, a counter-site where all societal spatial boundaries are juxtaposed, represented, contested and inverted (Allor 1997; Soja 1995, 1996).

Geographers have argued that such *heterotologies* are central sites for the investigation of a new mode of spatial thinking that disrupts binaries of past and present, margin and centre, and real and imagined space (Soja 1995, 1996; Soja and Hooper 1993). Drawing together the works of postmodern, postcolonial and feminist theorists, Soja (1996) has argued that postmodern geographies of resistance share a common search for what he has described as a 'third space', sites that disrupt a Cartesian epistemology by calling into question the relationships between time and space, abstract and real geographies, and which strive to open up 'other' possibilities (Soja 1996). Foucault's (1980, 1986) use of *heterotopia* to open historical geographies to decentred subjects, Lefebvre's (1991) use of social space to disrupt the binary between abstract and real space, hooks' (1990) use of the margins as sites of resistance and radical openness, and Rose's (1993) use of 'paradoxical space' as a means to question the transparency of space from a feminist perspective, are all illustrations of what Soja describes as "a vivid third space imagination" (Soja 1996). Bhabha's (1994) exploration of a hybrid and resistant 'third space' created by colonialism might also be included in this grouping (McDowell 1996; Rose 1994b). These projects share in common three characteristics: 1) the use of space to disrupt boundaries and binaries, 2) the search for, and construction of, spaces that share a resistant and all inclusive simultaneity, and 3) an emphasis on the shifting and contingent (rather than necessary) relationships between identity, experience and space.

'Radical postmodern feminist spatial critiques' have been important components of this new spatial imaginary, much of which has revolved around a feminist remapping of the city to disrupt binaries of gender and space such as same/other, public/private and masculine/feminine (Grosz 1992; Hooper 1992; Soja 1996; Soja and Hooper 1995; Squires 1994; Swanson 1995; Wilson 1991, 1995; Young 1990a, 1990b). While feminist geographers in particular remain cautious about the unravelling of categories of identity and the search for hybridity and liminality, in many ways they share this vision and search for a 'third space' (McDowell 1996). Early feminist critiques centred on exposing the patriarchal structure of the metropolis, and, more concretely, on the spatial constraints created by the separation of the public and private spheres that were extremely pronounced in post World War II cities due to mass suburbanization (England 1991; Hayden 1984; McKenzie 1989a, 1989b; McDowell 1983; MATRIX 1984; Wekerle 1984; WGSJ 1984). As a counter to the spatial constraints of the postwar metropolis, feminist urban researchers argued that 'the city' had fewer constraints than the suburbs in terms of access to services and transportation and a reduced distance between the public and private spheres (Saegert 1981; Wekerle 1984). Wekerle (1984), for example, argued that "a woman's place is in the city" because 'the city' is more conducive to the management of the double burden of household responsibilities and work outside the home, provides greater access to services such as daycare and public transportation, and offers more affordable housing solutions for female-led households. 'The city', therefore, became an important counter-discourse to the gender segregation and problems of mobility believed to characterize the lives of many women in the suburbs (Hooper 1992; Soja and Hooper 1993).

By the early 1990s, the 'public' sphere was being interrogated from a feminist perspective (Benhabib 1992; Fraser 1992; Marston 1990; Ryan 1990, 1992; Young 1990b). Arguing that the liberal democratic definition of citizenship produced exclusions through the separation of the public and private spheres, feminists turned to the accessibility and multiplicity of material urban public space to expose the fragility of this ideal (Fraser 1992; Ryan 1992; Young 1990b). Ryan (1990, 1992), for example, has

demonstrated that the multiplicity and accessibility of public spaces enabled women to develop specific strategies and find circuitous routes through which to participate in the public life of the nineteenth century republican city. Ryan's (1990, 1992) arguments have been reiterated by a long list of feminist historians who document the diverse experiences of women in material urban public space to counter the ideal of separate spheres (Copelman 1994; Deutsch 1994; Domosh 1996, 1998; Ewen 1985; Kaplan 1992; Meyerowitz 1993; Peiss 1986; Ryan 1994; Squires 1994; Swanson 1995; Wilson 1991). Other political theorists have used public spaces of the city as a material means by which to imagine a more socially inclusive society in a more explicit manner. Exemplary in this instance is Young (1990a, 1990b), for whom the multiplicity found in the material public spaces of 'city life' serves to subvert the singular and exclusive public sphere of liberal democracies. To radicalize liberal democracy, Young turns to the material conditions of the city: "Starting from the given of modern urban life is not simply necessary, moreover, it is desirable. Even for many of those who decry the alienation, massification, and bureaucratization of capitalist patriarchal society, city life exerts a powerful attraction" (Young 1990a: 317). For Young (1990a: 319), that "powerful attraction" is what she describes as a condition of "unassimilated otherness", an ideal that involves the copresence of strangers, in a condition of awareness -- but not of incorporation -- of others and their identities (Young 1990a).

Young's arguments regarding the characteristics of urbanism are certainly not new. Urban theorists of the Chicago School developed a large literature and body of theory regarding the breakdown of primary contacts and 'social disorder' inherent in urbanism (Ballis Lal 1990; Fincher and Jacobs 1988; Grafmeyer and Joseph 1979; Hannerz 1980; Jackson 1984; Park [1916] 1969; Sennett 1970, 1991; Short 1971; Simmel [1903] 1969; Wirth [1938] 1969; Yúdice 1988). In the 1960s and 1970s, these theories were being reexamined by authors who inverted these observations and celebrated these very same characteristics as central to the material production of democratic societies (Jacobs 1961; Lofland 1973; Sennett 1977). Young's (1990a) use of urban public space as a counter-narrative to existing models of gender and space, however, was an important feminist

strategy and it has led many theorists to reconsider urbanism as an ideal strategy for the construction of radical pluralist societies. For many contemporary feminist theorists, 'city life' represents the possibility for women to engage with the multiplicity, anomie, and paradoxical sites of the city (Bondi 1993; Golding 1993; Young 1990b; Wilson 1991).

'The city' has also been seen as a site from which to rewrite the history of space (Lefebvre 1991) and open the past to feminist subjectivity. Wilson's (1991) *The Sphinx in the City*, for example, reimagines the geography of the modern city from a feminist perspective. Exploring the seething and uncontrollable multiplicity of activities and identities in urban life, Wilson (1991) argues that modern urban life, in all its exploitations, dangers, insecurities and pleasures, enabled women to subvert the ideal of the public and private spheres and the material forms that actively structured gender and space. Moving away from an analysis of the limitations of the city, Wilson's goal is to "...insist on women's rights to the carnival, intensity and even the risks of the city", and to counter a totalizing narrative of urban life as patriarchal by contending that "...urban life, however fraught with difficulty, has emancipated women more than rural life or suburban domesticity" (Wilson 1991: 10). Such arguments have had an effect (albeit limited) on feminist urban researchers such as Bondi (1993; 1998), who have begun a comparative analysis of the codes of gender, sexuality and class at work in urban landscapes that restrict or accommodate women's access to urban public spaces. More importantly, however, the city has provided a site within which to solve many problems of 'dealing with difference' for feminist researchers (McDowell 1991). As a material environment, the city is a site from which to experiment with analyzing geographies of difference as they relate to gender, thereby creating room for diversity and multiplicity in our understanding of women's experience of urban life (Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Gilbert 1997; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Peake 1993; Pratt 1998; Pulido 1997; Ruddick 1996). While retaining gender as a significant category of analysis, the current project of many researchers revolves around an understanding of gender, 'race', class and sexuality as shifting and mutually constitutive categories (Gilbert 1997; Pratt 1998; Ruddick 1996).

While many feminist urban histories could be seen as insisting on the importance of the multiplicity of 'city life' in women's experiences (Kaplan 1992; Ryan 1990; Stansell 1986), what is important in Wilson's (1991) work is her refusal to separate time and space. Moving between industrial Manchester and Second Empire Paris, the American suburb and contemporary world cities, Wilson includes the past and present in her analysis of urban life and women. Just as feminists might use the city as a site to disrupt gender dichotomies, it is also important to undermine the separation of past and present. Hayden (1995) has similarly argued that to open landscapes up to the diversity of social groups that have been involved in their production, we might begin by asking what a landscape represents in the present and then use that analysis to reconfigure the past. She argues that urban public landscapes are important 'storehouses of public memory' that remain untapped by interpretations that do not examine the decentred histories and populations that were involved in their production (Hayden 1995).

These feminist modes of rethinking the city, therefore, require more than the deconstruction of existing urban theories from a feminist perspective and the inclusion of women in our interpretations of urban life. A 'third space' imagination requires the reworking of the Cartesian conception of the relationship between time, space and place (Massey 1993a, 1993b; Soja 1996). Rather than approach the city as an abstract space structured by external forces and a linear pattern of development over time, interpretations might be more usefully structured in terms of the fragmentary pasts that are evident in contemporary landscapes. By centring our interpretations around space (rather than time), the varied pasts embedded in the material landscape of cities move from being the passive backdrop of social life to the foreground in an historically complex assemblage. Foucault's (1980, 1986) notion of *heterotopia*, for example, brought together a group of unrelated objects in space to unravel the continuity of established historical geographies that conceal the practice of power relations (Genocchio 1995; Gregory 1994). Clifford (1988) has similarly used the concept of the *bricolage* to deconstruct abstract categories of space by embedding and juxtaposing diverse life worlds and voices in place (in Gregory 1994), and Wilson (1991) describes her own work as a collage that is as "... fragmentary and partial

as the experience of city life itself" (Wilson 1991: 10).

The proximity and propinquity inherent in the concepts of heterotopia, bricolage and collage necessarily come together 'in place' (Soja 1995). As Gregory (1994) has argued, a geographical imagination that starts from the plurality of life worlds lived 'in place' represents a shift away from abstract external views of urban space and can denaturalize abstract geometries of space such as public and private spheres. In response to the feminist spatial critiques that have been explored thus far, feminist geographers have similarly stressed the importance of 'placement' in the constitution of the urban experience and geographies of gender (McDowell 1991, 1993; Pratt 1993; Pratt and Hanson 1994). Young and Wilson's attempts to infuse city life with feminist possibility remain primarily discursive and differ greatly from research into the exclusions and segregations that structure material relations in the city. For these reasons feminist geographers have responded to Young's (1990a, 1990b) 'ideal of city life' by arguing that "...geographies of placement must be held in tension with the ideal of displacement" (Pratt and Hanson 1994: 5). Rather than adopting the postmodern obsession with deconstructing the meaning of space through codes of language, feminist geographers suggest adopting a recursive methodology, using both deconstruction and empiricism to undermine existing categories and theoretical assumptions (McDowell 1991; Pratt 1993; Pratt and Hanson 1994). In the face of abstraction and deconstruction, feminists "retain conventional notions of objectivity" while "staking simultaneous claim for embodied, local knowledges" (McDowell 1993: 315).

THIRD CITY/THIRD PLACE: REMAPPING THE MAIN

Despite concerns by American scholars regarding the end of 'truly' public space signified by the 'death of the street' (Davis 1992; Jacobs 1961; Sennett 1977; Soja 1989; 1996; Sorkin 1992), the diversified experience of urban social life continues to be a part of the contemporary North American city along streets like the Main. Due to an emphasis on the universal characteristics of streets as sites of 'city life', the specific characteristics of places like the Main have rarely been explored in the urban studies literature. Far too

much attention has been given to the social dynamic occurring on ubiquitous sidewalks of 'city streets' and too little to the material environment that make streetscapes diversified and distinctive 'places' (see Allor 1997; Jacobs 1961; Massey 1993a; Zukin 1995). With its late-nineteenth-century built environment, some portions of the Main retain the character of an intimate shopping street and resemble spaces that are idealized by radical pluralists like Young (1990a, 1990b). Like the grand boulevards of Paris, the Main has been a place where a diversity of classes, ethnic, and religious groups share space (albeit on unequal terms) and became aware of the social and cultural diversity of the people of this metropolis (Berman 1982; Eagleton 1988; Germain 1997; Harvey 1985; Ross 1988). The Main, however, is a more humble and functional social space, something between a metropolitan thoroughfare and a neighbourhood shopping street. Nevertheless, it is a place where private 'identities' enter public space, characterized by a copresence between classes, 'races' and genders and unexpected and jarring encounters with 'otherness' (Berman 1982). More importantly, however, it is a 'place' where particular spatial arrangements meet, where specific identities and activities are located, producing multiple meanings and a variety of internal conflicts. Whether it is understood as a border or a margin, the character of this landscape and its centrality in local discourses of the 'other' render the category 'street space' inadequate and attest to the significance of the Main as 'place'.

Paying closer attention to streets and their specific characteristics as places can serve to ground radical feminist postmodern critiques that use the city to disrupt spatial boundaries and gender dichotomies. The anomie and moving chaos of the city streets have often made it possible for women to transgress and redefine norms of womanhood (Copelman 1994; Deutsch 1994; Domosh 1998; Ewen 1985; Meyerowitz 1993; Munt 1995; Ryan 1990; Ryan 1994; Wilson 1991). Historians have shown, however, that counter-publics have generally produced social space in sites that the bourgeoisie considered immoral (rooming house districts, 'racial' and ethnic 'ghettos', popular quarters and red-light districts) -- spaces that held a unique position in the city as targets for reformers and stood outside of hegemonic middle-class norms (Peiss 1986; Wilson 1991).

The Main, with its garment factories, labour halls, 'foreign district', cabarets and counter-cultural spaces, has certainly been constructed as marginal, and, often, 'immoral'. While the Main represents the diversity of city life in all its displacement and multiplicity, it has done so in a very specific context. The experience and meaning of the Main have developed through a reflexive relationship between the activities and social groups that have occupied this place, its material environment as a commercial street, and its role as a border zone.

In recent years, geographers have reexamined the importance of 'place' as a site of critical and progressive geographical inquiry (Agnew 1993; Duncan 1993; Duncan and Ley 1993; Keith and Pile 1993; Massey 1993a, 1993b). Drawing 'place' and 'culture' out of the descriptive and totalizing realm of humanistic geography, the 'new cultural geography' has questioned the interpretation of 'place' as an authentic and deep ontology and has argued that place is a social construct requiring reexamination (Harvey 1993). In response to the crisis of representation posed by postmodernism, geographers have begun to understand 'places' as representations of broader power relations (Duncan and Ley 1993). Marxist scholars have also attempted to bring 'place' out of its 'parochial' past, suggesting that places need to be understood in relation of broader processes which meet in localities (Cochrane 1987; Cooke 1990; Jackson 1991; Massey 1991b; Massey and Allen 1984). Massey (1993a: 68), for example, has argued, "What we need...is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place".

In these new approaches to 'place' (as opposed to 'space') as a form of critical inquiry, a variety of conceptual frameworks have been proposed, the most significant of which has been *locality*, the point where social relations come together and are constituted (Giddens 1984). Massey's definition of place, for example, reflects this structuralist interpretation:

The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations between social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings,

in a situation of copresence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself. (Massey 1993a: 68)

This interpretation of places as localities where broader social relations intersect, however, is grounded and conceptualized in a 'globalizing' present, where commodities and populations are highly mobile at supposedly 'new' scales (McDowell 1996; Massey 1993a). As Agnew (1993) has argued, locality is only one facet of 'place' and in order to develop a culturally responsive understanding of 'place', it must be interpreted as a constellation of the tripartite relationship between locale, location and 'sense of place'. Places are settings where broader spatial relationships come together, but these intersections continually occur and accumulate, producing a distinctive 'sense of place'. These three elements of 'place' function in an interdependent manner: "In other words, locale is the geo-sociological element in place, but it is structured by the pressures of location and gives rise to its own sense of place that may in certain circumstances extend beyond the locality" (Agnew 1993: 263).

In this thesis, I use these constituent categories of 'place' to inform my analysis of the Main. I view the Main as a 'place' where particular sets of spatial relationships meet and are constituted in the landscape and its representations. As a *locality*, the Main brings together a diversity of social relations, processes and understandings in "a situation of copresence" (Massey 1993a: 68). It is in this sense that the Main resembles Foucault's heterotopia, bringing together unrelated objects such as global and local goods, old and new communities and uses, that speak of other spaces and times. This locality also brings together public and private identities and activities that implicate gender in the production and experience of the Main. The permissive character of sociability along this border zone has made it a place to transgress gender norms, but this characteristic is more concretely located in its institutions such as labour halls, cabarets, brothels and factories. These institutions are also constitutive of the Main as a *location*. They are material sites that draw subjects into social worlds lived on the Main, where they forge their identities in

urban space, what feminists have often referred to as 'placement' and, more critically, spatial entrapment (Gilbert 1997; Hanson and Pratt 1995; McDowell 1993). To occupy the Main is to assume a social location and to be constructed in relation to its border status. While these experiences involve oppressions -- in the sweat shops or the red-light district -- they also involve oppositional practices of resistance (hooks 1990; Shields 1991).

The problem with Agnew's (1993) definition of place, however, is the implication that locations and locales develop a singular transcendent 'sense of place', their "own sense of place" (Agnew 1993: 263). While the Main may be given a singular meaning as a space of difference, it has been manufactured through multiple meanings and interpretations that coexist and shift with time. As Massey (1993a: 65) has argued, "If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities, then the same point can be made in relation to places". As I will demonstrate in this thesis, the meanings of the Main are contingent and shifting and stem far beyond its particular location. The Main's 'sense of place' is signified through a multiplicity of meanings, "a host of competing spatialities", that make this place central to the production of gender geographies in Montreal (Keith and Pile 1993). A further problem is the frequent conflation of locale and locality in many literatures, whereby the larger locality is replaced by the locale and used instead of place as a spatial category. Turning back to Gidden's (1984) structuration thesis, Dyck (1990) makes important use of the locality as a site of local action for women. In her analysis of the sites of social interaction used by suburban mothers, Dyck (1990) makes the distinction between the locality and the locale. She argues that localities are a matrix of settings for social interaction, each of which contain particular combinations of resources to be drawn upon and are 'regionalized' in time and space. In contrast to the longstanding interpretation of suburbs as sites of constraint for women, Dyck (1990) views the lives of suburban women as constituted in a matrix of interconnected locales (the streets, the daycare centre, the church and the home) through which women negotiate and manage time-space constraints, and reinvent and interpret their identities as mothers. Drawing on this dissection of terms, I view the locality of the Main as formed through a matrix of

interconnected locales and time periods, including the garment district of the early 1900s, the shopping street that stretches across the century, and the red-light district of the 1930s to late 1950s, upon which the meaning of 'place' is constructed and experienced.

The reconsideration of 'place' as an important dimension of feminist analysis in urban studies stems from three other important theoretical developments in feminist urban geography. First, feminists have had serious concerns about the 'ideal of displacement' in postmodern urban studies and feminist theory (McDowell 1991, 1993; Pratt 1993; Pratt and Hanson 1994) while simultaneously recognizing the necessity to move beyond a universal concept of 'Woman'. Pratt (1998) has, therefore, proposed that it is necessary to find a middle ground between the 'deterritorialisation' of identity that goes along with understanding identities as mobile and shifting, and the recognition that "identities are still bounded" in urban space, especially for those populations that are less empowered by the dominant structuring of spatial relations of power. She proposes a reflexive understanding of social boundaries and "...multiple grids of difference and complex and varied links between place and identity formation" (Pratt 1998: 27). Secondly, recent studies of the diversity of women's experiences of urban space have demonstrated that 'placement' in relation to other structures of inequality such as 'race', class and sexuality is a complex process involving the interplay between various aspects of identity and 'place' (Gilbert 1998; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Peake 1993; Pratt 1998; Pulido 1997). These studies not only highlight shifting relationships between gender and other aspects of identity in the production and experience of place, but also go a long way in demonstrating that 'placement' does not only equal 'spatial entrapment'. Ethnically defined or class-based neighbourhoods, for example, can serve as resources for women's survival strategies (Gilbert 1998), or can be important locales around which to organize political activities (Pulido 1997). Thirdly, the study of the host of spatial relationships surrounding varied household types has revealed the complexity of gender lived at the micro-level. Undermining the classification of households based on the class definition of the male household head and looking more closely at the impact of household strategies on gender relations, these studies show that research that is concerned with the intersection of the

different structures of inequality that shape urban processes warrant intensive scrutiny (Gibson 1998; Gilbert 1997, 1998; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Pratt 1998). Considering each of these developments, I seek to take the Main apart, to deterritorialize its meaning by setting the representation and experience of gender associated with its various locales in context so as to reconfigure the relationships between gender, place and difference that currently inform our understanding of this place.

EXCAVATING A MATRIX: THE MAIN'S LOCALES

While the Main is an ever-present place in local histories of ethnic communities, organized crime, night life, and novels, it also figures prominently in Montreal's archival record. The Main appears in many government inquiries on topics as diverse as the conditions of labour, shop closing hours, police corruption, liquor consumption and the spread of venereal diseases. It appears in the archival record of reform groups such as the Les Lignes de Sacré Coeur and the Comité de Moralité Publique, early feminist groups such as the Montreal Local Council of Women and the Fédération Nationale St. Jean-Baptiste, and groups concerned with social welfare such as the University Settlement House and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. It is in the popular press, however, that the centrality of the Main and its meanings in the popular imagination is most apparent. The Main is the backdrop for reports on the illustrious madames of the war years, tales of raids on 'blind pigs', arson, 'socialist' parades, and anti-semitic attacks on orthodox Jewish men, sensationalist portraits of male prostitution, transvestite strip shows, reviews of Yiddish theatre and Chinese operas, and more recently, 'ethnic' restaurant reviews and the chronicles of the heritage preservation movement. Building relationships between social groups, activities and place, the popular press provides a portrait of the Main as a place where ethnicity, criminality, language and sexuality collide.

This project retains a feminist concern with restoring women's agency to the production and consumption of modern urban life (Copelman 1994; Deustche 1994; Domosh 1998; Ewen 1985; Peiss 1986; Stansell 1986; Wilson 1991), but does so by examining the material and discursive practices surrounding everyday sites. Considering

the existing landscape of the Main and its representation in the media and the archival record, careful choices have been made regarding the locales and groups included in this interpretation. Each element of the landscape chosen highlights an alignment between the Main and the performance and experience of a form of 'womanhood' that, in the past or present, has been marginal in broader arrangements of gender and space. This attention to representation and experience through various configurations of 'womanhood' does not ignore other aspects of identity or the broader consideration of gender experiences. The focus is specifically on how women along the Main were constructed and experienced this place in relation to intersections with other aspects of their identities as workers, consumers, and participants in ethnic, class and sexual communities. It is a project of examining the 'placement' of certain groups of women and forms of female identity on the margins (Gilbert 1998; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Pratt and Hanson 1994) and the role that such processes play in coding the Main as a place that is somehow unique and separate from the broader social order of Montreal. Like many other feminist geographies, it is concerned with the ways in which women have negotiated varied forms of identity 'in place', and how their presence and activities contribute a diversity of imagined and material geographies to urban life (Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Gilbert 1998; Hanson and Pratt 1995; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Massey 1993a; McDowell 1993; Peake 1993; Pratt 1998; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Ruddick 1996).

Despite the historical framework of most of the chapters, the thesis is not a history of the Main. Although I explore the historical development of different locales, I have used the description of concurrent spaces to unsettle linear narratives of time (Benjamin [1955] 1978; Gregory 1994) and to situate the contemporary meaning and character of the Main. The use of historical agents and sites to understand the present landscape is a means of reworking traditional interpretations of the Main by rearranging the relationships between space and time in the production of the landscape. This approach is largely drawn from Lefebvre's (1991) 'genesis of the present'. Suggesting a 'regressive-progressive' approach to the study of space, he argues that linear understandings of history, because of their reliance on master narratives and abstract discourses, conceal

'lived' spaces, rendering many subjects and the multiplicity of experiences invisible (see also de Certeau 1984). With this approach, "The past appears in a different light, and hence the process whereby that past becomes the present also takes on another aspect" (Lefebvre 1991: 65). Rather than privileging space at the expense of time (Harvey 1989; Soja 1989), Lefebvre, like some feminist geographers, stresses a more reflexive relationship between time, space and social life (Gregory 1994; Soja 1996). Massey (1993a: 152), for example, has emphasized the importance of refusing to separate space and time into a dichotomy and argues that "space and time are inextricably interwoven" (see also Massey 1993b). I view the Main as a landscape with a complex cumulative history shaped by various agents who determine its current reading as a space of difference. It is a 'genesis of the present' that incorporates the lived spaces of the street's most hidden and most visible subjects. The result is an interconnected and varied collection of spatial stories, each with a different composition and contribution to make to this an interpretation of gender and urban space.

Combining ethnography, discourse analysis and a variety of textual sources, this thesis is a methodological hybrid that brings together what have often been seen as discrete qualitative methods (Jacobs 1993). Concerned with the representation of the Main as a border zone of Montreal's modern metropolitan public culture, the primary methodological framework is what has been called 'discourse analysis'. This method stems from linguistic disciplines and can involve both the qualitative and quantitative analysis of texts, narratives and dialogues (Munslow 1992; Schiffrin 1987; Van Dijk 1985). Following Foucault, historians, geographers and other social scientists are clearly addressing the issue of representation at both epistemological and methodological levels (White 1987; Gregory 1994; Duncan and Ley 1993). By adopting a feminist approach to 're-imagining' the city, this thesis does address the discursive practices of geography on an epistemological level, but the focus on discourse is primarily methodological. Discourse analysis in this thesis involves the contextual examination of collective artifacts -- namely newspapers, government documents, the minutes of inquiries and literary works -- for their depiction of the people and locales of the Main. At the level of analysis, this

involves accounting for perspectives and objectives of the 'author(s)' and audiences as well as representation based on linguistic or class affiliation. As Munslow (1991: 3) has argued, cultural history has been concerned with "reconstructing how cultures develop a collective imagination", but poststructural approaches require addressing the contested and dialogical nature of this process. I view Montreal as having a variety of shared, overlapping and unequal 'collective imaginations' that sometimes collide around contests over space, behaviours, access and representations in various locales along the Main. In each case, I analyze the perspectives of the various social and cultural groups involved in their production and ask what these debates and strategies represent in terms of the meaning of the Main and gender relations and identities in Montreal during their respective epochs.

The employment of a top down approach to the discursive and material production of place would render this project impossible. The argument that discursive practices produce space (Foucault 1980, 1986) is generally one of hegemonic groups imposing meanings and material relations of power on the less empowered, a totalizing binary of margins and centres that leaves little room for resistance, agency or the multiplicity of the 'lived world' (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1991). The social relations surrounding the Main, however, more closely resemble a chronotope or a dialogue (Allor 1997; Bakhtin 1984; Hirschkop 1986, 1989; Hirschkop and Sheppard 1989; Hitchcock 1993; Stallybrass and White 1986). While this dialogue does implicate asymmetrical power relations, in strategic discussions regarding the locales of the Main their activities, a variety of social groups participate and are heard. Because the border status of the Main makes it a place where identities are contested, the agency of marginal social groups is often detectable in historical accounts. These debates are not the sole domain of the hegemonic and the oppressed. Other figures also contribute to these contests over identity and place. Anglo-elite suffragists, for example, were key actors in a debates regarding the working conditions of French-Canadian women dressmakers. Moral reformers from the petit bourgeoisie were equally important in lobbying the government to protect men from venereal disease by closing down the red-light.

The primary sources for most of the spatial stories are the material landscape of St. Lawrence and the metropolitan press. The material landscape, examined through photographs, city directories, census data and maps, provides an outline for each chapter. Many clipping files regarding prostitution, cabarets, and moral reform activities, reviews of plays and films, and descriptions of the street have been consulted. For other topics, newspapers were used to compile information and perspectives on specific events such as garment strikes and May Day parades. These were important sources in the popular dialogue surrounding the women and the locales of the Main. The images and ideas that were painted for the public by newspaper reporters are highly subjective, but they have constructed a dynamic social geography of Montreal for the general public and provide an excellent illustration of how the Main and its activities have been characterized by different social groups. As Ryan (1990) has argued, newspaper reporters, while not writing from anything close to a neutral perspective, did provide citizens with the information to make sense of their city and their situation in relation to specific sites in the city¹¹. This was particularly the case with reports on prostitution and 'non-traditional' ethnic groups. These topics, covered in the press, mapped spaces of danger and difference for readers, but they did so from various perspectives depending on language, politics and community affiliation. Even minor reports of arrests, arson or stabbings provide descriptions of social spaces and people contributing to imagined geographies of the Main. From the 1890s until the 1970s, Montreal always had at least two daily newspapers in both languages (English and French), making the analysis of newspaper discourses from a variety of perspectives possible.

Garment workers, prostitutes, servers and entertainers also raised the concern of social welfare and reform groups, who in turn, drew government attention to living and labour conditions, or the threat that such people and their activities to the 'moral order'

¹¹In her later work, Ryan (1997) further suggests that the metropolitan press provides perhaps the best source for understanding the contested nature of civic culture because of: 1) the diversity of its readers as literacy becomes more widespread and 2) the access that it offers to perspectives of less empowered populations by reporting and publishing letters on the struggles of everyday life.

of the city. These groups of women, therefore, appear in royal commissions, government reports, and the annual reports of social welfare and reform groups. These sources reflect official and elite perspectives, but are important for situating the roles played by the Main within the geography of the garment industry and prostitution. The reports of the Industrial Inspectress for the provincial Department of Public Works at the turn of the century, for example, furnish an upper-class woman's descriptions of the garment factories and their workers. The federal Ministry of Labour collection, *Strikes and Lockouts*, is also a useful source for tracing garment strikes. Provincial inquiries into police conduct in the first half of the century, however, often included the testimonies of people in daily contact with the red-light district and occasionally the prostitutes and madames. Their exhibits also included monthly reports by the morality squad that were central to my reconstruction of the geography of prostitution in the 1940s. Finally, the reports on cabarets in the 1940s by the Ligue de Temperance investigator provided descriptions of the people and activities in these sites through the particular lens of a French Catholic petit-bourgeois reformer.

All of these sources inhabit a muddy ontological realm because they speak of both representation and experience. Direct access to the experiences of women was difficult to attain for such a transient location and, admittedly, this was not my primary objective. While newspapers, government documents and reports are clearly forms of representation that reflect the agendas of their authors, they indirectly attest to the experience of the women that they describe. Standing behind the podium at the labour hall or describing their conditions to reporters and inspectors, the voices of these women do occasionally appear in the historical record. More important, perhaps, are what the discourses of others tell us about how these social worlds were structured around gender, class and other relations of power. The ways in which the characters in these stories outsmarted the police or defied the safety orders of the industrial inspectresses provide glimpses of their own strategies and agency. In my interpretation of the locales of the past, therefore, there is a strong tension between representation and experience, and where it has been possible to describe the experiences of these subjects, they have been included. In the final

substantive chapter, which unlike the others focuses upon the present and the lived experiences of women, interpretation is a central issue. To deepen the understanding of the Main as space of difference, I use open-ended interviews with lesbians living around the Main to describe the experience of this space. Beginning with my own personal network to construct a snowball sample, 18 respondents were interviewed with regard to their daily lives as experienced on and around the Main (see Figure 7.1).

A final note on language must be made as the thesis draws on English and French sources. At times the different language contexts of the sources, such as the newspapers, were significant to the interpretation, and where that is the case, the linguistic context is part of the interpretation. True to the character of the site, the language of the text constantly shifts. All quotations from the French language press, archives, interviews and secondary sources are presented here in the original with English translations provided in footnotes.

SUMMARY

I began this chapter by arguing that the Main, its overlapping functions and multiple meanings, could be seen as a site from which to reimagine the city using a feminist perspective. To initiate this project, I discussed current interpretations of this border zone in terms of feminist interpretations of deconstruction and difference to suggest that gender has been, and continues to be, a pivotal force in the production, representation and experience of the Main. Two primary geographical concepts were explored to develop this argument. First, I worked through disparate poststructural literatures on identity, city life and space to reframe the Main as a 'third space', and I outlined the possibilities that this place offers as a site of radical postmodern feminist spatial critique. Weighing the postmodern search for representation, displacement and juxtaposition in the urban landscape against the feminist concern with retaining meaningful categories of identity and sense of 'placement', I settled on the adoption of a recursive relationship between these epistemologies. To advance this approach, I explored the utility of 'place' as a conceptual framework for the production of critical geographies. Working through this

literature, I developed a framework through which to examine the Main as a 'place' where a matrix of intersecting locales overlap, each of which has involved the representation, communication and experience of different gender identities for women. Finally, to detail my methodology, I discussed discourse analysis and my sources, and demonstrated how both representation and experience are implicated in the production of gender identities and place. We now turn to Chapter 2 for a description of the material and social development of the Main, setting the stage for a more detailed analysis of the ways in which its locales drew women into new settings in the industrial city. The remaining chapters take us into the micro-worlds of particular groups and elaborate upon the specific gender relations and the representations of the locales that comprise the Main's matrix.



Figure 2.1: The Extent of the Built Area Surrounding the Main in the 1859. Source: National Archives of Canada, in Linteau (1992a: 77).

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE STAGE: THE CREATION OF THE MAIN

St. Lawrence Boulevard first appears on city maps in the eighteenth century as St. Lawrence Road (Chemin St-Laurent), a north-south thoroughfare that extended from the walled city to the northern regions of the island (Figure 1). At the end of the eighteenth century, its lower regions also served as 'the main street' of the St. Lawrence Suburb (Faubourg St-Laurent). By the time of the great fire of 1852, the built environment extended a few hundred feet above Ste. Catherine Street, reaching the summit of the Ontario-Sherbrooke escarpment by 1859 (Figure 2.1). By the 1870s, St. Lawrence Street was an important commercial artery. Below Ontario Street, an 'elegant' shopping street with raised sidewalks, gas street lamps and gravel paving was developing as one of "...the principal business streets of the city"¹ (Figure 2.2). The morphology and land use along this portion were typical of the mercantile city. From Craig to Ontario the street was serviced by a horse-draw street car and lined with two and three storey stone and brick buildings housing fine shops on the ground floor, and the homes of the shopkeepers and their families above (Beauregard 1950; Houle 1984). Up the hill, between the Ontario-Sherbrooke escarpment and the city limits at Duluth Street, land use was more mixed. Accessible only by private carriage, on foot or on horse-back, this area remained primarily residential, and its spectacular views, 'healthy air' and close proximity to the mountain made it attractive to elites, many of whom built country villas in the area².

¹City guide books in the 1870s often described St. Lawrence Street as an important commercial street but it was far from prestigious or elite. See: *Montreal Illustrated or The Stranger's Guide to Montreal* (Montreal: C. R. Chisholm and Bros., 1875) 112-13 and *Chisholm's Stranger's Guide* (Montreal: Chisholm Bros., 1871) 83. Its morphology was also very mixed. The author of *Montreal Illustrated* (1875: 112) described St. Lawrence Street as a street lined with "fine new stone edifices vieing [sic] with those of any other street", but also stressed that it was not uncommon to find a one storey house "with the high pitched roof covered with shingles, on which the moss has grown luxuriantly" and was supported by a "tottering frame[s]".

²The view from the top of the hill and the proximity to the woodlands surrounding Mont-Royal made the upper portion of the street a fashionable site for the country homes of the wealthiest families in the city. Belmont House (1818), for example, was the only cut stone structure outside the old city when it was built by shipper builder Thomas Torrance at the northwest corner of St. Lawrence and Sherbrooke (Gubbay 1989). It was inhabited later by the John Molson family until it was destroyed by fire in 1936 (Beauregard

Artisans and small-scale merchants also set up shops, lumber yards, commercial stables and stone yards in the area between what are now Prince Arthur and Pine Streets. Further north, between Duluth Street and Mont-Royal Avenue, lay



Figure 2.2: The Funeral Procession of Fire Chief Bertram descending St. Lambert's Hill to St. Lawrence Street, 1875. Source: *Canadian Illustrated News* 18 Sept. 1875

St. Jean-Baptiste Village, an independent French-Canadian settlement that extended far into the east of the city, but had its town hall, market and municipal services at the intersection of Rachel and St. Lawrence. In the 1870s and 1880s, therefore, the topography of the street shaped two distinctive landscapes along the Main. While the upper portion of the street was not yet integrated into the commercial infrastructure of the industrial city, the lower portion was developing symbolic and commercial centrality, and was increasingly seen as an unofficial dividing line between east and west Montreal. As the author of a popular guidebook wrote in 1887, "The east end is French and the west is the English quarter"³.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the material environment and symbolic space of the Main would be radically altered by a confluence of

1950; Gubbay 1989; Pinard 1986).

³Norman Murray, *A new Guide to Montreal containing a new map of Montreal. Descriptions of places of interest, cab tariffs etc...* (Montreal: Norman Murray, 1887) 20.

industrialisation, civic improvements, immigration, and the rise of commercial amusements. Ushering in the geography of the modern metropolis, these changes would permanently redefine the Main's vocation, morphology and its occupants. In this chapter, I examine the effects of these changes on the street and argue that the redefinition of the economy and built environment created new spaces for the representation of women. It is a chapter, therefore, that sets the stage for a deeper analysis of the several locales of the Main and the groups of women who participated in its urban public cultures. I begin by examining the relationships between women's activities and the public and private spaces of the mercantile street (1870 to 1890). Next, I describe the street widening process from 1889 to 1910 and analyze its effects on density, land use, and the economy of the upper and lower portions of the street. I argue that the street widening and rebuilding process between Craig and Sherbrooke transformed the land uses and the symbolic role played by this street, and brought unexpected results. I suggest that 'public improvements' radically altered the ways in which women experienced and were represented in relation to the Main. The densification of its built environment and intensification of land uses that stemmed from this process were not the only outcomes. These improvements coincided with the designation of St. Lawrence Street as the official dividing line of an increasingly fractured city, a factor that was central in shaping the character and meaning of this site. The widening also occurred in tandem with new immigration and the rise of popular commercial entertainments in the central area. After exploring the economic results of the street widening, I turn my attention to ethnic and social change and draw them into my interpretation of the effects of the industrial metropolis on the street.

GENDER AND THE MAIN IN THE INDUSTRIALIZING CITY

On June 25, 1884, Montrealers welcomed visitors from all over the continent to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the St. Jean-Baptiste Association, a Franco-American patriotic organization. A procession led by a squad of ten police officers, the Commissioner of the order, and the St. Jean-Baptiste flag left Champs de Mars and wound its way up St. Lawrence to Ste. Catherine Street. Usually this portion of the street was busy with

pedestrians, horse-drawn buggies and carriages, carters and omnibus cars, but for this day, a large crowd had gathered to celebrate what was one of the most important civic celebrations of the decade. They were treated to elaborately decorated horse-drawn floats that depicted scenes from the history of French 'exploration' of North America such as Jacques Cartier staking claim to Canada, Champlain surrounded by the Iroquois, and Maisonneuve taking possession of Ville Marie⁴. Between Craig and Dorchester, the procession wound its way past the establishments of James Goulden and Henry Grey, large chemists' shops, past dry goods retailers like Arcand et Frères and past some of the largest and most important photographers studios and hardware stores. An assortment of fancy goods stores, confectioners, milliners, dressmakers, and established merchant tailors also contributed to the commercial centrality and importance of this portion of the street. Crossing Dorchester, the procession passed the St. Lawrence butcher's market which was one of the largest and most significant buildings in the district in the 1880s (Figure 2.3). Usually, a bustling crowd of police officers, market workers, women on their way to and from the market, and carters would congregate in front of this large wooden structure, but today, a group of men, women and children had assembled and were extending a warm welcome to their American visitors and shouting "Vive St. Jean-Baptiste et la Patrie". Finally, turning the corner at Ste. Catherine Street, the patriots passed an establishment that represented the future of the street, the Fogarty Brothers' three storey shoe factory, warehouse and retail outlet (Figure 2.4).

The main street of the St. Lawrence Suburb developed as a mixed residential and commercial landscape in the 1870s and 1880s. Advertisements and city directories suggest that for most of the women residents of this suburb, the street was a site of consumption and domestic labour and the route through which they entered the urban public culture. At the St. Lawrence Market, for example, women continued the traditional practice of shopping for produce, fish and cuts of meat to feed their families, hired carters to

⁴Henri Giroux, *Guide illustré de Montréal et de ses institutions catholiques avec Programme de la St. Jean-Baptiste pour 1884* (Montréal: *La Gazette*, 1884) 79-84.



Figure 2.3: St. Lawrence Market, 1880 Source: *Canadian Illustrated News* 3 Jan 1880



Figure 2.4: Fogarty Brothers' Wholesale and Retail Shoe Factory at St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine, 1875. Source: *Canadian Illustrated News* 12 Dec. 1875.

transport their goods and interacted with the crowd of the marketplace. As household commodities expanded along the street, women were drawn into the retail world of the Main as middle-class household managers and domestic workers (Clio Collective 1987; Swanson 1995; Domosh 1996). Middle- and upper-class women engaged tailors and dressmakers, inspected imported toiletries, and ordered dry goods. As many business illustrations from the period demonstrate, the shops and public spaces of the street were integral to their everyday lives and they were the target market of many establishments. In an advertisement for Goulden's Pharmacy, for example, we see two bourgeois women walking past the store's large display windows on St. Lawrence and, in the corresponding interior illustration, the same women are chatting and inspecting the displays inside the store (Figure 2.5). Images of women shoppers appear in advertisements for other St. Lawrence Street businesses in

the 1870s, such as J. G. Kennedy and Co., a wholesale and retail clothing store, and Fogarty Shoes. The illustration of Kennedy's shop shows a bourgeois woman strolling past the shop's large plate glass picture windows (Figures 2.6). Unlike the female consumers at Goulden's Pharmacy, she is unaccompanied and is surrounded by the activities of the commercial thoroughfare. In the illustration from Fogarty Shoes, upper-class women

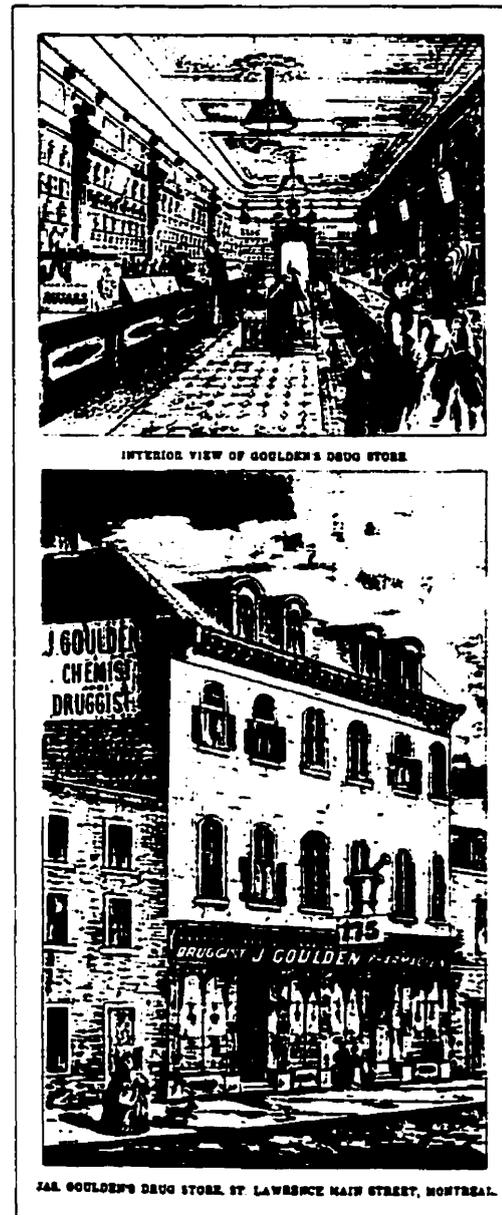


Figure 2.5: Interior and Exterior views of James Goulden's Drug Store, 1871. Source: *Canadian Illustrated News* 16 Sept. 1871.

similarly shop and promenade in the traffic of the modern commercial street (Figure 2.3). In these illustrations, however, their class and role as shoppers are explicit. While women are among the upper-class population observed by the men and women workers from the windows above, they are the only figures gazing into the display windows on the ground floor.

What do these images demonstrate regarding gender, commerce and urban public culture along St. Lawrence Street in the 1870s and 1880s? On one level, these images can simply be read as advertisements in which the upper-class female consumer is a figure used to code these businesses and the street itself as a respectable shopping district. While a gendered dichotomy between production and consumption had yet to be strongly defined along the street, it could also be argued that upper-class women were increasingly living in accordance with the separation of the genders into the public and private spheres (Swanson 1995; Domosh 1996). Their role as household managers and consumers, therefore, made them an important target



Figure 2.6: J. G. Kennedy's Clothing Store, 1873. Source: *Canadian Illustrated News* 24 May 1873.

market for merchants of consumer goods. These advertisements are also, however, important indicators of the character of St. Lawrence Street in the early industrial city. In the 1880s, mass consumption had yet to transform metropolitan commercial landscapes with institutions such as the department store, and commercial streets in suburban areas functioned as more fluid open air equivalents for which bourgeoisie women were the target market. Not yet confined to 'ladies' miles' and 'uptown' department stores (Domosh 1996), middle- and upper class women were an important presence along the shopping streets of the commercial city. Although the furniture stores, pharmacies and tailors that lined the street were important destinations, the mixed character of such sites was far from the gender specific confinement of later sites of consumption. Walking along these streets and gazing into the large plate glass windows, women participated in the public culture of the commercial city.

There were many other ways in which the mixed character of the mercantile city made its imprint on St. Lawrence Street and created a variety of economic and social roles for women before 1900. Illustrations and photographs from the last decades of the nineteenth century demonstrate that although women were excluded from most demonstrations of civic pride and identity, they were among the spectators that lined the street to celebrate these events. Dressed in their best clothing and often carrying parasols, they were part of the crowds that witnessed and participated in civic rituals such as the St. Jean Baptiste Day parades and the funeral processions of dignitaries such as Fire Chief Bertram (Figure 2.2). Women were also participants in the mercantile economy of the street as workers and through their family businesses. In the 1870s and 1880s, most of the shopkeepers, tailors, photographers and manufacturers along St. Lawrence Street lived above their commercial establishments, and most were family businesses that involved the whole household⁵. The wives and daughters of the saloon keepers, hotel and restaurant

⁵*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880 and Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle bugetaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1880. This can be verified by comparing city directories and the city tax rolls with census returns for the district in 1901. Census returns for earlier years, however, were not filed by street address, making the internal geography of the district invisible. For a discussion of the family economy in industrializing Montreal see Bradbury (1993).

owners and smaller merchants were an integral part of the labour force of these small enterprises. Women also ran their own enterprises in this mercantile economy. In the St. Lawrence Market in 1879-1880, 12 of the 65 stalls were operated by women and, women vendors represented almost half of those who dealt in goods other than meat⁶. Most of the women who managed their own stalls were French-Canadian widows who traded in vegetables and fruits, such as the widows Cadotte, Lecompte, Monette and St. Pierre⁷. While a woman stall keeper was rare among the pork and beef butchers, women did deal in other market goods: Widow Gidney, for example, was a butter dealer, Miss L. Laurin sold crockery, and Mrs. H. Lalonde and Mrs. Julie Beauchamp were poultry dealers⁸.

In the facades of the street, women were independently engaged in a variety of enterprises, but in much smaller numbers. In the area below Sherbrooke, approximately five widowed, single and married women ran their own enterprises. Mrs. Lavoie had her own hair dressing shop, and Miss S. Patterson and Miss Delima Bellevue each ran their own millinery shops in the blocks below Dorchester⁹. This pattern was even more common above Sherbrooke Street, where perhaps 15 single women employed themselves as milliners and lived and worked out of their homes¹⁰. Occasionally, the names of single women can also be found among the tenants of boarding houses in the lower portion of the street. In 1880, for example, two single women lived in the Lusvignan boarding house next to J. G. Kennedy's shop along with male clerks, carpenters, cabinetmakers and drivers¹¹. Evidence suggests that families derived their household incomes in different ways. In some cases, male and female family members ran separate businesses at the

⁶*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

⁷*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

⁸*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

⁹*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

¹⁰*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

¹¹*Lovell's City Directory*, 1879-1880, 188.

same address, with the male household head occupying the commercial space of the ground floor as a merchant or tradesman and female family members sewing or making hats in the residential space above. John Lovis, for example, did watchmaking on the ground floor of a building near the corner of Dorchester, while his daughter ran a millinery business in their home above. The Bœquet family down the street used a slightly different strategy. While Laurent worked outside the home as a cook, his wife earned money by running a dressmaking business out of their home. The first industries to develop along this street in the early industrial period were those that drew women into industrial labour such as the shoe, cigar and clothing industries. Female workers were employed in small factories and the second storey production units of the merchant tailors and dry goods merchants. These businesses had finishing departments in which female milliners, 'tailoresses' and dressmakers did alterations and custom fitted goods for customers (Payette-Daoust 1986).

St. Lawrence Street, however, emerged from the nineteenth century with a variety of new economic, social, and cultural roles to play in the industrial metropolis. Located in close proximity to the port, St. Lawrence would also become an important route in the circulation of incoming goods and people toward the ever-expanding northern boundaries of the city. Centred around the apparel industry and the dry goods merchants, the lower portion of St. Lawrence Street by the 1880s acquired a vocation as a mixed residential, retail and hotel district on the periphery of the Central Business District. While industrial activities had long been established in certain sections of the street, in the 1890s the industrial production of consumer goods such as clothing, shoes and cigars would significantly change this commercial street into a major thoroughfare of the industrial metropolis. The increase in factory employment and the introduction of the electric street car in 1892 brought more and more people to the street as either workers or commuters, and bolstered the consumer market for household goods, clothing and popular entertainments. No longer a fashionable suburb for the upper and middle classes, the residential area surrounding St. Lawrence Street would be increasingly inhabited by new immigrants to the city. The transformation of lower St. Lawrence Street into a major

thoroughfare of the industrial metropolis, however, was not entirely a 'natural' process of urban growth. The integration of this street into the expanding industrial metropolis involved practices of 'creative destruction' (Harvey 1985). Street improvements in the 1880s and 1890s were used to prepare the city for the circulation of goods and people required by industrialisation.

CIVIC DREAMS: PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS IN THE MODERN METROPOLIS

Today's mix of land uses along St. Lawrence Boulevard stems from its integration into the industrial metropolis in the late nineteenth century. To extend the role of Montreal as the "commercial metropolis of the Dominion", city officials, the Board of Trade and industrial capitalists worked together to facilitate the movement of people and goods¹². This process involved a significant reorganisation and restructuring of urban space. By the 1880s, the industrial and transportation hub of the Dominion was restructured through street improvements, the electrification of the tramway, the annexation of outlying municipalities and an intense period of construction. From large important thoroughfares and prestigious streets such as Notre Dame to small subsidiary streets, the city was transformed through street widening and improvements during these decades, increasing the value of the properties and determining the hierarchy of the city's circulation system. The port infrastructure was developed, the railway lines were extended and the internal transportation system was 'modernized' in the 1880s and 1890s to serve and create internal markets.

Through street improvements, St. Lawrence was transformed from a transportation route and suburban commercial street into one of the most important commercial thoroughfares of the industrial era. Following a petition of the property owners, the widening process began with the expropriation of the properties that lined the west side

¹²Some of the major external transportation projects from this era were the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway line, port improvements, the enlargement of the Lachine Canal (1875), and the extension of small railway lines to the north, south and east of the city (Linteau 1992b).

of the street between Craig and Sherbrooke in 1888¹³. Between 1888 and 1892, this portion of the street was widened to sixty seven feet, which required the demolition and rebuilding of all the buildings on the west side (Figure 2.7). The widening was done in three sections, and each section was demolished and rebuilt during the summer months of successive years (1889, 1890 and 1891)¹⁴. The new buildings were constructed in accordance with By-law 161, a widening by-law that stipulated that all new structures be no less than three storeys in height and be faced in stone or iron. The reconstruction of the built environment, therefore, brought new heights, density levels and volumes of rentable space to the street. Other improvements followed. Flagstone sidewalks were laid to Ste. Catherine street in 1891, the road was paved in rock asphalt and wood, and a double track for the electric tramway was laid in 1892. The modernisation process continued with the widening of the upper portion of the street between Sherbrooke and Mount-Royal from 1903 and 1910¹⁵. In 1905, the City Council was granted legal grounds to consolidate St. Lawrence Street with the contiguous streets of the old city, and to rename this thoroughfare St. Lawrence Boulevard, which would divide the city into east and west by civic address¹⁶. Finally, the street was extended through the central area to the port in 1913¹⁷.

Many authors have interpreted the widening as an attempt to destroy contentious spaces along the Main or to transform the Main into a grand boulevard. Assertions that

¹³The petition for the widening process was received in April 1888 and the City Surveyor proceeded with the expropriation process in the winter of that year. Ville de Montréal, Commission de la voirie, *Procès Verbaux*, 12 May 1888: 356, and Ville de Montréal, *Annual Report of City Surveyor*, 1889.

¹⁴*Gazette* 24 Sept. 1889: 3.

¹⁵See Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission Finances, *Rapports*, 1903-1904, No. 1615.

¹⁶Ville de Montréal, *Rapport annuelle de l'Inspecteur de la Cité pour l'année 1905*. 31 Dec. 1905.

¹⁷Expropriations between rue Notre Dame and rue des Commissaires, took place between 1911 and 1913. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds du Conseil de la Ville, *Rapports et dossiers*, 2ième série, No. 1587 and No. 4317.

the city was attempting to break up existing contentious spaces are questionable. Bourassa and Larrue (1993), for example, argue that the street widening was an effort to transform the area's reputation for prostitution and saloons and to disperse immigrant colonies. This is largely an error of viewing the widening of St. Lawrence in isolation from an overall process of improving the circulation, adding to the volume of rentable space, and increasing property values throughout the city. Characterizing the widening process as an attempt by city officials to develop St. Lawrence Street as a grand boulevard is equally dubious (Gubbay 1989). The civic planning associated with the street widening was much more utilitarian, functioning as a coalition of business interests between private transit companies, property owners, and the municipal administration, particularly the finance and road committees and the City Surveyor. Street improvements,



Figure 2.7: Built Environment, Lower St. Lawrence, 1880 and 1912 Source: Charles E Goad, *Atlas of the City of Montreal, 1880 and 1912-1913*.

moreover, were financed in equal parts by the property owners and the City¹⁸ and the objectives of both were functional. For city officials, the objective of these improvements was to enhance circulation and to generate capital. They also had political legitimacy and improved circulation at the forefront of their objectives. For local property owners, improvements were intended to increase the commercial importance of their properties and to ensure that, in the future, their street would be counted among the city's most important commercial districts. The property owners of the lower portion of St. Lawrence, for example, had petitioned the City for street improvements in 1881. This group of property owners claimed that St. Lawrence was a reputable commercial street should have the same quality of paving and access as the more established business streets of the central area. They demanded that the city finally, "...établir cette dite partie de la rue St. Laurent sur un pied d'égalité avec les rues Notre Dame et St. Jacques"¹⁹.

Due to its timing and location, the widening above Sherbrooke was a very different process. Continuation of the widening and northward extension of the tramway lines north of Sherbrooke was planned in 1891²⁰, but was not carried out 1903. By this time the upper portion of the street was already served by a single tramway line, and the northward expansion of industrial and commercial activities was already underway. Some of the buildings, such as the Baxter Block (Figure 2.8), completed in 1892, were built with setbacks in anticipation of the widening. Property owners, the city and the tramway

¹⁸The business owners were generally opposed to having to pay the cost of the widening of the lower portion of the street largely because it was clear that the payment process of five hundred dollars in ten annual instalments would put smaller operators out of business. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Procès Verbaux*, 12 May 1888: 356.

¹⁹They demanded that the city "...put this portion of St. Lawrence street on equal footing with Notre Dame and St. Jacques streets" (author's translation). Proprietors and Tenants of St. Lawrence Street, Petition to Conseil de la Ville de Montréal, 26 March 1881, in Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Rapports adoptés*, No. 27.

²⁰The Montreal City Railway Company had already planned to extend the double track of the St. Lawrence street car route above Sherbrooke Street to Mont-Royal Avenue. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds du Conseil de la ville, Commissions spéciales, Montreal Street Railway Company, *Procès verbaux*, 16 April 1891.



Figure 2.8 The Baxter Block (1892), ca. 1913. Source: Notman Collection, Musée McCord MP207/78(36)

company had been negotiating the integration of this portion of the street for at least a decade. Between 1891 and 1898 property owners of various portions petitioned the road committee to have the street widened and the double tracks extended²¹. The economy in the 1890s and the peripheral location of this portion of the street delayed the process. Land use was also more diverse -- it was not exclusively commercial -- making the expropriation process more difficult. Owners of elite homes and country villas in the block between Sherbrooke and Milton streets, for example, opposed the proposed improvements in the 1890s²².

²¹ Ville de Montréal, *Annual Report of the City Surveyor*, 1894

²²The City Assessor argued that petitioners between Sherbrooke and Prince Arthur streets who were requesting the enlargement did not represent the majority of the interested parties "...in number or value" of the proprietors between Sherbrooke and Milton streets where the John Molson family lived. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Rapport adoptés*, 1893-1894, No. 18. See also *Montreal Herald*, June 4, 1904 for a discussion of the effects of expropriation on Stanley Bagg's estate and the demolition of Chalmers' Church.

But the City had granted the Montreal City Railway Company the right to extend the double tramway from Sherbrooke to Mont-Royal Avenue in 1891²³. The widening and expropriation process was, therefore, inevitable. Commercial property owners used the extension of the street railway to support their claim, arguing that a width of 67 feet was necessary to accommodate this project and new levels of traffic²⁴. Their point of reference for their boosterism was lower St. Lawrence. They argued that their portion of the street should be integrated with the commercial and industrial area emerging below to increase the value of their properties and businesses. With a less dense built environment, the destruction of the existing properties did not constitute the same level of destruction as it did below. The rebuilding process, however, did lead to new density levels since the property owners had consented to rebuild in accordance with By-law 161 to "preserve the appearance of the street"²⁵. Expropriation was carried out from Sherbrooke to Pine in 1903, and from Pine to Mont Royal Avenue after 1905. Over two decades, the infrastructure of the street was built, establishing the built environment, activities and patterns of circulation which would define St. Lawrence Street from Craig to Mont-Royal. On a modern thoroughfare in an industrial city, we look now at the new activities and populations, and symbolic status of St. Lawrence Boulevard in the imagined geography of the modern metropolis.

MIXITY AND MODERNITY: THE MAIN IN THE INDUSTRIAL CITY

The modernisation of St. Lawrence Street ultimately altered the local economy, the balance of residence and commerce, and the symbolic and material value of properties along the street. Downtown merchants and industrialists relocated to St. Lawrence Street

²³Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds du Conseil de la Ville de Montréal, Commissions spéciales, Montreal Street Railway Company, *Procès verbaux*. 16 April 1891, and Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Rapport adoptés*, 1893-1894, No. 18.

²⁴Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Rapport adoptés*, 1893-1894, No. 18.

²⁵Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de la Commission de la voirie, *Rapport adoptés*, 1893-1894, No. 18.



Figure 2.9: The Establishment of Henry Grey, Chemist, 1891. Source: Dominion Illustrated (1891).



Figure 2.10: The Corner of St. Lawrence and Craig streets, ca. 1892. Source: Notman Collection, Musée McCord, in Lessard (1992).

and new manufacturers and retailers opened businesses in the new buildings of the Main. A variety of economic actors saw the street widening below Sherbrooke as an opportunity for relocation. Some established merchants, such as druggist Henry Grey, seized the opportunity to expand and relocate to larger and more accessible corner lots (Figure 2.9). But the widening was also linked to the expansion and reorganisation of central city functions. Retailers from central area streets, such as Notre Dame, were attracted to the lower rents and increased access to consumer markets afforded by what was being lauded as "one of the leading thoroughfares of the city"²⁶. The increased volume of rentable space and the anticipation of the tramway in 1892 made the corners of Craig and Ste. Catherine street particularly attractive locations. In 1890, for example, M. Saxe and Sons, an established merchant tailoring firm, moved to new premises on the western corner of St. Lawrence and Craig streets (Figure 2.10). L. J. A. Surveyor, a downtown hardware merchant since 1866, also installed his business a few doors up the street. The *Dominion Illustrated* in 1891 described his motives:

Recognizing the fact that upon the rebuilding and widening of St. Lawrence Main street, it must become the principal street in town for the transaction of business, Mr. Surveyor, with commendable foresight, removed his hardware store from the former premises on Notre Dame street, to his present eligible location at No. 6 St. Lawrence Main street.²⁷

Further north, at the intersection of Ste. Catherine Street, a group of 'Parisian gentlemen' built one of the city's first department stores in 1891, La Compagnie Générale des Bazar which was modelled on the Parisian Bon Marché and New York's Macy's.

The descriptions of all of these new stores in city guide books and illustrated albums emphasized the size of the premises and the display windows, and the range and quality of goods offered. Originally a hardware wholesale supplier, with the move to St.

²⁶Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number of the Dominion Illustrated Devoted to Montreal, the Commercial Metropolis of Canada* (Montreal: Sabiston Lithographic and Pub. Co., 1891).

²⁷Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number 97*.

Lawrence Street Surveyor had adapted his business to the domestic consumer market of the street. City guide books commented on the new appeal of his store for 'housewives': Surveyor now displayed a range of domestic consumer products, including "...couteaux, ciseaux, razors, cuillers, batterie de cuisine, séchoirs, glacières, planches à laver, [...], cafetières, théières, chaudrons, tordeuses, arrosoirs, etc..."²⁸. Although these goods were quite ordinary, its was their range, displayed in one shop, that was remarkable to the journalists of the period²⁹. La Compagnie Général des Bazars, although specialized in men's apparel, was described as offering an "indescribable variety" of fancy and dry goods³⁰. Equally remarkable was the changing nature of display that came with the expansion of these retail establishments. As a department store, La Compagnie ushered in a new scale of display that coincided with the modernisation of the street. With storey high display windows, the goods inside the store entered the visual landscape of the street: "The handsome plate glass windows are the point of admiration to all who pass on either street, each one being decorated with samples of the various lines that can be obtained in the different departments"³¹. Even smaller establishments along this modern commercial street like Surveyor's were praised in the press for their display windows: "The present house is one that is admirably suited to the business of a large retail store, it has a large show window with a plate glass front and a fine entrance"³².

²⁸ "...knives, scissors, razors, spoons, kitchen utensils, driers, refrigerated cabinets, washing boards, [...], coffeepots, teapots, kettles, blenders, watering cans.." (author's translation). Andrien Leblond de Brumath, *Guide de Montréal et de ses environs* (Montréal: Granger Frères, 1897) 166.

²⁹Andrien Leblond de Brumath, *Guide de Montréal* 166.

³⁰This new scale of merchandising was remarkable for the range and origin of its goods and the nature of the display: "On entering, the visitor would find himself [sic] in a spacious and well lighted apartment, in which can be purchased family goods, toilet articles, church ornaments, dry goods, hooks etc., which are disposed in great profusion on the shelves and in the show cases. These, together with the elegant wood trimming, which are of cherry, go to make up an effect particularly pleasing to the eye. The staple and fancy dry goods are of the latest patterns and colours, many lines being imported directly from Paris as well as from Germany and England. The assortment of jewellery, fancy clocks, cigar cases and other knick-knacks, is probably the most complete in the city, being selected with the greatest care by competent buyers in the leading markets in the world". Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 173.

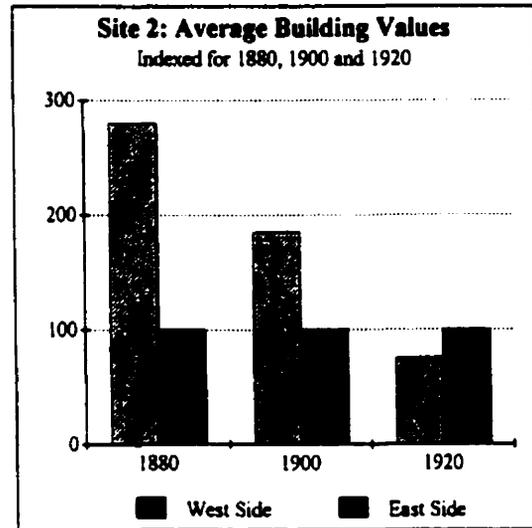
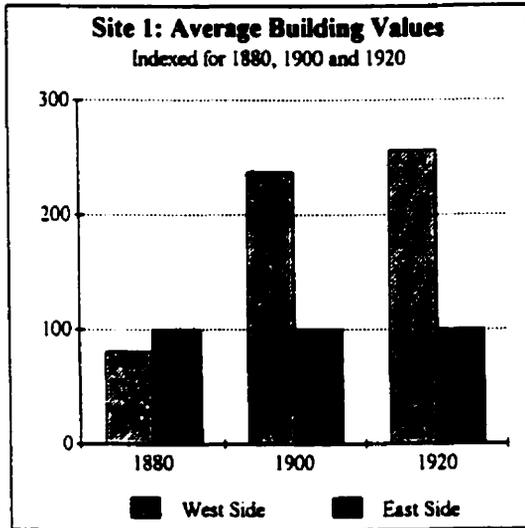
³¹Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 173.

³²Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 97.

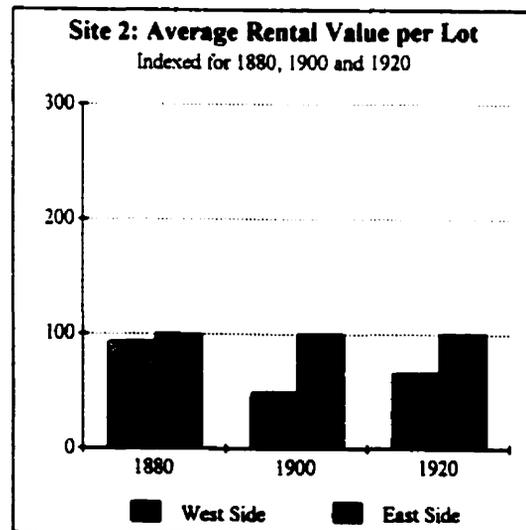
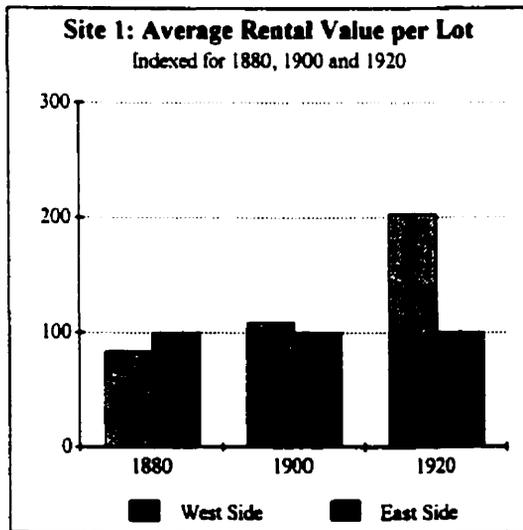
Although few department stores would ever be located on St. Lawrence Street, it would retain a retail vocation in apparel related sectors, specialized goods, and food and housewares. Its distinctive mixture of cloak and suit houses, dry goods merchants, grocers, jewellers, milliners and tailors, would be definitive of the commercial landscape of the street in the years to come³³. The emergence of such large retailers on lower St. Lawrence Street attests to its increasing importance as commercial location following the widening and in anticipation of the double tramway. As the main street of a central area suburb, St. Lawrence was a logical route for the expansion of particular commercial and industrial activities because it was also an important thoroughfare and access route for the downtown core. As the central business districts of industrializing North American port cities grew and expanded, the increasing dominance of the financial sector and port warehousing displaced other businesses out of the central city economy (see Ward 1966, 1971; Bowden 1971, 1975). The expansion of the financial sector and port warehousing in the central area of Montreal had displaced workshop manufacturing and retailing in the apparel industry to St. Lawrence Street by the 1890s. This move gave these firms better access to consumers, labour and lower rents. Embryonic department stores, clothing manufacturers and furniture retailers typically led the way out of the central area and up St. Lawrence Street, and were followed by theatres, hotels and restaurants.

The reconstruction of the built environment on the west side changed the density and potential value of the buildings, and introduced new building forms to the street that could accommodate these economic activities. Analysis of two distinct sections demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the widening and the expansion of the central area to the industrialisation, densification and modernisation of the street. Site 1 includes all the properties between Craig and Dorchester streets and Site 2 includes all of the properties between Sherbrooke Street and Pine Avenue. As shown by the data

³³Although retailing would be a permanent vocation of St. Lawrence street in the twentieth century, few department stores would ever be located on this street. Following the westward movement of the Anglophone upper-middle classes, most major retailers by-passed St. Lawrence in their move to the centre of Montreal's contemporary downtown core along Ste. Catherine Street.



Figures 2.11 and 2.12: Sites 1 and 2, Average Building Values, Indexed for 1880, 1900 and 1920 Source: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle budgétaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1880, 1900 and 1920



Figures 2.13 and 2.14: Sites 1 and 2, Average Rental Value per Lot, Indexed for 1880, 1900 and 1920. Source: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle budgétaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1880, 1900 and 1920.

on shifts in building values, the widening had a much stronger effect on the built environment and economy of the lower portion of the street (Figures 2.11 and 2.12). While the average building value in Site 1 was about the same for both sides before the widening, by 1900 new heights, density levels and the quality of construction intensified the value of the buildings on the west side, and they far surpassed that of the east side by 1920³⁴. This was not the case for Site 2, where the value of the buildings decreased relative to the average values for the east side. In this sector, land occupation was more diverse. The widening was also less intrusive because it did not necessarily mean reconstruction of entire city blocks.

In the area below Sherbrooke, there was also a strong increase in the volume of rentable space after the widening. Rental values drawn from the municipal tax rolls indicate that by rebuilding in accordance with By-law 161, building size, density of buildings per lot and the volume of rentable space increased (Figures 2.13 and 2.14). Although the rental rate per square foot was comparable, total rental values per lot on the west side on average increased dramatically, intensifying the gap between the east and west sides by 1920³⁵. While the east side was still lined with two storey brick structures,

³⁴In each case, the average building values for each side of the street were calculated by taking an average of the estimated building values for each side of the street from the municipal water tax evaluation rolls. To compare the difference between the east and west sides, the values were converted to an index where the average value for the east side for every year is constant at 100. Index values were calculated for the west side by dividing the average value for the west by the average value for the east and multiplying the result by 100. Property value was substituted for the 1880 values because building values do not appear in the water tax rolls until the 1890s. Archives de la Ville de Montreal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle budgétaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1880, 1900 and 1920.

³⁵In each case, the average rental values for each side of the street were calculated by taking an average of the total estimated rental values for each lot from the municipal tax evaluation rolls. These figures were then indexed to compare the east and west sides of the street using the same method as in Figures 2.11 and 2.12. See footnote 34 for an explanation of this method. This system of rental tax evaluation was adopted in Montreal to acquire the necessary capital to pay for the water works and is a rare source of annual assessment that includes tenants as well as property owners. Many researchers have verified that these rental values, used for taxation purposes, are strongly correlated with floor area in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Gilliland 1998; Gilliland and Olson 1998; Hanna and Olson 1983; Lauzon 1986, 1992. They are, therefore, strong indicators of building volume and the density of occupation.

the west side now consisted of three and four storey loft buildings. The introduction of new architectural forms facilitated an intensification of land occupation and, in turn, the amount of rent that could be earned. The Robillard Building (1889) and the Brunet Building (1890) (Figures 2.15 and 2.16) located on the west side of the street below Dorchester, are perhaps the best existing examples of the boom era mixed-use buildings constructed after the widening. Both were four storey loft buildings built in Romanesque style originating from the warehouse districts of Chicago and New York (Gubbay 1989; Houle 1984). The appeal of such buildings was their flexibility and dense lot coverage. With an undefined and divisible interior layout, they could accommodate a large mixture and volume of retail, residential, wholesaling and light manufacturing activities. By 1900 on St. Lawrence they housed a variety of tenants: piano showrooms, dime museums, shooting galleries and men's clothiers occupied the ground floor, and the apartments above served as boarding houses, family apartments, small tailor's workshops, or accountants' and labour union offices.

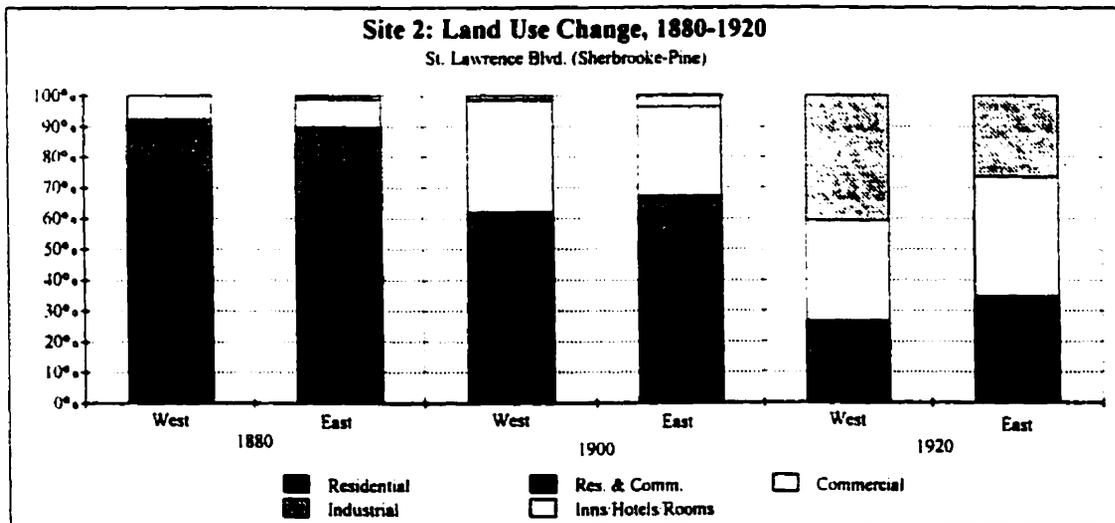
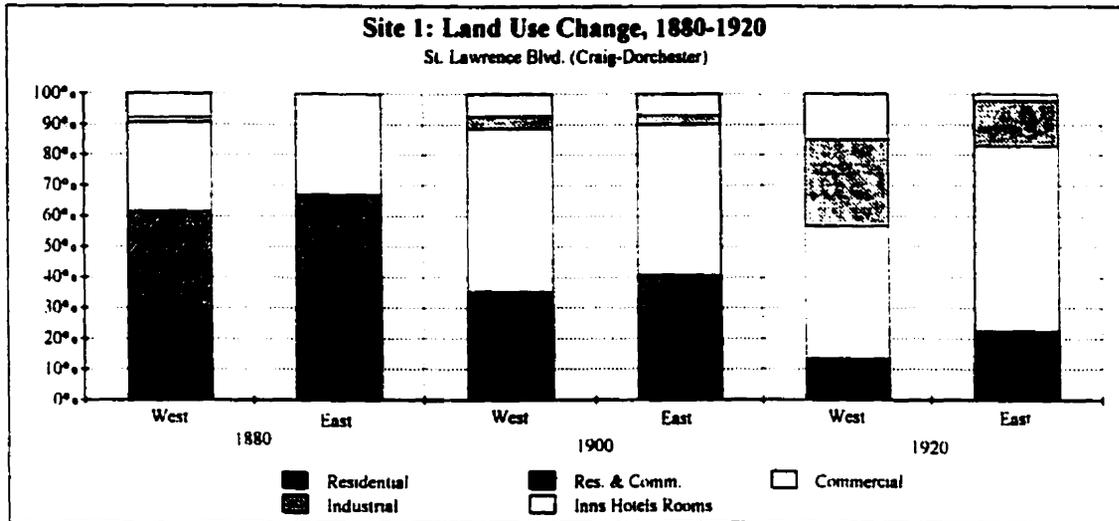


Figure 2.15 The Robillard Building (1889), 1999



Figure 2.16 The Brunet Building (1890), 1999

With the densification of the built environment on the west side of the street came



Figures 2.17 and 2.18: Sites 1 and 2, Land Use Change, 1880-1920. Source: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle budgétaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1880, 1900 and 1920.

a reordering of land use patterns³⁶ (Figures 2.17 and 2.18). The expanded volume of the built environment could now also accommodate industrial and larger commercial facilities as they left the central area in search of low rents and more space. Close to the Central Business District, merchants and artisans who lived above their shops dominated Site 1 in 1880 (Figure 2.17). By 1900 it had become part of the Central Business District and there was a significant decline in the percentage of merchants who lived above their businesses, an increase in commercial land uses and a very small increase in manufacturing activity. Effects of the new construction on the west side do not become evident until 1920, when this side emerges as dominated by commerce, manufacturing and hotels, inns and boarding houses, while the east side, with its smaller scale and older structures, continues to be dominated by commercial activities and services.

The low totals for manufacturing in this district do not, however, accurately reflect what was occurring in these spaces. The widening coincided with the outward movement of the garment industry. Many of the dry goods stores of the 1870s and 1880s remained, but by the 1891 they were beginning to manufacture ready-made clothing in the spaces above their businesses³⁷. As was typical of the apparel industry in other North American cities, an agglomeration economy of manufacturers, wholesalers, retailers and traditional custom clothing trades was developing along this portion of the street (Jacobs 1969; Ward

³⁶Totals for each of the five land use categories were calculated as a percentage of the total number of occupants for each side of the street. Professions of the occupants and tax evaluations for businesses or dwellings were used to categorize each unit using the following five land use categories: *residential* includes all dwellings, rented or owned by someone other than a merchant operating a business in the same building; *res. & commercial* includes dwellings and commercial units in the same building that are occupied by the same tenant; *commercial* land uses are all non-industrial economic activities including merchants, artisans, personal services, and offices; *industrial* includes all manufacturers; and *inn hotels/rooms* includes all hotels, inns and rooming houses.

³⁷Arcand Frères (1881) at the corner of de la Gauchetière, was a long established dry goods store that began to specialize in ladies' mantles and gentlemen's suits and devoted its upper floors to manufacturing. Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 113. Dry goods merchants P. Lamy & Bros. (1867) expanded into the ready-made clothing market and had a tailoring department above their shop Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 127. Merchant Tailors such as E. Lemieux were also beginning to participate in the manufacture of men's clothing in the upper storeys of their establishments. Dominion Illustrated, *Special Number* 163.

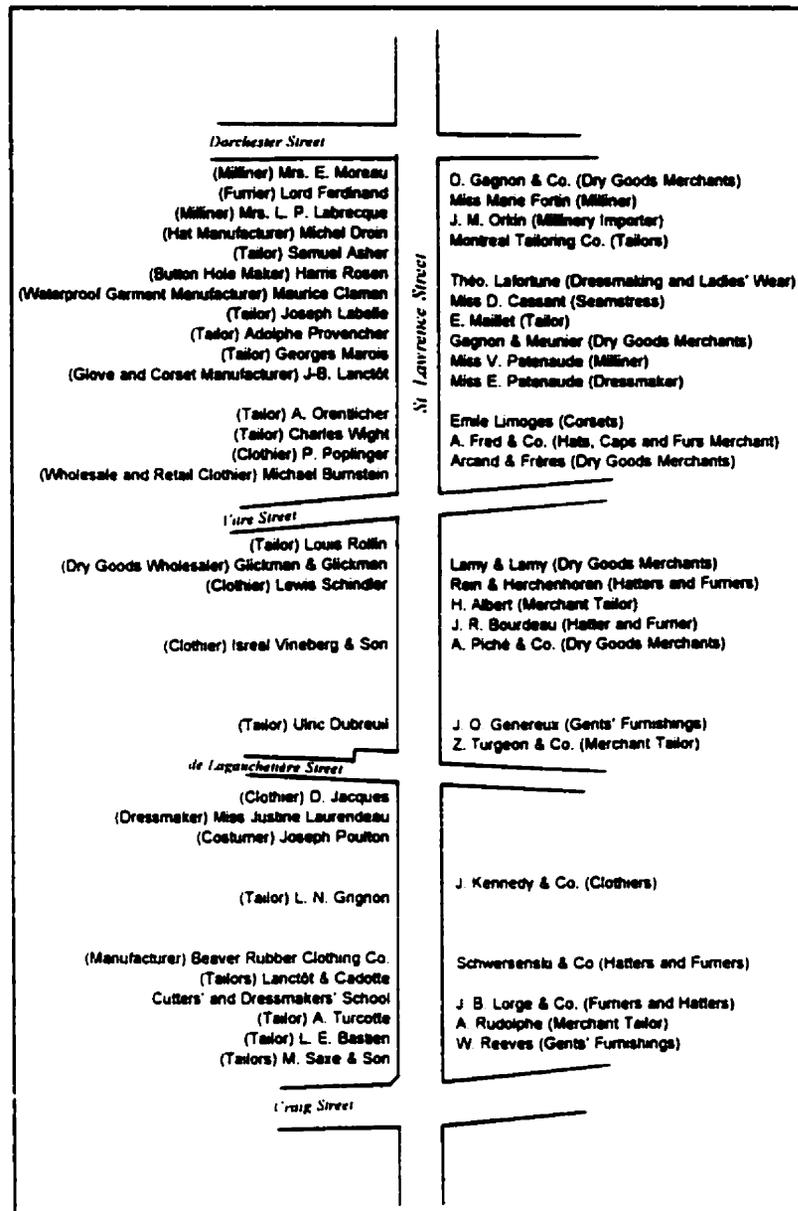


Figure 2.19: Map of Apparel Related Establishments, 1900 Source: *Lovell's City Directory*, 1899-1900, 1900-1901, and Archives de la Ville de Montréal. Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle bugetaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1900.

1966). By 1900, a cluster of traditional tailoring, millinery and dressmaking establishments occupied these spaces along with small scale manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. The new structures facilitated an agglomeration economy because they could accommodate the larger manufacturers and wholesalers along side the retailers and small sweatshops (Figure 2.19). Like Broadway in New York's Lower East Side or Spadina in Toronto's Kensington District, the St. Lawrence garment corridor would develop as the 'economic engine' of the surrounding Eastern European Jewish immigrant district (Chien Lin 1994; Frager 1992a; Hiebert 1995). The settlement of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the area after 1890 also led to the concentration of the industry in the area, since this population was an important management and labour force. By the first years of the twentieth century, the loft buildings on the west side of the street would be filled with furriers, tailors and clothiers that employed large labour pools of skilled of male cutters and pressers, and female machine operators and finishers. From the intersection of Craig, this garment manufacturing corridor would slowly extend northwards above Sherbrooke Street, to become the centre of garment manufacturing in Canada from the 1920s to the 1950s (Beauregard 1950).

With the widening of the upper portion of the street and the extension of the tramway to the north in 1905, upper and lower St. Lawrence Street had a stronger functional relationship. Until 1910, the upper portion of the street remained more residential upstairs and was usually lined on the ground floor with personal services and retail establishments that catered to the tenant families of the area (Figure 2.18). A dramatic change in land use occurred after 1910 when large house furnishings retailers and manufacturers began to build and lease space in the area. Between 1900 and 1920 there was a marked decline in residential land use -- particularly on the west side of the street -- and a dramatic increase in manufacturing. This pattern is not so much a product of the widening as a result of the transportation improvements which made the upper portion of the street accessible and attractive to manufacturers and their labour forces. A few years after the street improvements, manufacturers built five to eight storey buildings on either side of this portion of the street (See Chapter 3). By 1920, clothing firms such

as Atlas Clothing, Star Cap and Empire Knitting had their workshops in the large loft spaces of the Baxter Block. By 1920, therefore, the upper and lower portions of the street were integrated, the commercial and industrial activities extended the length of the street, and St. Lawrence was a bustling and modern thoroughfare populated by merchants, shoppers, commuters, lodgers, traders, farmers from the country and, as we will see, entertainment seekers.

The modernisation of the Main led to important morphological alterations that accommodated central city growth and determined its future as a place of work and entertainment. Symbolic and social changes were also associated with the street improvement process. First, expansion of commerce and industry along St. Lawrence Street changed gender relations. As garment production industrialized and the practice of combining home and work gave way to segregation, fewer and fewer women appear in the historical records as independent business owners in the millinery, dressmaking and merchandising sectors that accommodated these enterprises³⁸. As we will see in Chapter 3, the rise of the clothing factory drew women into waged labour in the loft spaces along St. Lawrence Boulevard in significant numbers. Secondly, as the garment industry expanded, there was a slow displacement of residents in the area and along the street. The housing was converted to hotels and rooming houses and the surrounding district was increasingly inhabited by working-class families. Some of the housing stock was also integrated into the economy of an emerging residential prostitution district. Thirdly, the increase in factory employment in the area and the introduction of the electric streetcar brought an increased volume of workers and commuters to the street, bolstering the consumer market for household goods, clothing and popular entertainments. Finally, increases in industrial employment and suburbanization changed the class and 'ethnic' identity of this space. As we will see, dramatic changes to the 'ethnic' composition of the surrounding districts were underway. Between 1890 and 1911, St. Lawrence Street

³⁸*Lovell's City Directory*, 1909-1910, and Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service des finances et du contrôle budgétaire, *Rôles de valeur locative*, 1920.

became an intercultural milieu for a cosmopolitan working-class population.

For a short time, the street's symbolic value was enhanced, making it the scene of civic displays and contests over space between the Francophone and Anglophone petit bourgeoisie. After the street widening, the Association St. Jean Baptiste³⁹ abandoned their original plans to build the headquarters of their society on Gosford Street in the downtown area, and chose a site on the west side of St. Lawrence Street above Dorchester⁴⁰. The accessibility of the newly renovated street made this a much more attractive site, but territorial strategies between Anglophones and Francophones were perhaps significant as Anglophones moved eastward on St. Lawrence above Sherbrooke⁴¹. The Monument National (Figure 2.20), the Association's Francophone cultural and educational centre, was inaugurated with large civic demonstrations in 1894 (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Rumilly 1975). The scale of this romanesque style four storey building was rare for its time and location and, although it was more humble than planned, the detail and weight of its stone-cut facade made it an imposing structure. With the completion of the Monument in 1894, the symbolic importance of St. Lawrence Boulevard for the Francophone petite bourgeoisie was temporarily enhanced. Photos of the Fête Dieu and the St. Jean Baptiste parades at the corner of St. Lawrence and Craig streets in June 1894

³⁹In 1912 the Association St. Jean-Baptiste changed its name to its current title, the Société St. Jean-Baptiste (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Rumilly 1975).

⁴⁰Plans for this headquarters of French culture in North America were announced at the fiftieth anniversary of the Association in 1884, on a site at Gosford and Craig, but financial difficulties delayed construction and the Association reconsidered their choice of location. For the original plans see *Le Monde Illustré*, 4 Oct. 1890: 1 and 355. For a discussion of this process see Bourassa and Larrue (1993) and Rumilly (1975).

⁴¹Bourassa and Larrue have argued that the clergy and city councillors believed that the Monument might improve the district and that occupying space further west was an attempt to counter the eastward expansion of the Anglophone city as symbolized by the construction of the Baxter Block. The Baxter Block was built between Prince Arthur and Guilbault street on the west side of St. Lawrence in 1892 (Figure 2.8). Designed by architect Théo Daoust, this uniform three storey structure would house 28 stores on the ground floor level. Although a luxurious theatre that would seat 2,500 was announced as part of this project, it was never built (Bourassa and Larrue 1993). The two projects, however, are not comparable since the Association St. Jean Baptiste was a cultural society and the Baxter block was built by an individual entrepreneur for commercial purposes.

appeared in *L.e Monde Illustré* and other local papers.

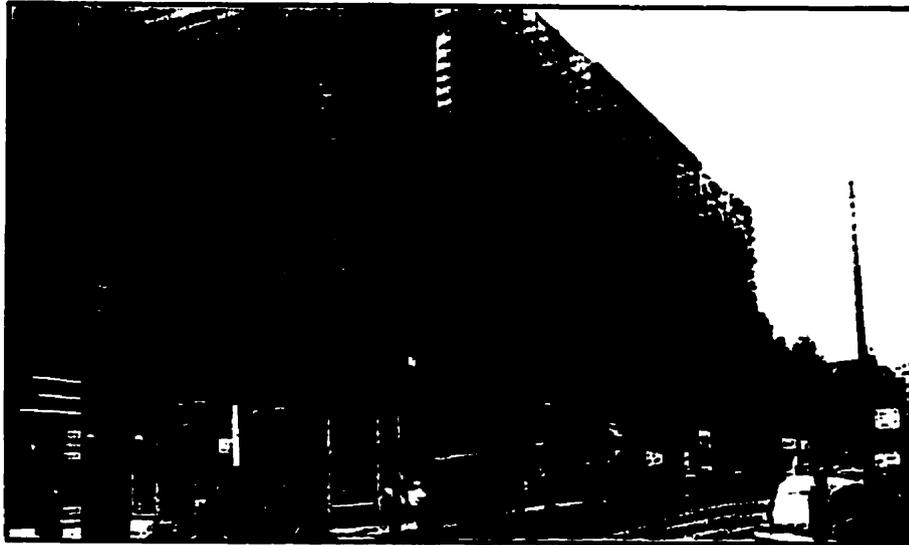


Figure 2.20: Monument National in the 1920s. Source: Notman Collection, Musée McCord, in Lessard (1995).

Larger civic dreams were attached by the Association St. Jean Baptiste to its bastion on the Main. In order to enlarge and give definition to French civic space in Anglo-capitalist Montreal, the Association (with the support of the French Catholic clergy) proposed the construction of a Boulevard National in 1899⁴² (Figure 2.21). This grand shopping street, resembling the rue Rivoli in Paris, would extend eastward from the Monument National to St. Denis Street, where a new opera house would be built (Gubbay 1989). The scheme would unite French-Canadian cultural institutions and carve out French civic space in the Anglo-capitalist city such as Laval University on St. Denis. It would also lead to the 'creative destruction' of the aging St. Lawrence Market, which lay

⁴²The Association made a similar proposal in 1894 but it was rejected. The 1894 plan appears in Figure 2.21. *La Presse* 27 May 1899

directly in front of the Monument⁴³. But the dream of a grand civic centre was crushed by the empty coffers of the city, a lack of political will, a continent-wide depression after 1893 and opposition from merchants in the Market (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gubbay 1989). Dramatic changes to the 'ethnic' composition of the surrounding districts and the social spaces and commercial activities along the Main would soon transform the symbolic meaning of the street. The Monument National remained an important French-

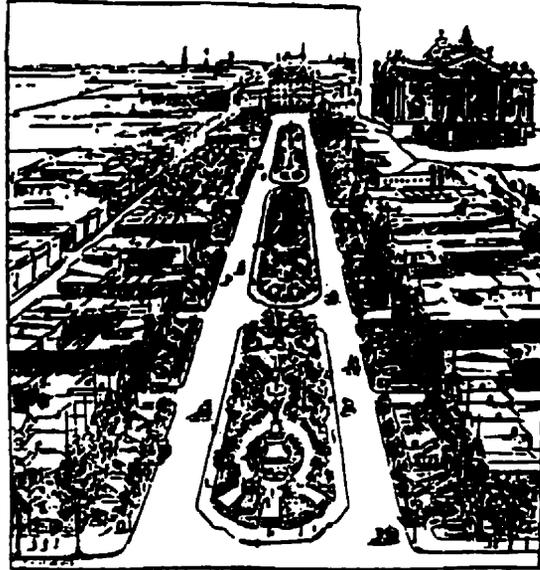


Figure 2.21: Plans for the Boulevard National, 1894
Source: *La Presse*, May 27, 1899

Canadian cultural institution, but it would also serve as an important resource for the socially and culturally diverse communities of the area.

'COSMOPOLITAN' SPACE: IMMIGRATION, GENDER AND 'COMMUNITY'

A central area with low rents and an aging housing stock, the St. Lawrence District⁴⁴ became a neighbourhood for new immigrant groups who came to the city in larger

⁴³In a 1892 petition, the Association claimed that the market was unsanitary and demanded its demolition. Secretary General of the Association St. Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, Petition to the Conseil de la Ville, 19 Dec. 1892. A second one was sent in 1896. Secretary General of the Association St. Jean-Baptiste de Montréal, Petition to the President of the Market Committee, 20 April 1896. The health inspector found that although the market required some improvements (such as privies) it was not in an uninhabitable state. Bureau of Hygiene, *Report*, 8 May 1896. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de Service du Greffe, *Dossiers de coupures de presse*, Marché St. Laurent. Counter petitions were submitted and the Market Committee decided that it was important to maintain a market in the area. It was renovated in 1902, and was lauded as among the cleanest and most well-kept markets in the city, the choice of 'good housekeepers' and 'responsible fathers'. *Album Universel* 1902.

⁴⁴St. Lawrence Street ran through the centre of the St. Lawrence District and was the boundary line between the St. Lawrence Ward to the west and the St. Louis Ward to the east. See *Census of Canada* 1881, 1891 and 1901.

numbers after the 1891⁴⁵. By the turn of the century, the ethnicity and religion of the residents of the St. Lawrence District were the most diverse in the city. This diversity had an important impact on the social worlds, economy, activities and symbolic meaning of St. Lawrence Street. While the vast majority of the population living in the St. Lawrence District in 1901 were Canadian-born, by 1911, the proportion of foreign-born was expanding rapidly. In 1881 one in twenty residents of the district were foreign-born (not including British-born), but by 1911 this ratio had reached one in three (Figure 2.22). In absolute numbers, the foreign-born population grew tenfold from 1,675 to 16,640 over the same period. While the Canadian-born population was still dominant, its share declined from 80 percent in 1881 to 61 percent in 1911 and there was also a decline of the British-born population over this period. A similar decline in the Anglo-Protestant and French-Canadian Catholic populations was reflected in the religions and ethnic origins of the populations of the St. Lawrence District. There was a marked decline in the Catholic and Protestant religious groups and French and British ethnic populations between 1881 and 1911 (Figure 2.23 and 2.24). French-Canadian Catholics clearly dominated the district before 1901, but by 1911 only 46 percent of the population were Catholic and the population of French ethnic origin had declined to 32 percent. At the border of English and French Montreal, the residential areas surrounding the street were developing as the 'ethnic' space of 'other' groups, and eventually this process would lead to the production of the 'third city'.

Backbone of the district, St. Lawrence Street became a cosmopolitan space in the first years of the twentieth century, where residents created distinctive institutions and businesses, and participated in the working-class North-American mass culture along the street. The people who took up residence on either side of St. Lawrence Street were

⁴⁵Despite what many authors have argued (Beaugard 1950; Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Massicotte 1942), these new ethno-cultural groups did not displace existing populations, but rather appropriated affordable and available space in a central city area undergoing transition (Linteau 1992b). The thesis of interethnic competition rests on the assumption that 1) diverse ethnic groups could not and did not share space, and that 2) the immigrants had the means to displace established populations, both of which cannot be born out in the material landscape of the city in the 1890s.

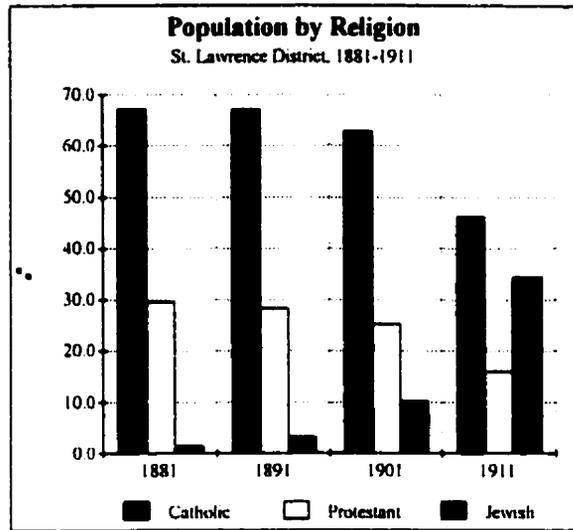
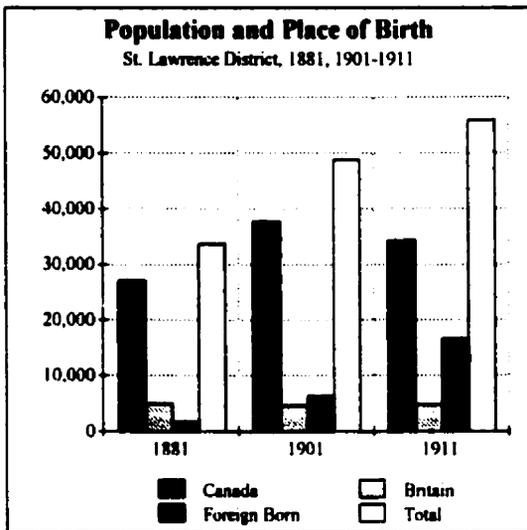


Figure 2.22: Population and Place of Birth, St. Lawrence District, 1881, 1901, 1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1881, 1901, 1911* and Figure 2.23: Population by Religion, St. Lawrence District, 1881-1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1881-1911*.

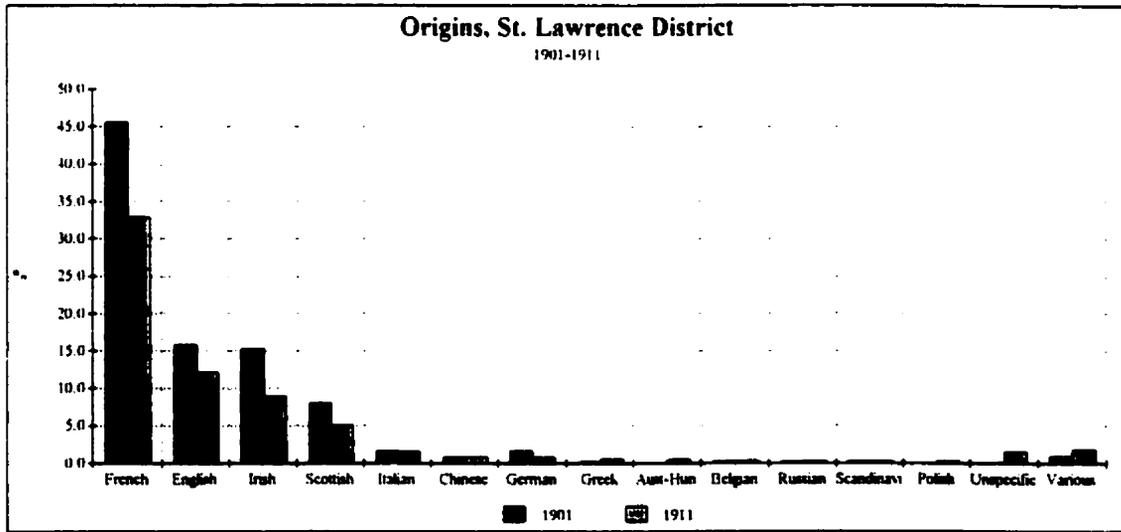


Figure 2.24: Origins, St. Lawrence District, 1901-1911. *Census of Canada, 1901, 1911*.

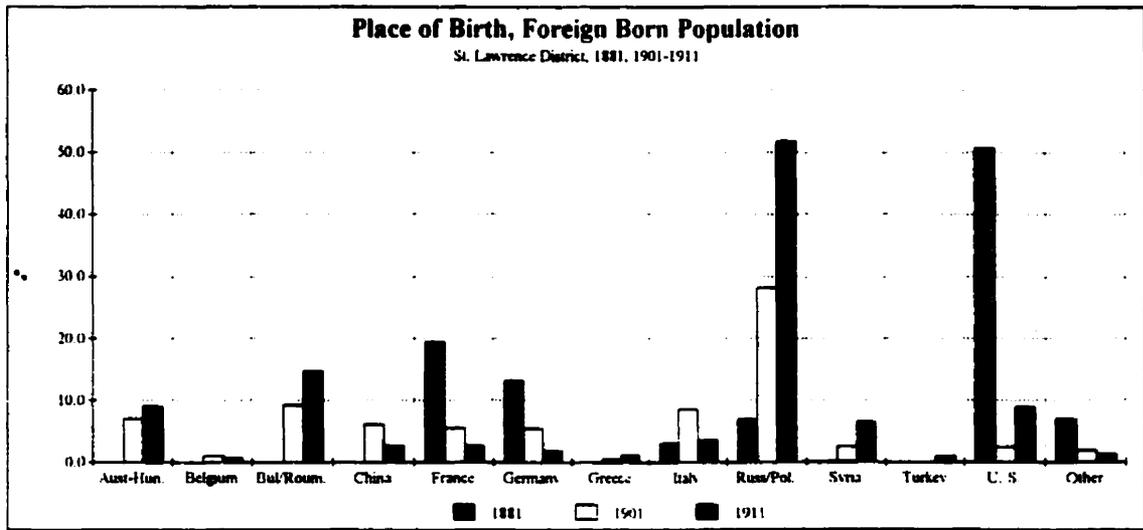


Figure 2.25: Place of Birth, Foreign-Born Population, St. Lawrence District, 1881-1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1881-1911*.

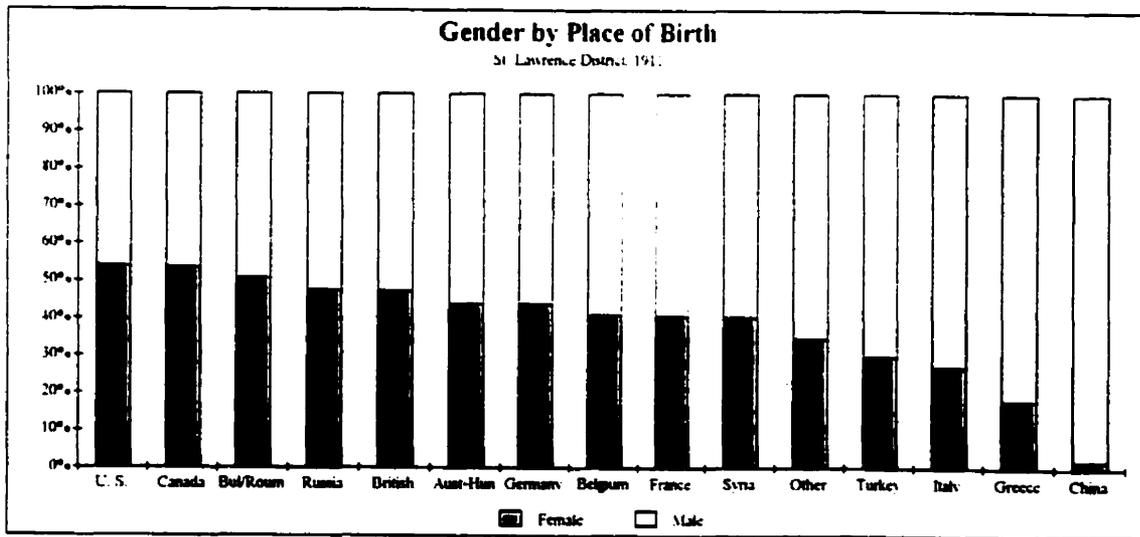


Figure 2.26: Gender by Place of Birth, St. Lawrence District, 1911. Source: *Census of Canada, 1911*.

distinct in terms of their ethnic, religious and linguistic differences. In 1911, the place of birth of the foreign-born population ranged from the United States, Eastern and Western Europe, to Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Greece, Turkey and Syria, and included China (Figure 2.25). While their numbers were very small, the clusters of Italian and Chinese residents were apparent by 1901. While these groups constituted only 798 and 394 of the people respectively, the St. Lawrence District was the primary area of concentration for these groups: 55 percent of the population of Chinese origin and 57 percent of those of Italian origin in Montreal in 1901 lived in this district. The largest groups, however, came from Eastern Europe (Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and Poland), a profile of Jewish immigrants in the 1890s. The 8,625 immigrants from Russia and Poland came to dominate the foreign-born population by 1911, constituting 15 percent of the total population and fully half (51 percent) of all the foreign-born. One third of the population reported an ethnic origin and religion as Jewish. Between 1901 and 1911, the population of Jewish 'ethnic' origin grew from 10 percent to 34 percent and became the largest group in the district, second only to Catholics as a religious group. Eastern European Jewish immigrants were strongly concentrated here. In 1881, half of the city's total Jewish population lived in the St. Lawrence District, and one third, more established populations, lived in the St. Antoine District in the west. By 1911, 87 percent of the city's entire Jewish population lived in the St. Lawrence District. As in other North American cities, this geography represented a significant split between a more established English speaking 'uptown' population and a new 'downtown' concentration of Yiddish-speaking immigrants (Ojima 1988; Linteau 1992b; Tulchinsky 1992).

Residents of the St. Lawrence District were as notable for their diversity as they were for their departure from localized 'norms' in terms of ethnic origins and population composition. In the Anglo-capitalist city, most other neighbourhoods were either populated by French-Canadian Catholics or British families and were distinguished by their class and religious character. Except for the St. Anne District to the west of the central area, most were populated by diverse age groups with a balanced gender composition. Before 1901, the St. Lawrence District had a higher population of women

especially among the unmarried, Canadian-born. In 1901, following an intense period of immigration, men out-numbered women. The population was 54.7 percent men and 45.3 percent women, a ratio of 1:1.2⁴⁶. There was also a markedly higher proportion of men and women between 20 and 29 years, and a much lower-than-average population under 14 years old⁴⁷. These demographic patterns reflect the nature of gender relations among these populations that often made them very different from the rest of the city. In most immigrant groups, men out-numbered women, but this pattern was especially pronounced among groups that suffered immigration restrictions (Figure 2.26). Chinese and Italian immigrant communities were respectively 98 percent and 72.8 percent male, and other sojourning groups such as Greeks and Turks had a low percentage of women. The Italian and Chinese concentrations were primarily male work communities. Like in other cities they were stigmatized due to racial prejudice and were seen by the wider populations as being associated with the gambling activities and 'vice' of the district (Anderson 1991, 1998). Among the Eastern European Jewish immigrants there was probably a strong concentration of young adults, but their patterns of immigration were diverse and included family and individual male and female immigrants. For this reason, the gender ratio among these communities was much more balanced and the percentage of women immigrants in all groups was highest among Eastern Europeans (Bulgarian, Romanian, Russian and Austro-Hungarian), with women slightly out-numbering men among Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants.

Due to this diversity, at the turn of the century the Main developed as a distinctive intercultural milieu with a strong concentration of young adults, unmarried male sojourners and workers from other nearby parishes. The cosmopolitan character of this district had an important impact on the social worlds, economy and symbolic meaning of St. Lawrence Boulevard. By 1910, the cultural diversity of the area was reflected in its

⁴⁶Canada. Census Office, "Table I: Ages of the People by Sex," *Report on the Fourth Census of Canada 1901*. Vol. 1. (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, King's Printer, 1902).

⁴⁷Canada. Census Office, "Table I: Ages of the People by Sex," *Report on the Fourth Census of Canada 1901*.

commercial and institutional activities and its crowd (Figure 2.27). At the Monument National, French-Canadian families attended "les soirées de famille", French-language plays, and educational programs. As we will see in Chapter 3, French-Canadian and Eastern European Jewish garment workers attended union and strike meetings at Empire Hall. Entrepreneurs of various ethnic backgrounds also ran businesses along the street. Italian immigrant Angelo Roncari, for example, ran Roncari's Confectionery on the east side of the street above Vitre. The small garment workshops were owned by new Jewish immigrants and the larger manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers were more established Jewish capitalists. Eastern European Jewish immigrants created their own institutional networks in the flexible spaces of the street. In addition to the garment factories and shops, lower St. Lawrence Boulevard was lined with Yiddish socialist bookstores, fraternal societies and 'store front' synagogues (Anctil 1988, 1997; Pinzer 1977; Medresh [1947] 1997; Tulchinsky 1992). Yiddish plays were often staged at the Monument National and the National Radical School occupied a room in this French-Canadian institution (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Medresh [1947] 1997) (Figure 2.28). The Yiddish language marked the landscape through signage and newspapers such as the *Forverts*, and the *Tageblatt* (Rome 1978). A wide range of Yiddish cultural identities were expressed here with the cafés and meeting halls of anarchists (Pinzer 1977), synagogues and religious institutions of the orthodox and the reformed, and the fraternal societies and shops of people from all over Eastern and Western Europe (Tulchinsky 1992).

On the other hand, it was along the Main that these new immigrants shared with French-Canadians in the consumption of a mass commercial culture that was at the heart of modernity in the industrial city. Working in factories and living in the heart of the entertainment district the immigrant population participated in a larger working-class culture. Although mass culture surrounded the district, records of the Yiddish community in the early years of the twentieth century, indicate that St. Lawrence Street was a distinctive location. According to Medresh [1947] (1997), the consumer and labour landscape of the Main represented a space between North American urban culture and the shtetls of Eastern Europe (see also Tulchinsky 1992). Medresh's [1947] (1997) memoirs



Figure 2.27 Fire at the Starland Theatre. 1907
Source *La Parole* 2 Oct 1907



Figure 2.28. Amateur Yiddish Theatre Troupe in front of the Monument Nationale in 1914. Source: Canadian Jewish Chronicle, in Bourassa and Larrue (1993)

describe the cinemas and clothing stores of the Main as an integral part of the production of a distinctive North American urban Yiddish culture. In the theatres new immigrants watched images of North American indigenous people, pioneers and the 'natural' landscape far beyond the city, and heard news from Europe and the United States (Medresh [1947] (1997)). Window shopping along the Main was part of everyday life, a popular form of entertainment for the young men and women (Medresh [1947] 1997). Affordable ready-made dresses adorned the windows of the dry goods and dressmakers' shops. Stylish and flamboyant hats that made women stop and look were found in the millinery shops. While window shopping Medresh [1947](1997: 91) recalls that,

Les femmes, [...] exprimaient un intérêt particulier pour les vitrines des magasins de chapeaux féminins. Elles y regardaient la dernière mode en matière de chapellerie. Les chapeaux bien sûr attiraient les commentaires, mais pas autant que les plumes qui les décoraient. Plus elles étaient longues, plus le chapeau était magnifique et imposant⁴⁸.

In the photographers's windows people admired the photos on display and had their own photos taken in their new Americanized clothing to send to friends and relatives back in Europe (Medresh [1947] 1997). Along the Main, therefore, immigrant women entered the world of commercial entertainments. As on the Lower East Side, the accessibility of the ready-made clothing, cinema and work along the Main provided a gateway to modern womanhood in stark contrast with the norms of their parent community and their mothers (Calvi 1990; Glenn 1990; Ewen 1985).

⁴⁸"The Women..expressed a particular interest in the windows of the women's hat stores. Here they saw the latest styles in millinery. The hats certainly attracted comments but not as many as the plumes that decorated them. The longer they were, the more imposing and magnificent the hat" (author's translation) (Medresh [1947](1997): 91).

BRIGHT LIGHTS IN A FRACTURED CITY

But the street par excellence where Montreal is to be seen au naturel; the boulevard where upon strolls the grand flaneur, the street where walk the pimp and the prostitute; where saloons, museums, confectionery and retail dry-goods stores form almost the entire length; where ground floors are used for business purposes, and the upper flats for gambling and vilest debauchery, where tobacco-stores and candy-stores, ostensibly respectable, are but dens of infamy, where liquor is sold after hours and on Sundays without even the aid of a little side door - that street is St. Lawrence Main Street...Here is a spicy taste of immorality. In such a field will surely be found food for reflection⁴⁹.

The spread of commerce and industry and the shifting class character of the residences and entertainments transformed central city commercial streets like the Main in the late nineteenth century (Swanson 1995). Thus far we have examined the economic and cultural changes resulting from the integration of St. Lawrence Street into the industrial metropolis. The proximity of the street to the expanding central area also intensified the concentration of services for transient populations and working-class popular entertainments. The mix of commercial activities along St. Lawrence Street had already made it a contentious space in the eyes of the Victorian Anglo-reform classes before the street widening. The above quote, drawn from the anonymous 1889 text *Montreal by Gaslight*, demonstrates that in the 1880s St. Lawrence had a reputation for commercial entertainments, prostitution and 'vice'. The fact that commerce, mixed with residence, extended the length of the street, made the Main a place where social relations could be commodified in the eyes of Victorian Anglo-reform classes. The Main, therefore, constituted an 'immoral region' for this class group (Driver 1988; Hubbard 1997, 1998; Ogborn 1992; Ogborn and Pile 1994).

By the 1890s a cluster of night restaurants, hotels, taverns and theatres had developed between Craig and Ste. Catherine streets. Over the course of the next fifty years, this emerging bright lights entertainment district would develop as the commercial facade of a red-light district in the St. Louis Ward (east of St. Lawrence Street) from 1890 to 1950 (Lévesque 1995; Myers 1996). Located near the port, this portion of the

⁴⁹Anon., *Montreal by Gaslight* (Montreal, 1889) 154.

street housed a number of hotels and inns and other services to accommodate visiting populations, drawing even the domestic spaces of the Main into the domain of commerce. By 1890, a cluster of night restaurants, hotels, taverns, theatres and other 'cheap amusements' (Peiss 1986) had developed at the intersection of St Lawrence and St



Figure 2.29 Rush Hour on St Lawrence Boulevard below Ste Catherine, ca. 1910. Source: Notman Collection, Musée McCord MP125.82

Catherine Street. Although few brothels would ever be located on St. Lawrence, it was a site where a variety of commodities were exchanged, and, as such, developed a suggestive reputation for transgression of a domesticated Victorian sexuality. Like 'immoral regions' in other commercial cities, attempts to maintain 'moral order' involved constructing spatial boundaries between women based on middle-class norms of respectable female sexuality (Hubbard 1998; Lévesque 1995). As we will see, discourse of fear and desire was constructed around the female prostitute and the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine Street because this corner came to represent the possibility of commercialized sex, an image that permeated the area's commercial entertainment and private spaces and would persist until the 1980s (Rosen 1982; Ryan 1990; Walkowitz 1980).

As a large industrial port city, Montreal had a constant flow of people and goods into the city and hotel taverns and licensed restaurants were seen as a necessary evil to serve seamen, merchants and farmers who came to the city. The connection between St. Lawrence Street, the port and the agricultural hinterland had always made it a profitable

location for locate inns and taverns serving visiting traders and workers. The new levels of traffic generated by the tramway also brought Montrealers to its restaurants and theatres (Figure 2.29). A number of sources indicate that the concentration of taverns, hotels and theatres along this street was not a 'natural' process, but rather was orchestrated by legal and political powers. Under pressure from religious leaders and temperance groups, authorities strove to reduce their influence on the local population by limiting such licenses to the central area of the city⁵⁰. In the eyes of civic leaders, the location of St. Lawrence Street and its function as the axis of the 'third city' made it the perfect site to concentrate commercial entertainments. Popular entertainments developed here as a compromise between the Anglo-capitalist upper-middle class population who wanted to keep taverns, theatres and popular museums at a distance from their own neighbourhoods in the west, and the French Catholic church, which strove to protect residents of working-class parishes to the east from the perils of commercial culture.

Due to its location, St. Lawrence Street was among the streets in the central city area where obtaining a liquor license was a simple process. The 1894 testimonies of legal authorities, journalists and theatre owners before the *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic* demonstrate that the concentration of popular amusements along St. Lawrence was a product of the city's licensing practices. For example, in the early 1890s the owner and manager of the Lyceum Theatre (located on Ste. Catherine one block east of St. Lawrence), easily obtained a majority of support from the electors of the district on a petition to sell beer and wine in his theatre primarily because there were a number of licensed establishments at this intersection⁵¹. Testimony also indicates that in the east of the city taverns could be found in every parish, but in the west obtaining an liquor license

⁵⁰Canada, Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic, *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic, Minutes of Evidence, Quebec*. Vol. II (Ottawa: Owen Dawson for the Order of Parliament, 1894) 243.

⁵¹ The Lyceum Theatre lay at the heart of a cluster of licensed night restaurants and billiard rooms. As Moore told the commission regarding licensed establishments in the area: "I am right in the very heart of them. I can throw a stone into 10 windows at least". Testimony of William Walter Moore, Owner and Manager of the Lyceum Theatre, *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic*, 531.

was practically impossible⁵². A cluster of similar types of businesses developed in one district, far away from the homes of the Anglo-capitalist reform classes and at a certain distance from the French-Canadian Catholic parishes in the east. The maintenance of this district, moreover, required a certain amount of police protection and patronage which was later revealed during the Cannon Commission in 1909, an inquiry into the municipal administration⁵³. The testimonies before the commission demonstrated that the police and the city councillors played a role in shaping this geography. Investigating the annulment of fifty-six infractions of the liquor license by hotel-keepers, the commission discovered that some city councillors had encouraged the police to protect a "...cercle d'hôteliers" that were located at the intersection of St. Lawrence and Craig streets who had contributed to their campaigns in the 1907 elections⁵⁴ (see Brodeur 1984). The infractions committed by these innkeepers were usually for selling intoxicating liquor on Sundays, and opening after hours, but some had apparently committed more serious infractions such as tolerating prostitution⁵⁵.

As St. Lawrence Street became associated with prostitution, transience and working-class entertainments it was seen as a transgressive site in terms of Victorian

⁵²As William Walter Moore told the commission, obtaining a license in the West was difficult: "In the west end the people are controlled more or less by Churches and one thing and the other, and it is harder there". Testimony of William Walter Moore, Owner and Manager of the Lyceum Theatre, *Royal Commission on the Liquor Traffic*, 533.

⁵³Québec, Commission Royale d'enquête sur l'administration de Montréal, *Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de la Cité de Montréal par son conseil de ville, 1909. Rapport de M. le Juge L. J. Cannon. Commissaire*. Québec, 1909.

⁵⁴When the city clamped down on infractions in 1905, innkeepers turned to Councillor Wilfrid Proulx, who later became the President of the Police Commission. See the testimonies of Jules Durand, Proprietor of the White Palace Restaurant (Vol. 3: 83) and Wilfrid Landry, Proprietor of the Magestic Hotel (Vol. 11: 36) in Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de la Cité de Montréal par son conseil de ville (Cannon Commission), 1909, *Témoignages de la Commission royale*.

⁵⁵This occurred at Oceau's Café, the Aumais Hotel and the Park House Hotel. Police Chief Campeau, Monthly Report to the License Committee of Montreal, 15 Nov. 1907, in Archives Nationales de Québec, Fonds de la Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de la Cité de Montréal par son conseil de ville (1909) présidée par L. J. Cannon, *Exhibits from the Inquiry*, 1902-1909.

norms of behaviour (Hubbard 1998). As the Captain of the district told the Cannon Commission: "J'ai la rue St. Laurent et la rue Ste. Catherine, qui sont à peu près les deux rues les plus fréquentées que nous avons à Montréal, qui sont sous ma surveillance et qui me donnent beaucoup d'ouvrage; il y a beaucoup d'infractions qui se commettent contre les règlements municipaux"⁵⁶. On the one hand, the Main was the domain of transient populations and was place of encounters between visitors to the city and local working-class populations. As a doorman in one of the St. Lawrence hotels testified, one of his roles was to keep transients out of the bar. His employer gave him specific instructions: "Tous les bums du bord de l'eau passent par ici: je ne veux pas que tu les laisses entrer, pour rien, ni repas, ni autre chose"⁵⁷. On the other hand, because it lay just outside the most central commercial area of the city and at the intersection of major tramway routes to working-class neighbourhoods to the north and east, the Main was developing as an important centre of commercial entertainments.

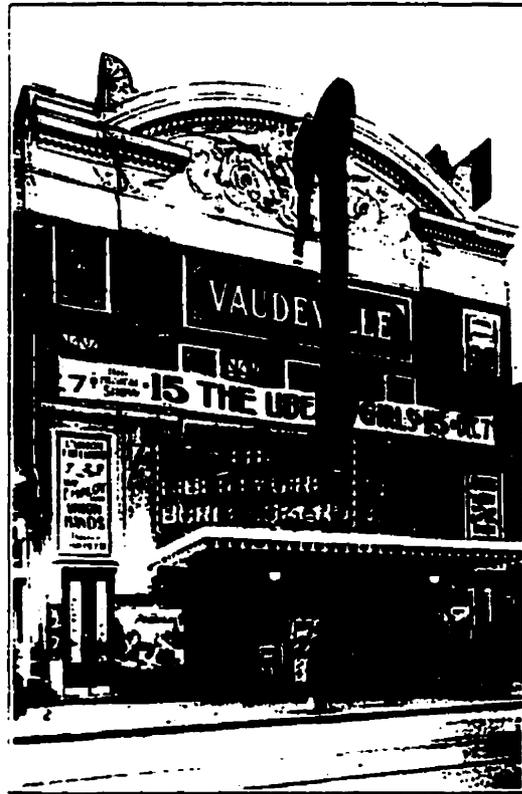


Figure 2.30: Scala Theatre, St. Lawrence above Ste Catherine, ca. 1913 Source: Notman Collection, Musée McCord, MP2336(10).

The assignment of taverns, inns and licensed restaurants to St. Lawrence spawned

⁵⁶"I have St. Lawrence Street and Ste. Catherine streets under my surveillance, which are pretty much the two busiest streets and give me a lot of work; there are many infractions committed against municipal regulations" (author's translation). Testimony of Joseph Eugene Hébert, Captain of Police, District 4, Montreal, Cannon Commission, 1909 Vol. 17: 29.

⁵⁷"All the bums from the waterfront pass here: I don't want you to let them enter for anything, not for meals or anything else" (author's translation). Testimony of James. T. Simoneau, Bartender, Cannon Commission, 1909 Vol. 6: 43.

other commercial entertainments in their earliest form. Dime museums, cafés-concerts, nickelodeons, théâtres des variétés, and American vaudeville were introduced to Montrealers along lower St. Lawrence Street (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Hébert 1981). Encouraged by this concentration, many of the first owners of moving picture houses in the city located their establishments on St. Lawrence Boulevard and on Notre Dame Street in the nickelodeon era (1905 to World War I) (Lanken 1993). For the first time, crowds of up to 800 working-class men, women and children could pay five cents apiece to sit together in the large dark spaces of the first movie theatres. Here, they watched the half hour films of the Lumière Brothers interspersed with short variety entertainments such as jugglers, singers, comedians and magicians (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Hébert 1981). Two long lasting theatres were built along St. Lawrence in this era, the Crystal Palace (1908) and the Starland (Scala) (1906) (Figure 2.30) (Lanken 1993). The unique aspect of these theatres was the strong connection between cinema and the burlesque, a relationship that continued long after 1905 and shaped the future of Lower St. Lawrence Boulevard as a centre for burlesque entertainment and variety shows between 1922 and 1945 (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gubbay 1989; Hébert 1981). In these sites of popular entertainment and in the public spaces of the street, turn-of-the-century Montrealers escaped the intimate context of their own parishes, and revelled in the wonder of modern urban life.

CONCLUSION

As the primary street of a mercantile suburb, St. Lawrence Boulevard had an early vocation as central place and site of commodity exchange. Alterations to the morphology of the street and the expansion of the Central Business District in the 1890s changed patterns of land use in ways that would reorient the local economy and social character of the space. The street widening played an important role in expanding commercial and industrial activities because it created new volumes of rentable space. Despite the aspirations of the property owners of 1888, however, the widening did not make St. Lawrence Boulevard into a prestigious commercial artery on par with the streets of the

central area. First, the development of the garment industry along St. Lawrence Street drew large numbers of people to work in the factories and congregate in the labour halls of this increasingly central site of working-class sociability. While women were participants in the exchange, production and consumption of the commodities of the mercantile street, as we will see in Chapter 3, the development of the garment industry along St. Lawrence Street drew women into the factories and labour halls altering ways that different groups of women would participate in the social spaces of the street. Secondly, the occupation of the surrounding neighbourhood by the city's newest immigrant groups after 1891 led to the production of an intercultural milieu. Intended to revive and maintain French-Canadian culture in the Anglo-capitalist city, even the Monument National came to serve this diverse local population. Here men and women from countries all over the world throughout the twentieth century would negotiate between their culture of origin and the mass culture of the industrial metropolis. Finally, the commodification of the social space of the street that came with the separation of the shops and homes of merchants also had long term repercussions for the street as a social space. Entertainment and transient lodging came to dominate its land use patterns by the 1920s. As I will show in Chapter 5, Lower St. Lawrence Boulevard, therefore, ultimately developed as a bright lights region and was integrated into the economy of the adjacent red-light district.

CHAPTER 3

SWEATED WORKERS AND REDS

In 1974, journalist Sheila Arnopoulos took a bus trip up the Main in search of a hosiery factory where she would pose as a factory worker and report on her experience for the *Montreal Star*¹. As the bus made its way up the street the shoppers consuming 'exotic' goods caught her attention, but she quickly shifted her gaze to the upper floors of the street's facades. Looking at the small loft buildings lining the street, Arnopolis describes the Main as a site of production, a place where immigrant women have laboured long hours in "...crooked buildings, with warped doors, narrow wood staircases and grimy sectioned windows" in an environment of "...clattering machines, steam pressers, greasy cardboard boxes and harsh bright lights"². Twenty years later, most such industrial buildings had been converted into residential or commercial loft spaces. These three to nine storey buildings were constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century, formed by a conjunction between capital interests and a constant supply of low-paid women workers at a time when garment production in Canada underwent rapid transformation.

The first female clothing operators and finishers carved out an identity for themselves as women workers along the Main by participating in the multiethnic working-class culture that emerged in the street's factories and institutions. As we saw in Chapter 2, central-city expansion and civic improvements at the end of the nineteenth century changed the economy and patterns of land use along the street. With the expansion of the industrial economy, streets such as St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine East were centres of work, commerce, popular entertainment and social life, and served as symbolic centres of an emerging working-class consciousness. As I will show, the Main had a specific

¹For an edited collection of Arnopolis' series for the *Montreal Star* (March and April 1974) see Irving Abella and David Millar (eds) *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1978) 203-215.

²Arnopolis in Abella and Millar, *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century*.

character because it was the domain of a multiethnic labour force that was employed in the garment industry and lived in the surrounding residential areas. The dominance of the garment industry along this thoroughfare shaped the character of the institutions and drew women workers into the urban public culture of the street in distinctive and contentious ways. Formed at a time of intense expansion and redefinition of the industry, the factories and working-class institutions of the Main were sites where young women negotiated their role in the working world and communicated their identities as women workers.

In this chapter, I begin to examine the relationship between the expression of an oppositional female identity by garment workers and the characterization of the Main as space of difference at the beginning of the twentieth century. Throughout North America the expansion of the industry between 1890 and 1914 produced new relationships and cleavages between people and production sites that were specifically related to the gender of the labour force (Waldinger 1985). In Montreal, one of the principal places this expansion took place was on St. Lawrence Boulevard where a new identity for women workers would be expressed and contested in the institutions, factories and on the street. While women had been working in factories in other manufacturing sectors such as shoes and textiles since the 1870s (Ferland 1989), the garment industry had relied on home workers well into the 1890s. As we will see, the location and organization of the industry had specific implications for the gender of the labour force. The practice of home work in the 1890s and the appearance of the female factory worker in the garment industry after 1900 were embedded in a set of competing discourses regarding the working-class family, industrial urban life, ethnicity and gender. Drawing upon reports by middle-class women's reform groups, female industrial inspectors and journalists, I illustrate how female garment workers were represented in reform discourses regarding the disruption of the working-class domestic sphere in the industrializing city. I unpack the relationship between, gender, compartment and city life embedded in discourses regarding subcontracting and the garment district that formed along the Main. In order to show that the social characteristics of the Main provided a space where women workers could communicate their own identities, I examine their involvement in Labour Day and May

Day Parades on the Main. Discourses voiced in the popular press are analyzed to show how the garment industry and the institutions of the Main were specifically implicated in the expression of a politically charged socialist female identity intended to contest the ethnic and social inequalities of industrial urban life in Montreal.

THE MAIN: A NASCENT GARMENT DISTRICT

In the garment industry, the expansion and diversification between 1900 and 1914 was fuelled by the growth of urban labour and consumer markets in Toronto, Hamilton and Montreal, and increased access to North-American markets (Payette-Daoust 1986; Teal 1985). Montreal had an advantage in terms of these factors and emerged as the garment production capital of Canada, out-competing Toronto by 1901 (Teal 1985). By 1891, clothing production dominated four of the top ten sectors of industrial employment (de Bonville 1975) and was second only to shoe manufacturing from 1871 to 1901 (Payette-Daoust 1986: 32). Specific to the garment industry was the predominance of a female labour force. Although only a fragment of the women involved in garment production worked outside of their homes, they were still the dominant labour force inside factories and shops by 1891³.

At the turn of the century, men's clothing was primarily manufactured in the West Ward of the central area and in the St. Anne Ward west of McGill Street (Payette-Daoust 1986). Tailors and other custom clothing producers were located throughout the city. The production of women's clothing was concentrated in small shops surrounding the major dry goods and apparel stores along Ste. Catherine and St. Lawrence streets (Payette-

³Census data compiled by de Bonville (1975) indicates that tailors and clothiers ranked second in the top ten employment groups in manufacturing in 1891, shirt and tie manufacturers were sixth, dressmakers and milliners were seventh, and hatters and furriers were tenth. These were employment groups in which the labour force was over fifty percent women: women represented 62 percent of the labour force in tailors' and clothiers' shops, 74 percent in shirt and tie manufacturing, 87 percent in dressmakers and milliners shops, and 54 percent in fur and hat production (de Bonville 1975: 36). As Payette-Daoust (1986) has pointed out, census data on the garment industry greatly under-represents the female labour force in this industry since 90 percent of workers who engaged in some stage of garment production laboured outside the factory and are not included in these statistics.

Daoust 1986). As we saw in Chapter 2, the first decade of the twentieth century brought the garment industry to St. Lawrence Boulevard and a distinct agglomeration economy of garment retailing, wholesaling, and manufacturing developed near the central area and spread northward. Due to its proximity to the central area and increased access to labour markets created by improvements to the tramway system, light manufacturing expanded along the street after 1890. Between 1901 and 1911, the number of waged employees and the capital invested in garment production dramatically increased in the St. Lawrence District. As the primary commercial street, St. Lawrence

	1901	1911
Men's Clothing (Custom)		
<i>Firms</i>	19	17
<i>Capital</i>	\$104,560	\$241,450
<i>Value</i>	\$241,516	\$455,200
<i>Salaried Employees</i>	41	41
<i>Average Weekly Salary</i>	\$17.00	\$18.30
<i>Waged Employees</i>	185	273
<i>Average Weekly Wage</i>	\$6.02	\$6.40
Men's Clothing (Factory)		
<i>Firms</i>	7	29
<i>Capital</i>	\$155,707	\$1,078,516
<i>Value</i>	\$364,950	\$2,567,948
<i>Salaried Employees</i>	33	73
<i>Average Weekly Salary</i>	\$17.70	\$22.26
<i>Waged Employees</i>	407	1261
<i>Average Weekly Wage</i>	\$6.28	\$8.63
Women's Clothing (Custom and Factory)		
<i>Firms</i>	31	29
<i>Capital</i>	\$72,825	\$647,001
<i>Value</i>	\$227,612	\$1,596,182
<i>Salaried Employees</i>	37	105
<i>Average Weekly Salary</i>	\$13.46	\$16.84
<i>Waged Employees</i>	235	1064
<i>Average Weekly Wage</i>	\$4.28	\$6.02

Figure 3.1 The Expansion of the Garment Industry in the St. Lawrence District, 1901-1911 Source *Census of Canada, 1901-1911*

Boulevard housed many of these firms (Figures 3.1 and 2.19). The expansion of the industry in this district was particularly pronounced in the manufacture of men's clothing where the number of firms, the value of the goods and the amount of capital invested increased dramatically between 1901 and 1911 (Figure 3.1). In the coming decades, this industry would dominate industrial production on the street. An agglomeration economy comprised of an intricate web of merchant tailors, ready-made contractors, retailers, wholesalers, jobbers and large manufacturers in the men's and women's clothing sectors would form along the Main and become the most productive garment manufacturing

district in Canada until the 1950s⁴.

The shift from tailoring to ready-made clothing production in the late nineteenth century set the conditions for the emergence of this district⁵. In the nineteenth century, the bulk of production activities in the garment industry were done outside the factory in the homes of farming families living in nearby villages such as Ste. Rose and St. Hyacinth⁶. The expansion of the market for ready-made clothing after 1900 meant that the industry increasingly relied on technology and an urban labour force to accelerate production (Oiwa 1988). With the exception of the printing industry, garment production was one of the few light manufacturing activities that benefitted from a central location because it required small, low-cost facilities, integration with retailers and wholesalers, and became dependent on cheap labour forces drawn from inner-city neighbourhoods (Linteau 1992b). These conditions created very specific ethnic and sexual divisions of labour in the Montreal industry. In the ready-made sector, manufacturers in Montreal made use of Eastern European Jewish male immigrants as subcontractors or as skilled in-house factory workers. While skilled Jewish male tailors were most important to management and production, the large 'unskilled' labour force was dominated by young French-Canadian women, but also included Eastern European Jewish, Syrian and Italian

⁴By the 1920s, Ste. Catherine Street replaced the Main as the primary commercial artery in the city, and the Main became the centre of the clothing business, which included not only factories, but also small shops, importers and wholesalers (Houle 1986). Although there were other centres of garment production in the city, the Main has been the most persistent site of production and merchandising, and the industry dominated the street from 1900 until the 1950s, when manufacturers began to close or move their businesses to suburban, rural and off-shore locations (Beauregard 1950; Houle 1986).

⁵ In the 1880s, custom tailoring remained the dominant form of clothing production in Montreal, but ready-made clothing had eclipsed tailoring in certain sectors of production. The manufacture of men's furnishings began in the 1850s and expanded rapidly in the last third of the nineteenth century, particularly between 1880 and 1900 (Payette-Daoust 1986; Teal 1985). The mass production of women's cloaks and suits began in the 1890s and slowly industrialized between 1900 and 1920 (Payette-Daoust 1986; Shlakman 1931).

⁶See, Canada, Royal Commission on the Relations between Labour and Capital, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations between Labour and Capital in Canada. Minutes of Evidence. Quebec. Volumes 3 and 4* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1889).

immigrant women from central-city neighbourhoods (Payette-Daoust 1985; Steedman 1997). Although mechanisation at times altered the roles of women in the Montreal garment industry, the female labour force shaped this industry. The reorganising of this labour force has continued to be an important method of adaptation to economic change throughout the twentieth century⁷.

The location of the garment factories on the Main was clearly linked to economic factors and the presence of a skilled male immigrant labour force in the district. The predominance of specific ethnic groups among the female labour force in this industry suggests that being accessible to these workers was also an important locational factor. At the turn of the century, young, unmarried female factory workers had a limited range of work opportunities. They rarely lived independently, factory work was temporary, their wages were low but integral to the family economy, and household location decisions were made around the occupation of the male household head and by parish affiliation⁸. Eastern Districts such as St. Jean-Baptiste, Ste. Marie and St. Jacques were populated by French-Canadian working-class families where men worked in locally-based industrial sectors such as the railway, shoe and tobacco manufacturing and in stone cutting yards (Lussier 1984). In the nineteenth century, women in these districts did home work since

⁷For more details on the effects of the female labour force on the structure of the garment industry in Canada see Steedman (1986, 1997). Feminist geographies of work have suggested that local gender relations play an important role in the restructuring of advanced capitalist economies (Massey 1984, 1994; Hanson and Pratt 1988, 1995). Massey's (1984) work on the British economy reveals that labour market segmentation differs by local conditions, and industrial (re)location depends on local gender relations.

⁸It was a common assumption that young French-Canadian women who lived with their families accepted low wages, and drove wages down in Montreal. When A. L. Vernon came to examine possible work conditions for British women in Montreal she found that, unlike the United States and elsewhere in Canada, manufacturing conditions were structured in relation to young women who lived at home, and that there were few accommodations for independent, young working women. A. L. Vernon, *Notebook of Miss A. L. Vernon on her visit to Canada for the British Women's Emigration Association* (Great Britain: County of Hereford and Worcester Record Office, 1904) in National Archives of Canada, Montreal Local Council of Women, *Briefs and Reports*. Factory owners, such as Willie Gordon of Standard Shirt told her that most of their employees were French-Canadians who were "...living at home and quite content with 2 or 3 dollars a week" (Vernon 1904: 68). The Montreal Women's Club informed her that there were few opportunities for independent female factory workers in Montreal: "There are a number of French-Canadians employed who are quick workers, live at home and keep down prices" (Vernon 1904: 57). These interpretations may, on some level, be accurate, but more research would be required to substantiate such claims.

there were few local opportunities to work outside the home. To take advantage of this labour reservoir, garment manufacturers and contractors chose the flexible spaces of the Main as a locational compromise between building costs and access to labour markets⁹. As the garment industry expanded along the street it provided jobs that were only a short tramway ride from home or even within walking distance. The Main became a location in the city where these labour forces met on a daily basis, producing a variety of struggles over the organization of the labour force, generating concern on the part of middle-class reformers and occasionally resulting in unconventional alliances that crossed ethnic and gender lines.

THE MIRROR OF DISLOCATION

In an era of increasing occupational segmentation and residential segregation, the Main presented authorities with a perplexing mixture of activities and people. The street consisted of a mix of industrial, residential and commercial activities that blurred social and functional boundaries. Populations of diverse ethno-cultural origins met in the shops, theatres and factories and encountered each other on the street and in the tramway. With its new industrial vocation, this street would play a very central role in the reworking of gender and class identities in Montreal before World War I. The activities that made up the industry were fragmented and diverse, and many of them drew working-class women into new labour contexts, such as the factories, the backrooms of the large retailers, small clandestine ateliers and the homes of the clothing subcontractors. As I will demonstrate, the emergence of an international labour union movement and its institutions along the Main also gave women workers a new context in which to express their identities as workers and contest their conditions of labour. From important meeting halls such as Empire Hall to small socialist bookstores and taverns, the Main was where working-class populations contested the social order (Oiwa 1988; Rome 1978b). In an era when

⁹Hanson and Pratt (1995) have sought to draw out the dynamic between employers and employees in the production of locally-based female labour markets. Examining the problematic of "the friction of distance", a concept that is central to geographies of women and work, they have demonstrated that manufacturers in labour intensive sectors often seek out immobile female labour markets (Hanson and Pratt 1995).

ethnically fragmented working-class interests converged around international unionism and socialism, these spaces were particularly contentious in the eyes of the municipal authorities, the clergy and the bourgeoisie.

As many historians of women in the garment industry have shown, finding a legitimate identity as a factory worker and union member was a challenge (Frager 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Kessler-Harris 1985; Steedman 1986, 1997; Waldinger 1985). Women garment workers contributed significantly to the family wage of their households, but their labour markets continued to be defined in terms of their feminine role in the domestic sphere (Bradbury 1993; Steedman 1986; 1997). They were viewed even by their allies as partial and temporary workers (Clio Collective 1987; Frager 1992a, 1992b Steedman 1986). Their ambiguous relationship to male industrial unions is perhaps one of the longest struggles in twentieth century unionism. While gender inequities in the household shaped role in the workplace, their actions at work and in the labour movement show that they questioned their social position and inequalities within the industry. As many historians have shown, working life in the factory led to the construction of new forms of female identity (Calvi 1990) and created new possibilities for working-class women to participate in the public cultures that surrounded the industry such as the socialist and labour movements (Kessler-Harris 1985; Steedman 1997).

Like women garment workers in most cities, their fragile position in the labour movement enabled manufacturers to exploit them. The conditions of their labour, however, drew public attention from industrial inspectors, unions and middle-class reform groups. Garment production establishments along the Main captured the attention of middle-class reformers who were concerned with the impact of industrialisation on the working-class family. The *Fédération Nationale St. Jean-Baptiste* (FNSJB), for example, organized French Catholic women into professional associations and stressed education

as a means to improve conditions among the working classes¹⁰. The Montreal Local Council of Women (MLCW) advocated education, industrial inspections and a variety of shop-floor improvements to protect working women. As women's groups, they specifically questioned the abuses of industrial capitalism by addressing the working conditions of women (Lavigne and Stoddart 1983). Reports from both groups demonstrate that they typically saw working women as subjects displaced from their proper sphere by the poverty of working-class families. Their perspective on the lives of working-class women was ideologically linked to a middle-class perspective on gender and space that was at odds with the concerns of the workers themselves. In this discourse, the body of the female garment worker played an important symbolic role and was ideologically situated in the garment district emerging along the Main.

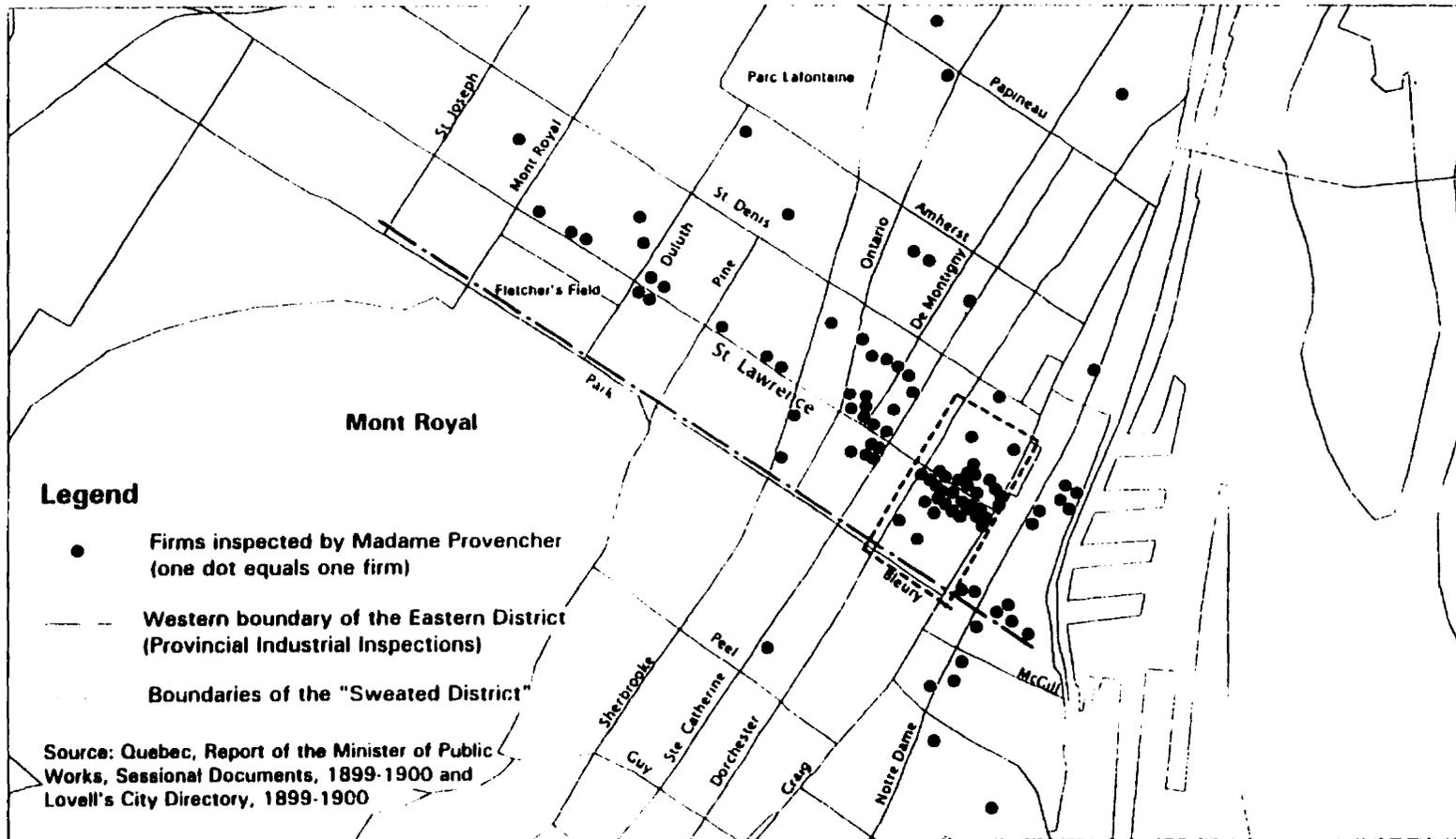
THE SWEATED DISTRICT

Women garment workers, however, entered the public eye in Montreal as 'sweated workers', as women who took piece work from large clothing contractors into their homes. 'Sweating' or doing very poorly paid labour in the home, referred specifically to poor women's labouring bodies and the exploitation they experienced in the garment industry (see Boris 1994). Labouring for long hours within the home did not correspond to middle-class ideals of femininity and respectability, and raised the concern of reformers. In 1897, *The Herald* drew public attention to the existence of the sweating system in Montreal and mapped its location in the city. "It is estimated by men who have made special inquiries that there are now over a thousand of them [sweaters] in the square that is bounded by Craig, Sanguinet, St. Catherine and Bleury Streets"¹¹ (Figure 3.2).

¹⁰The Fédération Nationale St. Jean-Baptiste (FNSJB) was formed in 1907 by elite Francophone women who were active members in the Association St. Jean-Baptiste through the women's auxiliary organization Les Dame Patronesses de l'Association St. Jean-Baptiste (Rumilly 1975). After investigating the organization of Les Écoles Ménagères in Europe and attending meetings of the MLCW, Francophone women leaders in this group such as Marie Lacoste-Gérin-Lajoie launched this association with the goal of providing an educational structure and meeting place that would bring together Catholic, francophone women (Lévesque 1994, 1995). They founded three professional associations, one of which was for manufacturing employees (Rumilly 1975).

¹¹*Montreal Herald* 3 Feb. 1897: 1.

FIGURE 3.2: CLOTHIERS AND TAILORS INSPECTED IN EAST MONTREAL, 1899-1900



While the purpose of this article was to build public awareness among 'concerned' Montrealers about the existence and spread of garment subcontracting in their city, it reveals an important spatial discourse. The reporter's view of 'the sweated district' was part of multiple discourses about the social order of urban space. Its boundaries encompassed the Jewish immigrant neighbourhood and the red-light district, both in early stages of expansion. The profiteers and victims of this system were both intimately linked to the double meaning of the area: "The operators and victims of this system are mostly Hebrews [sic], the number of whom is continually increasing"¹². The operators were described as the pawns of larger dealers, middle-men "...who bid for the work at the lowest possible prices and depend upon their ability to 'sweat' poor women and children to make a profit"¹³. The sites where this exploitation occurred were in the homes of the Jewish immigrant families and in the shops of subcontractors who occupied the district. The conditions of these houses and workshops clearly threatened the liberal capitalist optimism of the Victorian bourgeoisie: "The combination living-room and workshop offers one of the saddest spectacles which can be sought by any humanely disposed person, who seeks light on the subject of human misery"¹⁴. Men and women toiled side-by-side in unsanitary conditions, non-family members entered the home to work, home life and work were not separated, and women were engaged in paid labour rather than nurturing their families. Located in private and semi-private spaces this activity was inaccessible to public regulation, since industrial inspectors could not inspect homes or establishments that employed fewer than twenty people (Lessard 1895; Provencher 1900-1901).

The *Herald* (1897) article is important for reasons that extend beyond the fearful

¹²*Montreal Herald* 3 Feb. 1897: 1.

¹³An even stronger anti-Semitic sentiment was expressed in the bills proposed to rid the city of sweating, such as "...restriction of a certain class of immigration" and the prohibition of Sunday work (*Montreal Herald* 3 Feb. 1897: 1).

¹⁴*Montreal Herald* Feb. 3, 1897: 1.

Victorian gaze on conditions of poverty. In the late 1890s, subcontracting and homework became an important mode of production in a fast-growing industry as well as an object of national concern. While rural women initially did clothing work to supplement household incomes in an emerging commodity capitalist economy, rural to urban migration, immigration, and an increased rate of production meant that home-work and subcontracting in small shops in close proximity to the garment district were attractive solutions to reduce production costs for garment manufacturers (Oiwa 1988; Rome 1978a). New urban labour and commodity markets brought subcontracting and sweating to the city and increased its magnitude. This system was pervasive by the 1890s. MacKenzie King's investigations in 1896 revealed that two thirds of men's and boy's clothing was produced using the subcontracting system¹⁵. King's (1900) investigation into clothing contracts for federal military and postal uniforms outlined the system of production used by the contractors in Montreal and Toronto¹⁶. Contractors were keeping small workshops where cutters prepared the cloth to be distributed to one of three types of subcontractors: 1) a subcontractor who employed hands in a shop, 2) a subcontractor who employed hands in a shop in his or her own home, or 3) to individuals whose families served as production teams¹⁷. Contractors then played a pivotal role in the

¹⁵William Lyon MacKenzie King, *Report upon the Sweating System in Canada. 1895-1896* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1896).

¹⁶William Lyon MacKenzie King, *Report to the Honourable Postmaster General of the Methods Adopted in Canada in the Carrying Out of Government Clothing Contracts* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1900).

¹⁷The best known early clothiers, such as those who testified before *The Royal Commission on the Relations between Capital and Labour* (1889) and in King's investigations of government contracts (1900), were largely located in the West Ward or in the Ste. Anne district (Payette-Daoust 1986). King's report revealed that the majority of the workers and even some of the subcontractors were women. Women were employed in subcontracting shops that produced riding breeches, tunics and coats for the Canadian military and postal service. These workers were generally unmarried, French-Canadian, and 18 to 25 years old. King's report and that of the Royal Commission (1889) revealed that the vast majority of the labour force in the men's clothing sector were home workers in outlying settlements such as St. Hyacinth and Ste. Rose, a trend that is confirmed by the testimonies of the larger men's clothing manufacturers. Hollis Shorey testified that he employed 150 hands inside his factory and 1,450 workers in their homes within a twenty to thirty mile radius of Montreal. James O'Brien's testimony further revealed the geography of the sweating system. In his men's clothing factory, the cutting was done inside, but all other work was done outside by Jewish city contractors each of whom hired ten to thirty hands, except when manufacturing pants which were sent to women and their families outside Montreal.

expansion of the industry, providing manufacturers with cheap labour and capital costs and women workers with an abundance of 'unskilled' and low-paying jobs. The middlemen secured their contracts from manufacturers and either produced the work directly or subcontracted it to tailors and seamstresses at even lower rates, driving wages down to extremely low levels (Provencher 1897: 71).

With French-Canadian rural to urban migration and Eastern European Jewish immigration, the women who populated Montreal provided a labour force in the city. Urban homeworkers and women in the factories took over the finishing and operating work in the industry in the early years of the twentieth century (MacIntosh 1993; Payette-Daoust 1986; Steedman 1986; Teal 1985). What emerged was an industry that depended on a decentralisation of production, a fragmented labour force, and a 'reserve army' of French-Canadian and Jewish women (Teal 1985). By the 1890s, the industrial inspectors were well aware that the subcontracting system was prevalent in the workers' districts, where seamstresses earned a meagre fifty cents to three dollars a week for seventy-five to eighty hours of work¹⁸. The contract shop, which eventually took over from the home seamstress, had a more compact geographical location. Due to its early cluster of dressmakers, milliners, tailors and dry goods stores, contractors and subcontractors found a niche in the agglomeration economy of the Main¹⁹ (de Bonville 1975; Rome 1978a, 1978b; Teal 1985).

Subcontracting and exploitation in the garment industry also attracted the attention of provincial government officials. In 1895, Inspector Lessard investigated "The Sweating

¹⁸See Lessard (1895: 56). The geography of seamstresses doing home work probably followed the spatial concentration of the working classes in certain districts of the city, particularly districts with high concentrations of French-Canadian rural migrant families and immigrant families. See Bradbury's (1993) discussion of home work in St. Jacques Ward.

¹⁹The testimonies of Abraham Ephraim, Isaac Gold, Joseph Myers and Isreal Solomon before Royal Commission (1889) provide evidence of the operation, scale and conditions in these shops. They were coat finishers who employed a few young women as finishers. Abraham Ephraim, for example, worked in his brother's home with another man and nine young women. In Isaac Gold's shop, the ratio of men to women was three women to one man.

System and Sunday Labour", targeting the garment industry. Lessard (1895) saw the exploitation of home workers and employees in contract shops in moral terms and argued that they were "immorally enslaved" by the piecework system²⁰. Sunday work, subcontracting and women's work were 'problems' that required further investigation. The MLCW lobbied the Québec government, and in 1896, two female inspectors were appointed to investigate the conditions of women's work. To locate the women workers, they were instructed to search out the small shops that the male inspectors had never visited, such as the ateliers of dressmakers and tailors. Louisa King, charged with the Western district, reported that "...she found women where she least expected to do so", and that it was in small shops that "...there was most to be done" (King 1896: 64). Louise Provencher, who was assigned to the Eastern District (east of Bleury), went into small factories and shops, but soon targeted dressmakers, milliners and tailors (Provencher 1897: 69). Her reports for 1899 and 1900 reveal a cluster of garment related activities located in close proximity to the 'sweated district' and extending up the Main (Figure 3.2).

The emergence of the tailor who did contracting work for clothing manufacturers was an important element in the urbanisation, expansion and intensification of garment production in this district. While home contracting had raised concerns about the spread of disease and the erosion of the working-class family²¹, the expansion of subcontracting shops intensified these concerns. Subcontracting was seen as a threat to male wages, industrial standards and especially the health and comportment of young women workers (MacIntosh 1993). The concerns of reform and women's groups like the MLCW and the FNSJB were substantiated by the investigations of the inspectresses and other

²⁰Arguing that Montreal was too Catholic a city for such crimes against God, Lessard had sympathy for the hard working seamstress employed in the contractors shop: "The poor seamstress, who frequently has nothing but her earnings to support an aged mother or younger sisters, passes her Sunday at work, so as not to lose her place, and to earn a little more money for her pitiless employer" (Lessard 1895: 56).

²¹For examples of the kinds of concerns that surrounded home sweating and disease and family structure see King (1897-1898) and Provencher (1900).

researchers²², adding weight to claims that industrial life was having a negative effect. Reformers and government officials saw in garment subcontracting a problem of capitalism, which they sought to promote, but central to their liberal capitalist perspective was a desire to "...mute its destructive aspects" (MacIntosh 1993: 107). The conditions of women's work, particularly in spaces on the margins of the formal economy, became the focal point for their efforts²³.

The female inspectors, appointed to scrutinize the spaces where women worked, saw themselves as protecting members of their sex by improving the physical conditions of their work²⁴. As inspectors that were specifically concerned with women workers, their objectives were to enforce standards of cleanliness and morality. Reflecting a middle-class perspective on the comportment of working women, Provencher's reports often emphasized the need to protect working women by segregating them from men and to give them a moral education by demonstrating cleanliness in the workplace. Working within the parameters of the Quebec Factory Act (1885), she strove to secure separate lunch rooms, cloakrooms and toilets for women and to reduce mingling between the sexes

²²See the FNSJB's investigation for the Child Welfare Exhibition in 1911. Laura Robert, *Conditions de travail à l'usine. Hygiène et moralité* (Montréal: Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, 1912) and Archives Nationales de Québec, Fonds de la Fédération nationale de Saint-Jean Baptiste, *Enquête pour le bien-être des femmes et des enfants qui travaillent dans les manufactures*, 1912. In 1910 the MLCW prepared a study that was later submitted to the *Royal Commission on Technical Education and Training* in 1913. National Archives of Canada, Montreal Local Council of Women, *Briefs and Reports and An Inquiry into the Conditions Prevailing Amongst Wage-Earning Women in Commercial and Industrial Establishments in Montreal, conducted by the subcommittee of the Montreal Local Council of Women* (Montreal: Montreal Local Council of Women, 1910).

²³The inspectors, employed by the Québec Department of Public Works, were engaged in the regulation of the industrial environment to abate the effects of industrialization on health and safety. Inspectors had control only over physical conditions, therefore their efforts had little impact on the system of production that created piecework and subcontracting.

²⁴In her 1899-1900 report Provencher discussed her position as an "inspectress". She argued that it was the responsibility of women such as herself, who had material advantages, to defend her sex by improving their conditions: "Woman has, more unquestionably than ever today, the right to defend and ameliorate her position in this world, but as all are not gifted with the courage and power to do so, it remains for those who Providence has given these advantages to protect their sex by improving their lot in every possible way that is honest, practical and legal" (Provencher 1900: 67).

by encouraging separate leaving and arrival times. In terms of morality, she encouraged employers to hire forewomen to protect young women from improper advances and demonstrate 'proper' comportment (Provencher 1900-1901).

In the larger factories, these regulatory controls were largely successful, but the smaller contract shops were a constant thorn in Provencher's side. Located in old buildings that were adapted for clothing production, conditions in the tailors' shops were far behind those of the larger factories. Although dressmakers' shops were located in similar buildings and known for poor ventilation and lighting, tailors' shops were "primarily kept by Jews", which added yet another layer to the discourse of 'difference' surrounding garment work on the Main (Provencher 1897: 70). Like investigators in other large cities, she depicted of these shops as the epitome of the 'sweating' system because they were workplaces where young women laboured under the control of Jewish male tailors. Describing the tailors' workshops in the eastern district Provencher wrote:

These workshops, with very few exceptions, are the worst kept and the most defective possible. Located as best they can be in old buildings or in private houses, on narrow streets, in lanes and backyards, sometimes in basements, but oftener [sic] in garrets, they lack equally in air, light and cleanliness. It is especially the masters of these shops who are accused of carrying on the sweating system so much condemned by all the philanthropists who interest themselves in working women. (Provencher 1897: 71)

Just as the contracting system had clearly marked victims, as we saw in the *Herald* article it also had definitive antagonists. Provencher's analysis exhibits an implicit relationship between contracting, cleanliness, slum conditions and the Jewish immigrant quarter and her reports reflect growing anti-Semitism with increased immigration²⁵. The managers of

²⁵In 1908, Madame Provencher was fired after it was discovered that she was accepting bribes during her inspections. Archives Nationales de Québec, Fonds de ministre de travaux publics et travail, *Correspondence*, 1896-1914. She was replaced by Robertine Barry of the FNSJB for one year in 1909, but Barry died in September, 1910. Clémentine Clément was then hired as the female inspector for the Eastern district and the tone of the reports changed dramatically. Whether Clément was particularly anti-Semitic or her observations about the conditions in the Jewish establishments reflected more wide-spread anti-Semitism

contract shops were depicted as incapable of cleanliness and resistant to improvements. The footloose nature of the contract shop made these spaces very difficult to control. Although in 1901 Provencher reported that tailors were improving the conditions in their shops, in the larger workrooms of contractors' shops, difficulties continued:

The inspectress is well received; the Sons of Israel especially make fine promises, and even keep them sometimes; but then the whole thing has to be done over again. The cuttings, the dust, the ashes, the coals and the garments, finished or unfinished, all claim the right to a place on the floor. The stairways are dark and dirty; they are strewn with a part of the refuse destined for the garbage carts; the neighbours complain; the proprietor never fyles [sic] an appearance so that he may remain a stranger to the quarelles [sic]: the inspectress secures a little better light; and the tailor agrees to sweep once, that is to say, on the day or the morrow of the inspection, provided that he has not to do so too often, for otherwise he removes and his successor acts absolutely as he did. (Provencher 1901-1902: 209)

The term 'sweating', once linked to seamstresses in their homes and later to women in the contract shops, referred to the very specific oppression experienced by young female garment workers as the industry expanded. This figure signified more than just the abuse of women's labour by the piecework system. She represented the dislocation experienced by all as the city was transformed by industrialisation, urbanisation and immigration.

Reform of the sweating system, therefore, could easily find consensus around issues related to women's roles and place. As McIntosh (1993: 107) has argued of the period, "If society was to be saved, reform had to begin with women". In the first years of the twentieth century, reformers and unions contested their low wages and long hours of work in the garment industry, and targeted subcontracting because it exacerbated each

following immigration is impossible to determine (Clément 1912: 87). Calling for closer inspection and enforcement of hygiene laws, she argued that society required protection from the diseases 'spread' by Jewish manufacturers (Clément 1911: 75).

of these injustices²⁶. The women workers occupied a position that Klein and Roberts (1974) have described as "besieged innocence". As women, they were the inherently pure bearers of moral standards, but as workers they participated in the 'amoral' public sphere where female purity was constantly threatened. In the case of Montreal, the image of the pitiable sweated worker was generally that of a young woman who lived with her family under conditions of great hardship. Her identity was more often than not French-Canadian, a Catholic woman thrown into a secular or non-Christian world where Sunday work and 'amoral' men from other cultures were part of daily life. The ethnic, religious and linguistic identity of the sweated worker in Montreal, however, often shifted depending on the identity of the speaker in this dialogue over women's bodies and industrial conditions.

The actions of the women garment workers did not necessarily correspond with this image. By virtue of their everyday lives as working women they displayed the incongruity of the domestic sphere as an ideal site of 'true' womanhood among the working classes. As workers, they often participated in social movements that questioned class inequalities in the industrial city. Press coverage of strikes and labour events between 1900 and 1914 in Montreal illustrates that their presence in the factory and union hall was often subject to public debate. Journalists constantly remarked on the appearance of women workers on picket lines, in parades and demonstrations and attending rallies at the union hall. As we will see, their presence in these spaces and social movements that were located on the Main also added to the interpretation of the street as a space of difference.

²⁶Throughout the period the wages of these workers rarely varied or increased. In the 1889 Royal Commission it was reported that women employed in dressmakers', tailors' and milliners' shops earned between three and five dollars a week for sixty hours of work, which was probably high. Twenty years later the MLCW's (1910) found that female factory workers earned 4.50 to 5.50 dollars a week on average, which fell far below a living wage for an independent working women. This survey, however, was conducted in factories of "larger and higher type" so these wages represent the best rather than the worst conditions. Montreal Local Council of Women, *An Inquiry into the Conditions.....*, 1910.

CONTESTING THE SUBCONTRACTING SYSTEM

Working women had an ambiguous relationship with the major forums of working-class culture in the garment industry. They were rarely included in the building of a working-class consciousness within the unions and labour groups (Steedman 1986). As the garment industry deskilled, however, male unionists began to recognize the power to be gained by organizing on an industry-wide basis (Rome 1978b; Rouillard 1989). During strikes, the garment unions stressed solidarity and secular membership, which occasionally led to the serious consideration of women garment workers as equals, but this unity was never put into practice. Labour leaders also recognized the public appeal to be gained by drawing upon the image of the female garment worker to illustrate the negative effects of industrial life on the working classes (de Bonville 1975).

Although most early strikes targeted the sweating system in some form or another, it was in the first mass strike in late August 1907 that the United Garment Workers' of America (UGWA) in the men's clothing sector targeted the contractors and, on some level, temporarily altered their role in the production process²⁷. Contracting was targeted because, as the industry expanded, subcontractors were deskilling the trade, threatening the position of tradesmen, and replacing men with women. During this strike, however, women were depicted as the victims of the contracting system in an attempt to build

²⁷Following a bitter conflict at H. Vineberg and Co. in the month of August 1907, this strike was among the earliest mass offensives by the UGWA to force the recognition of the union and eliminate the sweating system in Montreal. *Labour Gazette*. Vol. 8, Sept. 1907: 337. The strike started on August 20 and ran to September 4, 1907. Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts*, TO2685, RG 27, Vol. 295, Strike 2981, Aug. 1907. This conflict involved 1,000 members of the United Garment Worker's Union locals 49, 134, and 317. The UGWA formed in 1906, although there had been another union in the Men's Apparel industry from 1904 to 1906 (Rome 1978b: 132). Approximately twenty manufacturers were involved, four of which were located on St. Lawrence. Peck Bros. was located to the far north at St. Viateur street, but Standard Cloak and Skirt, Segal and Feldstein and Union Clothing Mfg. Co. were located to the south, in the garment district between Craig and Ste. Catherine streets. The majority of the other firms were located on Notre Dame and St. James streets, in the earlier garment district clustered between Bleury Street to the east and Inspector to the west. Of the eighteen contractors that were affected, few addresses can be found. The general locational patterns seems to have been that they were located in the same buildings as the manufacturers on St. James and Notre Dame. The larger and more independent contractors such as Abel Rubin and Singer and Packard, had their own shops on St. Lawrence, both of whom were located in the block between de la Gauchetière and Vitre streets.

consensus and public appeal. Miller, the general organiser of the UGWA, stated that the contractors had "...commenced the war by ill treating women and young girls employed in the trade"²⁸. Union leaders stressed the young age of the women who worked for contractors and highlighted the poor conditions under which they worked²⁹. They told the press that many of these young women were working in "badly ventilate attics or cellars" that only had artificial light³⁰. They also highlighted the vulnerability of the women working for contractors. After a strike meeting at Standard Hall, a *Montreal Star* reporter recounted a young woman's story: "One bright looking woman said that she had been brutally treated by a contractor who had kept back two or three weeks of her wages, and struck her in the face on more than one occasion, simply because she demanded back her wages"³¹.

The contractors themselves had an ambiguous role in the relationship between labour and capital. Although they were a key actors in fragmentation of the labour force and maintenance poor labour conditions, they were usually former garment workers or tailors who had strong ethnic and class ties to their workers (Rome 1978b). They were 'middle men', not far from poverty themselves, and often former union members. During this strike, the contractors formed their own association to protect themselves from the union and to build a stronger bargaining position with the manufacturers³². Acting as an interest group they served to 'force the hand' of the manufacturers, who claimed that they could not raise wages because labour costs had already been established in existing

²⁸*Montreal Star* 20 Aug. 1907.

²⁹*Gazette* 23 Aug. 1907: 3.

³⁰*Gazette* 23 Aug. 1907: 3.

³¹*Montreal Star* 20 Aug. 1907.

³²*La Patrie* 21 Aug. 1907; *Montreal Star* 20 Aug. 1907.

contracts³³. All contractors, however, said that they would raise wages if the manufacturers would pay them more³⁴. On August 23, 1907, twenty contractors declared a 'lock out' of 1,000 garment workers in order to force the manufacturers to pay higher prices³⁵. As the *Montreal Star* reported, "The contractors, it is said, [took] this drastic step in order to secure an increase of prices paid to them so that they in turn may grant their employees the increase which the latter are asking"³⁶. This strategy eventually led to agreements between manufacturers and contractors, and the improvement of conditions in some contracting shops. After eight of the largest shops settled with the union and men and women workers returned to work at reduced hours³⁷.

The workers in the subcontracting shops also had a complex relationship to the union. The roles played by female garment workers in the contracting system are illustrated in the 1913 strike against the H. Vineberg Company. This strike was particularly important within the Jewish immigrant community because Vineberg was a very large employer, an important Jewish philanthropist and he had recently built his new eight storey factory in the heart of the immigrant district on west side of St. Lawrence above Duluth Street (Hart 1926; Rome 1978b; Tulchinsky 1992). Manufacturers such as Vineberg used subcontractors to fragment the labour movement by hiring smaller firms who employed non-unionized women workers at very low wages. During the Vineberg strike, the union discovered that the company had sent the work to 'an obscure little shop',

³³The contractors were divided over the strike and could not take a unanimous position. Although Abel Ruben, the president of the Contractors' Association, was willing to consider union's request that the contractors join the strike, other members, such as Benjamin Jasper, were strongly opposed to an alliance with workers. *Gazette* 22 Aug. 1907: 4; *Gazette* 23 Aug. 1907: 3.

³⁴*La Patrie* 21 Aug 1907.

³⁵*Montreal Herald* 23 Aug. 1907; *Montreal Star* 22 Aug. 1907.

³⁶*Montreal Star* 22 Aug 1907.

³⁷*The Witness* 3 Sept. 1907.

the Schulman Co., located further down the street at Ontario³⁸. After the union encouraged Schulman's employees to join the strike, Vineberg tried a variety of tactics to continue production. Known for his virulent resistance to union control and strong opposition to 'closed' shops (unionized), Vineberg was accused of replacing picketers with workers from outside of the city and French-Canadian city workers who were not unionized. Vineberg also installed a small sweatshop in East Montreal³⁹. On Sept. 26, 1913, the *Herald* reported that the 'women strike breakers', who were French-Canadian, were doing the strikers' work in a home at 3352 St. Hubert Street⁴⁰. After investigating this shop and finding the conditions very poor, the union told the press that they were hopeful that they could persuade the girls to stop. The union secretary stated, "The workers there are girls [sic][...] and girls are the best strikers we have. There are 160 girls from Vineberg alone"⁴¹.

Not only did Vineberg resist the strikers by subcontracting work, like many other manufacturers on the eve of World War One, he was also expanding his production and reducing labour costs by employing women workers at very low wages. In the Vineberg factory there were about 100 young female workers earning from three to six dollars a week. One male worker expressed concern for these women workers using a paternalistic argument: "Why they can't keep body and soul together on that amount. I see there is a play running in the city which claims that a girl can't live and keep straight on six dollars a week. How much chance have they, on three dollars?"⁴².

³⁸*Montreal Star* 26 Sept. 1913. The Schulman Company was located at the corner of St. Lawrence and Ontario in the Grothé Building.

³⁹These French-Canadian workers, who were not members of the tailors' union, finally joined the union to fight the manufacturers plans to use them as replacements for the English and Jewish strikers. *Gazette* 25 Sept. 1913; *La Patrie* 23 Sept. 1913.

⁴⁰*Montreal Herald* 26 Sept. 1913.

⁴¹*Montreal Star* 26 Sept. 1913.

⁴²*Gazette* 20 Sept. 1913.

At the peak of UGWA power in Canada and on the eve of the first World War, the Vineberg strike was an important struggle over a variety of conflicting communal aspects of the garment workers movement⁴³. Within the Jewish community, this strike pitted an increasingly powerful and ethnically-based union against a major Jewish entrepreneur and philanthropist, Harris Vineberg, illustrating the weakness of religious solidarity in the face of class and ethnic divisions (Rome 1978b; Tulchinsky 1992). A long strike that caused great friction among workers and suffering among the workers' families, it also highlighted important sources of discontent among workers, most of which revolved around the rearrangement of the sexual division of labour. It stands as a prime example of how manufacturers used subcontracting and female labour to undermine the force of the union.

GENDER, RESISTANCE AND PLACE

The union representative's assertion during the Vineberg strike that women were among the union's best strikers indicates that the victimized sweated worker was but a representation. This image of working women did not necessarily correspond with how they saw themselves. As Lavigne and Stoddart (1983) have argued, while Montreal reformers certainly imposed limits on the development of a worker's consciousness among women, female factory operatives were important participants in the redefinition of the social role of women because they contributed to the growing acceptance of women's right to work. The experience of the working world in the factories and ateliers of the Main led women to develop their own forms of self-identification. As the Main emerged as a symbol of an emerging working-class consciousness, women workers shaped and

⁴³On January 8, 1913 it was reported that the strikers had come to an agreement with the employers to submit their differences to a board of arbitration, led by Reuben Brainin, the editor of the Yiddish daily *The Jewish Daily Eagle*. *Montreal Herald* 8 Jan. 1913. Although Vineberg disputed this agreement, the strike was apparently settled by arbitration on Jan. 13, 1914. Gabrielle R. des Iles, Woman correspondent to the *Labour Gazette*, Trade Dispute Report, 14 Jan. 1914 and Gabrielle R. des Iles, Women correspondent to the *Labour Gazette*, Letter, 23 Jan. 1914, in Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts*, TO2690 RG27 Vol. 303, Strike 112, Sept. 1913. Harris Vineberg, Letter, 6 Jan. 1914 and Harris Vineberg, Letter, 14 Jan. 1914 in, Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts*, TO2690 RG27 Vol. 303, Strike 112, Sept. 1913.

communicated their identities by participating in strikes and working-class parades. The streets were a major forum of communication in the compact industrial city and during organized rituals May Day and Labour Day parades the working classes contested and redefined labour and class relations (Davis 1986; Goheen 1993, 1994, 1998; Kaplan 1992; Marston 1989; Ryan 1990, 1996). Between 1900 and 1914, these events centred on the Main and were relatively contentious in the eyes of the municipal authorities, the clergy and the bourgeoisie. The portrayal of the parades in the metropolitan press contributed to the interpretation of the Main as a space of difference eyes of Montrealers. During these events, women garment workers in turn-of-the-century Montreal communicated their allegiance with socialist and labour movements and their identities as women who were part of the 'public' world of factory work.

During the period between 1900 and 1920 the garment district expanded northwards. By the time of the 1917 mass strike of clothing workers in both the men's and women's sectors, most firms were located either near the intersection of Ste. Catherine and Bleury streets (slightly west of the Main), or along the St. Lawrence Boulevard between Craig and Mont-Royal. During the construction boom of 1912, a number of larger manufacturers like Harris Vineberg and John Peck had built their own factories along this street. Smaller firms were operating out of the existing three to four storey buildings, or in large buildings that housed a variety of garment production activities. Important workers' institutions were located amidst these sites of production. By 1910, socialists had their headquarters at Liberty Hall located just off the Main on Prince Arthur Street. Liberty Hall and others such as St. Joseph's Hall, Standard Hall and Auditorium Hall were located near the intersection of the Main and Ste. Catherine Street. Empire Hall, Coronation Hall and the Monument National were located on St. Lawrence Boulevard near this intersection.

Montreal's international garment workers' union movement was shaped and conducted in these halls and along these streets. Organizing in the union halls and parading past manufacturing sites on the Main was a means for all garment workers to

demonstrate their importance to the labour process and to contest the conditions of their work. The symbolic meaning of the Main as a working-class space is clearly illustrated by the parade routes of the Labour Day and May Day Parades in early-twentieth-century Montreal (Figures 3.3 and 3.4). By this time, Labour Day was, comparatively, a more conservative demonstration. The first Labour Day parade in Montreal took place in 1886, and by 1894 it was recognized as a legal holiday (Rouillard 1989). Directed by the Trades and Labour Council, this parade was essentially a celebration of the international workers' movement, who described it as a demonstration of the well-being, high morals, rationality, and respectability of the working classes. This annual demonstration had, however, divergent meanings for different social groups. An interdependent relationship between labour and capital shaped the catholic workers' perspective⁴⁴. According to *La Patrie* and *La Presse*, Labour Day was a day of hope for workers, who were inevitably the victims of the shifts and instability of capital. From the Catholic perspective, the secular world would always be imperfect, but workers had the right to hope for a state of equality based on respect for 'men' [sic] of all classes⁴⁵. In the first years of the twentieth century, however, the secular character of the international unions threatened this interpretation of working-class consciousness. International unions in the garment industry were multiethnic in character and led primarily by Eastern European Jewish members of the UGWA (Rome 1978b; Tulchinsky 1992).

The 1907 Labour Day parade, significantly, saw the division of international and national unions into two separate celebrations and parade routes. This event demonstrated the growing importance of the international union movement and the cohesiveness of the community of garment workers that was developing around the spaces of the Main. The participation of women workers in the union movement was, furthermore, demonstrated during this parade. On September 2, 1907, the garment workers took part in the international parade, which totalled 18,000 participants. The more modest national parade

⁴⁴*La Presse* 3 Sept. 1907: 1.

⁴⁵*La Presse* 3 Sept. 1907: 1; *La Patrie* 3 Sept. 1907: 9.

FIGURE 3.3: LABOUR DAY PARADE ROUTES, 1907

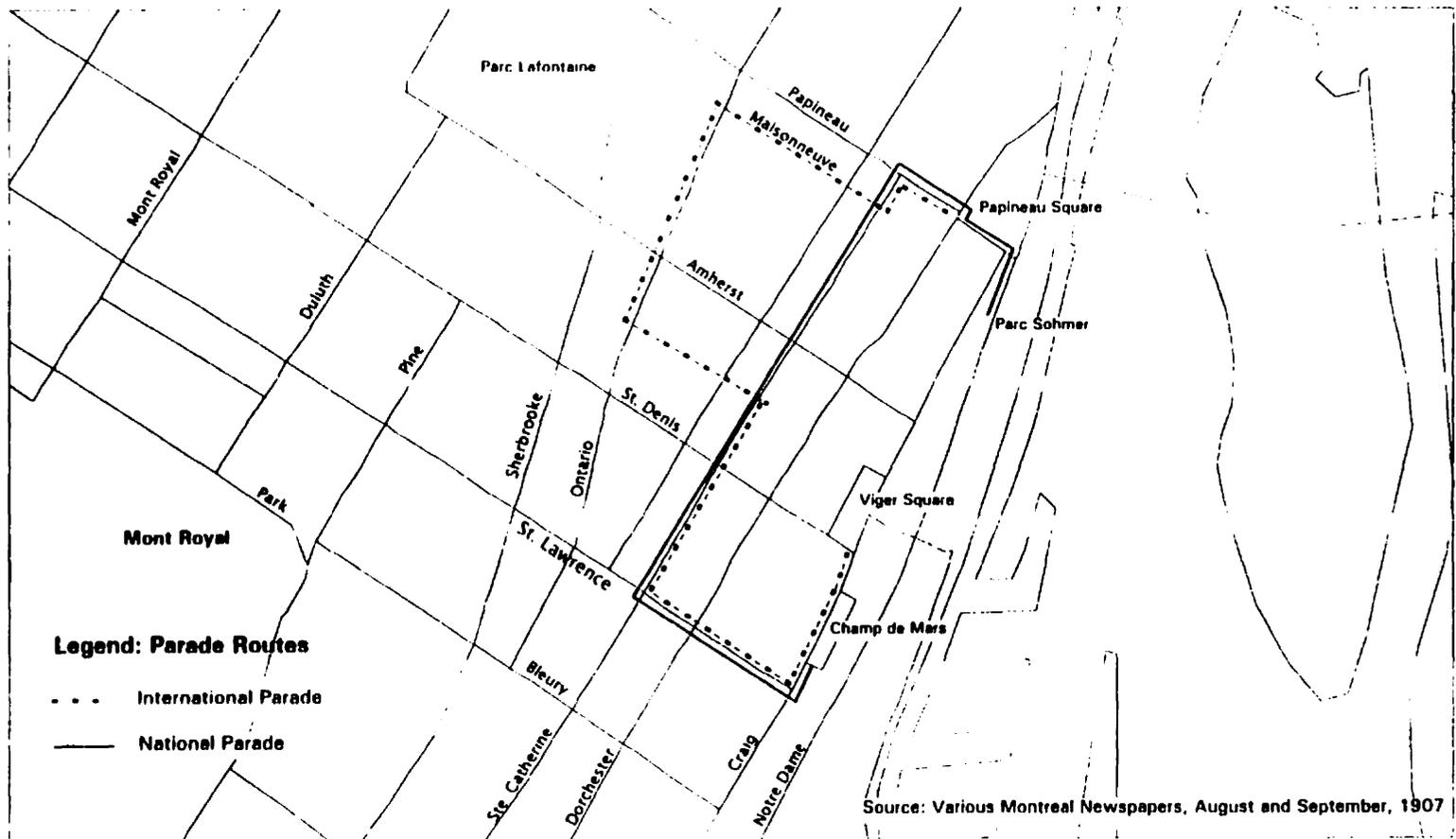
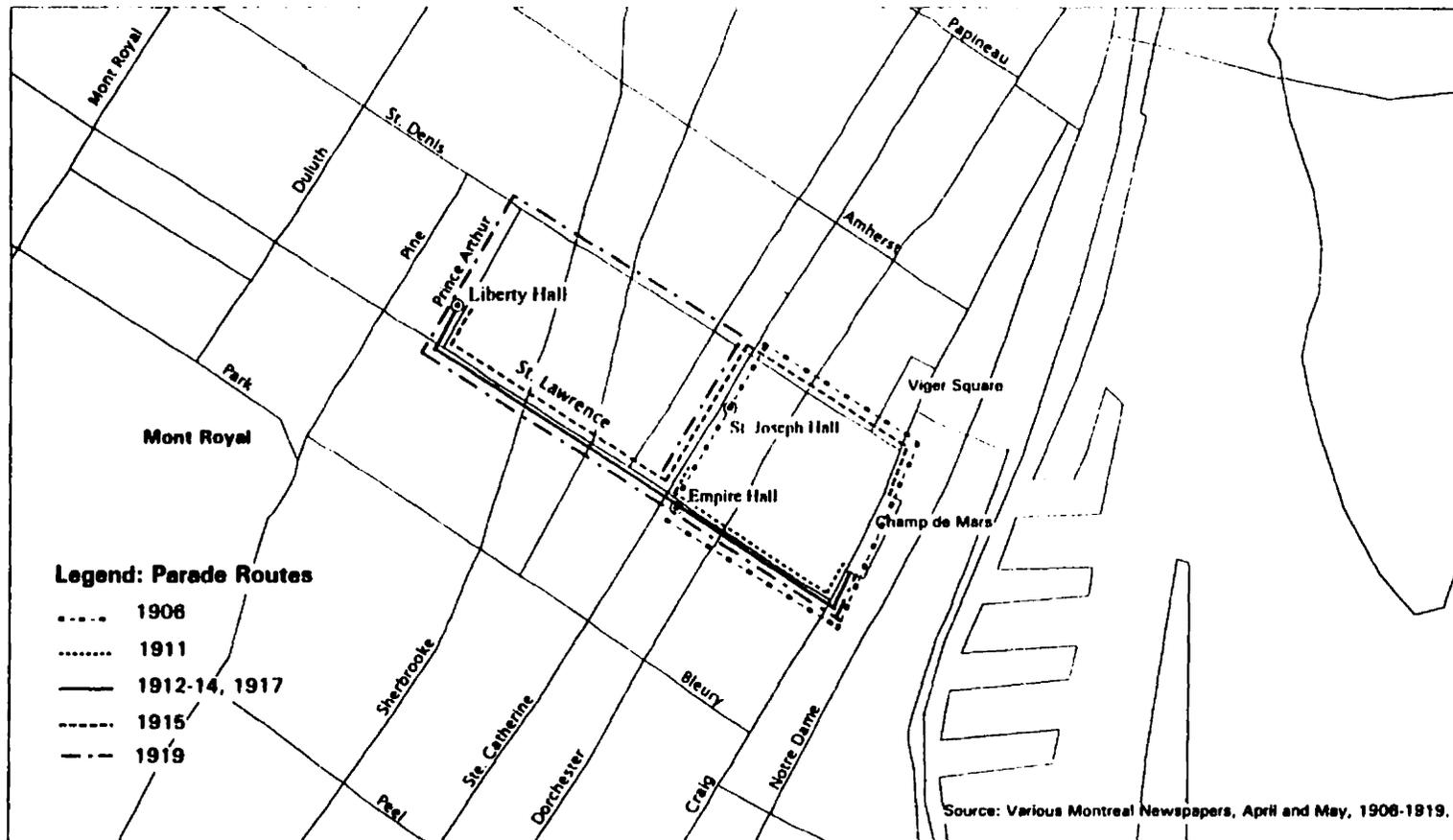


FIGURE 3.4: MAY DAY PARADE ROUTES, 1906-1919



attracted 3,000 demonstrators and did not include garment workers or women. It began at Champ de Mars and proceeded to Parc Sohmer via Notre Dame Street, St. Lawrence Boulevard, Ste. Catherine Street, Papineau Street and Notre Dame Street. The international parade was a much more vibrant demonstration. The parade left Viger Square at ten o'clock in the morning and proceeded to Papineau Square via the following route: from Craig Street up St. Lawrence to Ste. Catherine, along St. Hubert Street, Ontario, Maisonneuve, and back to Ste. Catherine Street (see Figure 3.3)⁴⁶. This was the first Labour Day parade to include women, all of whom were members of the UGWA. Labour Day fell during the 1907 mass strike in the garment industry, therefore, female garment workers were radicalized to the point of forming a respectable and conspicuous contingent of the parade⁴⁷. They had formed their own union and were celebrated as the hallmark of the garment workers' representation during the parade. "The two hundred girls in the parade on Labour Day were the members of the new tailoresses' local. They were, by the way, the only women in the parade, five hundred of their men colleagues marched behind them"⁴⁸. Uniting with their five hundred 'brothers' from UGWA locals 49, 134 and 317, these women made an impressive impact on the public as they walked through Montreal's streets "...ornamented with brilliant sashes, thrown over one shoulder and knotted at the waist"⁴⁹.

In the first years of the twentieth century, the May Day Parade in Montreal was a much more radical and marginal demonstration. Montreal's first May Day Parade was organized in 1905 by "...a Jewish debating society named in honour of Kropotkin" (Rome 1978b: 90). After the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, May Day parades caused great alarm because anti-socialist sentiment was mounting in Canada. Anti-communist to anti-

⁴⁶*Montreal Star* 24 Aug. 1907: 21.

⁴⁷*Gazette* 3 Sept. 1907: 7; *La Presse* 3 Sept. 1907: 1.

⁴⁸*The Witness* 3 Sept. 1907.

⁴⁹*Gazette* 3 Sept. 1907: 7; *La Patrie* 3 Sept. 1907: 9.



Figure 3.5: May Day outside of Empire Hall, 1906. Source: *La Patrie* 2 May 1906.

semitic discourses were used to discredit socialist movements. In general, the press delegitimized early May Day demonstrations by highlighting the ethnicity of the demonstrators and describing the socialists as anarchist followers of the red flag who were prone to violence. Distancing itself from any association with the Jewish socialists, the bourgeois *Jewish Times* described this demonstration as being attended almost entirely by "...newly arrived Russian and Rumanian Jews" (Rome 1978b: 91). In a broader context, the threat of a foreign influence was an important discourse used to discredit the demonstrators in papers like the *Star*. "The parade was made up mostly of foreigners all of whom were members of one or the other of the socialistic societies in the city" (Rome 1978b: 91).

The vibrancy of the second May Day parade in 1906 alarmed city officials and

the Catholic, francophone clergy⁵⁰. Although Mayor Ekers allowed the socialists the right to their demonstration, the threat of violence and the marginal interest in the parade were emphasized in the popular press⁵¹. The demonstrators met at Empire Hall at St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine and proceeded to St. Denis, Craig, and back up St. Lawrence returning to Empire Hall⁵² (Figure 3.5). The sensationalism of the press with regard to this demonstration makes assessing the impact of the parade very difficult. Although *La Patrie* described this demonstration as forceful, with a good turn-out, the *Star* minimized the impact of the parade and described the demonstrators as marching through the city streets, "...breathing socialism at every turn"⁵³. The demonstrators were further described as a counter-productive threat to the social order: "...anarchy was their cry, the red flag their emblem"⁵⁴. The parade, moreover, did not end without violent incident. When the demonstration turned from Ste. Catherine on to St. Denis Street it was met by a group students who shouted "Canaille, canaille" [Crooks, crooks] to which the demonstrators replied, "À bas la calotte, à bas le pape"[Down with the clergy, down with the Pope]⁵⁵. The secular character and ethnic diversity of these 300 men and women from Yiddish, Italian, French and English language communities, exacerbated their threat to the social order. They were constructed as anti-clerical, anti-capitalist, anti-national and/or foreign.

⁵⁰In one of his sermons on Labour Day, Mgr. Bruchési clearly stated the church's preference for national unions. Rouillard has argued that the church feared international unions for many reasons: 1) they encouraged education, 2) socialism was spreading among the working classes, 3) the Parti ouvrier was proposing the nationalisation of services and 4) there had been many strikes in Montreal in the first years of the twentieth century (Rouillard 1989).

⁵¹*La Patrie* 1 May 1906; *Montreal Star* 1 May 1906.

⁵²*La Patrie* 2 May 1906.

⁵³*La Patrie* 2 May 1906; *Montreal Star* 1 May 1906.

⁵⁴The *Star* also linked the apparent ethnicity of the demonstrators and the poor turn-out of the parade. In an extremely anti-Semitic interpretation of the socialists, the *Star* argued that: "...even the leaders themselves began to think of the shekels that might be raked in were their shops only open". *Montreal Star* 1 May 1906.

⁵⁵*Montreal Star* 2 May 1906: 6

Despite the marginality of the movement in 1906, support for the ideals of the May Day parade was mounting. The new Mayor, Médéric Martin, therefore outlawed the May Day parade in 1907. He described the 1906 demonstrators as "...this vomit of Old Europe that abused the liberty of Canada" and argued that the May Day parade was a threat to public order (Rome 1978b: 92). Martin did, however, allow the demonstrators to hold a meeting on Champ de Mars for which 10,000 citizens were present (Rome 1978b: 91). This year marks the beginning of a four year struggle to hold the parade, during which the socialists attempted parades without official sanction. Before the meeting at Champ de Mars in 1907, for example, demonstrators attempted to march from St. Joseph's Hall on Ste. Catherine and Ste. Elizabeth streets, which resulted in an intense clash with the police⁵⁶. During this struggle women played a particular role in guarding the red flag. Two women, carrying red flags inscribed with socialist messages, managed to escape the police in a car, displaying the red flags from inside⁵⁷.

In conjunction with the strikes during this period, these parades demonstrate yet another public identity assigned to the female garment worker and constructed in the spaces of work and sociability of the Main. First, female garment workers were among the earliest and only participants from their gender in both demonstrations⁵⁸. Secondly, female participation coincided with the rise of a workers' consciousness among women and men who worked in garment factories following the industry-wide strikes of 1904 and 1907. Finally, the participation of women in these parades coincides with concern from

⁵⁶*La Patrie* 2 May 1907: 1; *La Presse* 2 May 1907: 1.

⁵⁷*La Patrie* 2 May 1907: 1; *La Presse* 2 May 1907: 1.

⁵⁸Although the identities of the female demonstrators in the May Day parade of 1906 are less certain, they were probably garment workers since, besides the capmakers' and carpenters' unions, the UGWA and the cloak makers' union were the only other trade unions among the nine societies that were involved in the demonstration. The nine societies that were involved were the UGWA, the Cloak Workers' Union, the Socialist Labour Party, the Italian Socialists, the Social Democrats, The Socialist Party of Canada, the Capmakers' Union and the Carpenter's Union. *Montreal Star* 2 May 1906: 6. As time passed, the female participants in the May Day parade were themselves members of the Socialist Party of Canada or La ligue d'unité ouvrière, a communist group that started in 1910 and marched in the May Day parade that year (Lavigne and Stoddart 1983).

other institutions over these parades. While some women continued to participate in the May Day parades, Catholic women workers were discouraged from participating in the Labour Day parade by the Catholic Church. After 1913, the Catholic church added a special sermon for women workers to the weekend's celebrations, and encouraged women to see this as the proper way for them to participate in Labour Day festivities⁵⁹. Catholic women, especially French-Canadians, attended the mass organised by the Factory Employees Association of the FNSJB, choosing the mass over the parade. In 1913⁶⁰, for example, women did appear in the Labour Day parade, but the woman correspondent for the *Labour Gazette*, Gabrielle Roy des Iles, suggested that these women were Jewish: "As far as women workers are concerned, those of the Garment Workers Union, a Jewish organization, are the only ones that will take part in the celebration"⁶¹. Finally, in 1914, Rose Henderson⁶², a suffragist and officer of the juvenile court, requested that women and children workers be included in the Labour Day parade to demonstrate the extensive use of these two labour forces by Montreal manufactures. Her request was defeated by the Parade Committee of the Trades and Labour Council, and the official participation of women in the day's festivities continued to be restricted to the Catholic mass⁶³.

As Catholic women stepped out of the Labour Day festivities, those who remained visibly engaged in the labour movement concentrated around the Main became a threatening spectacle in the public discourse of the era. The Catholic woman garment worker, who properly observed Labour Day by attending mass, represented the downtrodden and pitiable 'sweated' worker. Women who dared to contest the social order, on the other hand, were increasingly depicted as 'red women' who were visibly and

⁵⁹*Labour Gazette* Aug. 1914: 185-186.

⁶⁰*Montreal Star* 3 Sept. 1912: 15.

⁶¹*Labour Gazette* Sept. 1913: 262; *Labour Gazette* Aug. 1914: 185-186.

⁶²For a biographical reference to Rose Henderson see footnote 10 in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁶³*Labour Gazette* Aug. 1914: 185-186; *Labour Gazette* Oct. 1914: 462.

actively engaged social struggles expressed in the streets. In the metropolitan press, the 'red woman' was often implicitly a Jewish immigrant, although neither the French-Canadian sweated worker nor the Jewish 'red woman' were exclusive and consistent categories. The socialist movement, furthermore, participated in the construction of the 'red woman' by institutionalizing the representation of liberty through a common reference point, the young female clad in a white dress wearing a red sash. In the early years of the demonstration, fearless, determined and self-sacrificing women carried the



Figure 3.6: Woman Flag Bearer being Apprehended by Police. May Day 1908. Source: *La Patrie* 2 May 1908

demonized red flag, protecting and displaying it proudly in public space. In 1908, for example, during an attempt to circumvent police on May Day a woman, "...whose name [was] unknown and whose nationality [was] uncertain", tried to serve her cause by bearing the red flag (Figure 3.6)⁶⁴. By 1912 the appointment of a young socialist woman to carry the red flag was an institutional practice of the socialists. In that year, Lillie Zuduck was unanimously chosen to carry the red flag, and she was protected by a group

⁶⁴This flag-bearer was described as the victim of the public demonstration: "When sacrifices are required there is often a woman ready to step in and accept conditions, no matter what pain, or trouble or distress may be her portion". *Montreal Star* 1 May 1908: 6. Carrying a flag, she was a contentious public figure: "She was of small stature, dressed neatly in a dark costume, her dark hair surmounted by a pleasing toque [sic]. She had a little body guard, but she was a fearless little body, and seemed grimly determined to do serious work". *Montreal Star* 1 May 1908: 6. When she was ordered to roll up the flag, she resisted a little, and then disappeared into the crowd as it scattered. According *La Patrie*, her name was Tony Rippopore. *La Patrie* 2 May 1908: 1.

of guards⁶⁵: "C'est une femme qui portera le drapeau, elle sera entourée d'une bonne garde qui veillera à protéger le drapeau de toute insulte"⁶⁶. As the May Day Parade gained legitimacy, the portion of the Main between Prince Arthur and Craig became their symbolic space. By 1912, the socialists had a permanent headquarters in Liberty Hall, east of St. Lawrence Boulevard on Prince Arthur Street. They consistently followed the same parade route from this headquarters, down the Main to Champ de Mars for a number of years (see Figure 3.4). The 'red' woman also became an institution of the street. As the parade route of the May Day demonstration became established, the process of electing a young female member of the socialist party to lead the parade became common practice.

While the Labour Day parade was much more established and legitimate, these two demonstrations share important characteristics. Labour Day parades consistently included the Main as part of their parade route, and the May Day parade eventually became an institution of the street. Although participation in the Labour Day parade led to the separation of groups of women workers, in the first years of the twentieth century it served as a powerful means of demonstrating their presence in the international union movement and the working world of the factory. An important identity was expressed during these parades that was diametrically opposed to the image of the pitiable 'sweated' worker. Depicted as 'red women', particularly during the May Day parades, the female garment workers emerged as a representations of pride and discontent emanating from the ethnically diverse working-class labour movement that was developing along the Main. Most importantly, it was a form of self-identification that was opposed to most images of working-class womanhood in early-twentieth-century Montreal. The Main, therefore,

⁶⁵During the assembly at Champ de Mars other women also carried red flags. "Plusieurs drapeaux ou bannières, d'un rouge éclatant, étaient portés par des jeunes filles" [Many flags or banners, in brilliant red, will be carried by young women] (author's translation). *La Patrie* 2 May 1912: 12. Women were also chosen to go and offer badges and socialist newspapers, such as *New York Call*, *Cotton's Weekly* and the Canadian *The Appeal to Reason*, to the public. *La Patrie* 1 May 1912: 1. Women who sold the most flags and newspapers during tag-days were also celebrated by the movement and the papers. *Montreal Star* 2 May 1912.

⁶⁶"A woman will carry the flag and she will be surrounded by a strong troop of guards who will strive to protect the flag from all insults" (author's translation). *La Patrie* 1 May 1912: 1.

was not only the centre of the garment industry and working-class social and institutional life, it was a place marked by the oppositional female identities that were produced within this social world. Its status as a space of difference made the communication of such new forms of female identity possible because it became a radical focal point for a diverse sector of the city's working-class populations who experienced similar inequalities and shared in the critique of capitalism emanating from the Main.

CONCLUSION

I introduced this chapter by examining the expansion of the garment industry along the Main and the emergence of an ethno-sexual division of labour that drew women workers into the street's factories and labour movement. As increasing numbers of young women from French-Canadian working-class and immigrant communities were employed in this industry, the identity of the female garment worker was constructed and debated. This identity was never straightforward and involved a variety of divergent interpretations. In the early stages of the district's expansion, female garment workers were constructed as victims of the industrial city, drawn out of their homes and unprotected from the material and moral exploitation of industrial urban life. The sweated district and the subcontracting system were central to this discourse, and the female garment worker came to embody anxieties that seemed on the surface to be about the working conditions of women in the industry. As the reports of the industrial inspectress demonstrated, deeper anxieties regarding the mixing of people across gender and ethnic lines surrounded the contract shops on the Main. The 'sweated' worker was a form of representation that embodied these concerns for middle-class reform and women's groups because she mirrored a broader social crisis created through a rapid expansion of the city with industrialisation. During strikes in the garment industry, her conditions of work were crucial to winning public sympathy for the workers' cause.

The sweated worker was not the only image of female garment workers to emerge along the Main. As the Main became a centre garment manufacturing, a multiethnic working-class culture was constructed in its labour halls and on the street. The secular and

multiethnic character of the garment workers' political activities along the Main produced interethnic alliances based on a shared identity as workers, socialists, immigrants and union members. Evidence from early strikes and workers' parades illustrates that this social world provided an arena where women could communicate their identities as factory operatives and as distinctive members of the working-class. Although women were still treated as separate and often played only a representational role in these movements, they communicated another identity among the garment workers. During Labour Day parades young female garment workers demonstrated their participation in the labour process and captured the attention of the public, reformers and the clergy. During May Day parades the 'red' or socialist woman was an even more radical female identity to be associated with the Main. This representation eventually became an institution of the street and the early socialist movement. Conflicting representations of female garment workers were developed in association with the Main as a site of difference. In the dialogue over gender, the conditions of work and the domestic sphere of the working classes, these identities shifted according to ethnic identity, political alliances, and in association with particular social spaces. We turn now to examine how women participated in the labour movement and contested the order of gender, class and space during two particular garment workers' strikes before World War I.

CHAPTER 4

PICKETS, LABOUR HALLS AND STREET PROTESTS

As the garment industry took root on the Main, a number of worker's organisations developed in the area. As we saw in the previous chapter, labour temples, socialist meeting halls and workers parades became institutions of the street. As women were integrated into the in-house production process, these institutions were places and occasions where their identities as workers could be constructed and expressed. Strikes were particularly important events in building the labour movement and contesting the organization of production. In the first years of the twentieth century, however, they were also important moments in which women could demonstrate their participation in the labour force, contest their conditions of work and express their identities as members of the various working-class cultural groups in industrial Montreal. But like the production process and the parades, women's participation in strikes and union organizing was not unconstrained. Their participation was determined by the paternalist attitudes of the union, the union's allies, and their own ethnic, religious and linguistic identities.

In this chapter, I continue an analysis of the Main as a space of difference from the perspective of the women employed in the garment industry. I analyze two strikes that highlight the street's centrality to the contestation of class inequalities in industrial Montreal by women garment workers. The 1910 strike of the cloakmakers, led by the International Ladies' Garment Workers of America (ILGWA), presents a debate regarding the role of women in the labour movement which involved the union, suffragists, the Catholic Church, and women skirt operators. As I will show, the Main played an integral role in bringing together a labour force that was divided along ethnic and gender lines. During the 1912 strike, women workers in the men's clothing sector participated from within the ranks of the United Garment Workers of America (UGWA). As piece workers, they were both the centre of a debate about the conditions of work and important public representatives of the international union movement (Steedman 1997). These stories demonstrate the divergent ways in which ethnicity shaped the experience of gender and

class in the garment district as it industrialized.

The factories involved in these strikes were not all located on the Main, but as we saw in Chapter 3, the Main was developing as the symbolic space of the socialist movement and of the labour movement, especially among garment workers. Each strike, therefore, implicates the Main in different but interrelated ways. The cloakmakers' strike of 1910 drew attention to shop conditions along the Main, but it was in the labour halls and auditoriums of the district where women workers negotiated their participation in the labour movement and their identities as women workers. In the union halls, class and gendered interests met with regard to unionizing women workers. During the 1912 Tailors' strike, the Main was a symbolic public space in which women defined themselves from within the labour movement. As official representatives of the union, Jewish immigrant women workers aggressively appeared in the public space of the Main in parades, riots, tag-days and picket lines. By examining the contrasts between these two different groups of women I demonstrate that the heterogeneity of the Main gave rise to a cosmopolitan labour movement that facilitated the expression of oppositional identities for women garment workers. Ultimately, however, the Main was seen as the domain of international unions and Eastern European immigrants. The participation and representation of women workers was determined by their ethnic identities and their respective relationships to the social worlds of the street.

COSMOPOLITAN SPACE, SEPARATE SPHERES

Fuelled by the intensity of the Uprising of 20,000 in New York in 1909, the ILGWA made a strong effort to enter the labour movement in Montreal in 1910 (Waldinger 1985). In the pages of Canadian labour history, this strike has been read as a strike for higher wages that only resulted in a partial victory for the union¹. A more thorough examination of newspaper reports of the time revealed a much more radical and broad-based cause for

¹*Labour Gazette* 1910; Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts* TO2686 RG27 Vol. 295, Strike 3220, Feb. 1910; Rome 1987b; Rouillard 1989; Tulchinsky 1992.

this strike and demonstrate that it was a very important episode in the unionization process. On Feb. 8, 1910 eighty male and female members of the ILGWA working at A. Sommer and Co. chose to go on strike in sympathy with a French-Canadian cloakmaker, Lebeau, who had been fired because he had refused to work on Sunday². Two weeks later, this small strike expanded when many strikers from Sommer's shop were arrested for being absent from work without notice³. The union also suspected that Sommer was contracting work out to other firms. The news that other garment workers were assisting Sommer to complete his contracts radicalized the garment workers. With the objective to enforce the principle that "...union men and women should not work to defeat the ends of the strikers in other establishments"⁴, the union declared a sympathy strike of all garment workers in the women's wear sector on Feb. 23, 1910. This strike involved 1,000 workers in 26 firms but workers in at least 40 firms participated during the course of the strike⁵. These firms were concentrated in three districts: the original garment district in the central area along Notre-Dame Street, the future site of the women's wear sector at Ste. Catherine and Bleury streets, and along the Main, an interim location for this industry. Only 12 of these firms were actually located on the Main, but the Main was

²*Montreal Star* 8 Feb. 1910: 19; *La Patrie* 8 Feb. 1910: 1.

³On February 16, 1910 the *Star* announced that the real cause of Lebeau's dismissal had been revealed in the trials of Sommer's striking employees before the Recorder's court. Sommer tried to force the workers to return by using a 1865 by-law that prohibited workers with individual contracts from absenting themselves from work without leave. *Montreal Star* 16 Feb. 1910: 1. By-law No. 4 read as follows: "All apprentices and servants who shall be guilty of absenting themselves by day or by night without leave from said services in their employer's shop, shall be liable upon conviction before Recorder's Court to a penalty not exceeding twenty dollars and to imprisonment not exceeding thirty days for each offense" (Sec.1, Civic By-law No. 4). The court, initially recommended that Sommer patch up his differences with his employees which the *Chronique ouvrière* interpreted as a victory for organized labour, but, two weeks later, the court found many cutters and cloakmakers from Sommer's and Boas-Felson guilty. *La Patrie* 17 Feb 1910: 3; *La Presse* 17 Feb. 1910; *Montreal Star*. 16 Feb. 1910: 1.

⁴*Montreal Star* 23 Feb. 1910: 1.

⁵Six hundred men and women union members voted 527 to 45 to declare a general strike. *La Presse* 23 Feb. 1910: last page; *Montreal Star* 23 Feb. 1910: 1. Although it was a sympathy strike, the union decided to take advantage of the opportunity to make important demands. The objectives of the union were to secure, 1) a fifty hour work week, 2) time and a half for overtime and double time on holidays, 3) the prompt payment of wages, 4) shop admittance to union agents at any time, and 5) a maximum of 24 hours notice for employee absences. *Labour Gazette* April 1910: 1183.

implicated in this struggle through the union halls. A coalition of cross-class interests met at Standard Hall at the corner of St. Dominique below Dorchester, St. Joseph's Hall on Ste. Elisabeth at Ste. Catherine, Auditorium Hall on Berthelet and at Grand Central on the Main (Figure 4.1).

Press coverage of the strike drew attention to the multiethnic solidarity expressed by the workers who were drawn together in a 'cosmopolitan struggle' for union recognition⁶. One *La Presse* headline read, "Des ouvriers juifs et italiens se mettent en grève par sympathie pour un compagnon canadien-français"⁷. *La Presse* also reported a strong solidarity among the strikers, who continued to support the union even though their own bosses had accepted the union contract⁸. Steedman (1997), however, has stressed the importance of this strike for women garment workers. It is perhaps one of the earliest examples of women workers protesting the inequality of the sexual division of labour in the industry and demanding equal wages. Although this strike resulted in the reaffirmation of male trade union control, press coverage and events suggest that female garment workers articulated their objections to their working conditions during this strike with an intensity that was not seen again until the strikes of the 1930s and 1960s (Steedman 1997).

⁶Despite Rome's (1978b) argument that the press employed anti-semitic rhetoric to delegitimize the union, a close reading of the four major newspapers in the city during the 1910 strike of the cloakmakers illustrates that although the press facilitated anti-semitic discourses, particularly the *Star*, these primarily emanated from established Jewish garment manufacturers such as Hart or Sommer (see Hart 1926). A. J. Hart, for example, representing the newly formed Ladies' Garment Manufacturers Association, tried to delegitimize the union by arguing that the Jewish unions had power and influence with workers because so few of the workers spoke English or French. Reflecting the growing gap between Jewish manufacturers and workers Hart stated, "...another unpleasant feature of this strike is the fact that with the exception of a bare half dozen Canadians, all the strikers are foreigners or of foreign birth, and have come to this country to avoid persecution. They are today tying [sic] up a very important section of the largest industry in Montreal and the consequences to our city are serious. Practically everyone of the Canadian born hands are at work". *Montreal Star* 11 March 1910: 15.

⁷"Jewish and Italian workers went out on strike in sympathy with a French-Canadian worker" (author's translation). *La Presse* 8 Feb. 1910: 1.

⁸*La Presse* 25 Feb. 1910: last page.

As Waldinger (1985) has argued, uprisings in the women's clothing sector at the time of the 1910 strike were the result of structural and technological changes. 'Unskilled' sectors of the production process such as machine operating were feminized during this period which resulted in competition and decreased wages (Waldinger 1985). These forces made the labour force conducive to organization (Frager 1992a, 1992b; Steedman 1986, 1997). Male union leaders were still ambiguous about the status of women workers, but they recognized the power to be gained by organizing on an industry-wide basis (Rome 1987b; Rouillard 1989; Tulchinsky 1992). The increasing presence of women in the industry was also a driving force in creating labour conflict and instability. Women skirt operators were seen as "the weak spot in [their] organisations"⁹ even by female strike leaders. As radical suffragist Rose Henderson told an assembly of striking ILGWA members¹⁰,

Women disorganize the labour market and weaken the hands of the men trade unionists. Some women belong to trade unions, but only to those run for and controlled by men, and the men find that such members are loyal to the union and punctual with their dues, but every trade unionist realizes that a separate organization is required for the women¹¹.

The formation of a woman's union was, therefore, seen as crucial to the improvement of the working conditions of all workers, since low-paid women workers were increasingly dominating the industry. To gain legitimacy for their cause, women strike leaders argued

⁹*Montreal Star* 21 Feb. 1910: 19. For a discussion of the development of this perspective in labour circles in North America see Kessler-Harris (1985). For the specific context of the Montreal garment industry and the ethnic and gender cleavages that led to the perception that French-Canadians, and in particular women, were 'unorganizable' see Rouillard (1981/1982). In the 1930s see Tyler (1995).

¹⁰Rose Henderson was a suffragist and an officer of the Montreal Juvenile Court. She was one of the few radical suffragists who believed that women would only get the vote by affiliating with labour to gain the franchise for all (Bacchi 1983). Henderson's unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Montreal Trades and Labour Council that women and children join the Labour Day Parade in 1914 is perhaps evidence of her labour-based feminism. *Labour Gazette*. July 1914: 46. Her later campaign for mother's pensions, however, has been seen as an attempt to remove women from the labour force and bring them back into the domestic sphere (Bacchi 1983).

¹¹*Montreal Star* 21 Feb. 1910: 19.

that a separate women's union would improve the lot of the working-class as a whole: "...the necessity for organisations among the women workers is patent to all who desire to improve the status of women, and, through them, the status of men"¹².

By day three of the strike at Sommer's, labour columns and newspaper reports reveal that women who belonged the ILGWA had already begun to organize themselves in order to create a separate skirt operators' union in the industry. Jewish immigrant women already played important roles within the ranks of the union as members of the strikers' executive committee¹³ (Figure 4.2), fighting on picket lines¹⁴, serving as messengers and investigating strike breaking in other cities¹⁵. These were politicized women who were involved in the labour movement through their parent community, and who probably had some experience with political movements in Eastern Europe (Ewen 1985; Glenn 1990). While in Toronto these women dominated the labour force in the women's sector in the early twentieth century (Frager 1992a, 1992b), in Montreal they constituted a relatively small portion of the labour force (Rouillard 1981/1982). The French-Canadian skirt operators, who constituted the majority of women workers in the industry, were discouraged from participating in the union movement by the Catholic church and their parent community (Rouillard 1981/1982). In order to attract these women

¹²*Montreal Star* 21 Feb. 1910: 19.

¹³*La Patrie* 26 Feb. 1910: 1.

¹⁴During this strike female picketers were subject to violence and were arrested, which caused great public outcry. On March 1, 1910 a private detective hired by a manufacturer to survey the picket lines slapped a young girl in the face while she was picketing. The *Star* reported that prominent citizens in the city were concerned and outraged by this incident and the court found that the female striker had every right to occupy public space, not because women had claims to public space, but because women who were 'condemned to the public sphere' had to be protected from its hazards. *Montreal Star* 1 March 1910; *Montreal Star* 2 March 1910: 4. On March 8, 1910 Annie Goldberg, Malish Schwartz, and Annie Bloomfield, all under twenty years of age, were arrested for obstructing the sidewalk while picketing in front of Sommer's. When they insisted on remaining, five other picketers, including two women, Eva Haverlock and Pauline Hoffer, intervened, and were also arrested for interfering with police. The women maintained that they were poorly handled by police and the French working-class press argued that the police were too zealous when they stopped the five women. *La Patrie* 9 March 1910: 3.

¹⁵*Montreal Star* 2 March 1910: 4.

to the union, female strike leaders and the male union leaders built a key alliance for their cause. Inspired by the philanthropic sentiment of high society women in New York weeks earlier, the Montreal Women's Suffrage Society (MWSS)¹⁶, took up the cause of supporting the female strikers and worked to organize the skirtmakers into a separate local.

The suffragists agreed to organize the women workers because had their own interests in this process. Although early Anglo-Canadian suffrage groups had difficulty recognizing the importance of cross-class alliances, the MWSS made a rare attempt to include working-class women when they asked the garment workers to join their movement (Bacchi 1983; Frager 1992a; Kealey 1979; Newton 1995). Women factory workers had a role in the public sphere as paid labourers, therefore, the MWSS saw them as crucial actors in their struggle to change the social role of women (Clio Collective 1987; Lavigne et al. 1977; Lavigne and Stoddart 1983). This factor created a potential for the alliance of working- and middle-class women over claims to citizenship during this garment strike. The MWSS argued that "...since they [female garment workers] have been driven from home into the

LA GREVE DES CONFECTIONNEURS DE VETEMENTS.

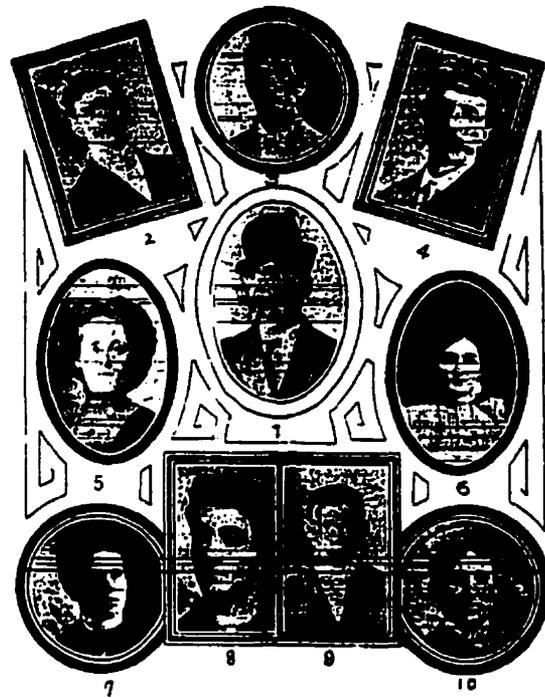


Figure 4.2: Members of the Strikers' Committee, 1910 Cloakmakers' Strike. Source: *La Patrie*, February 26, 1910: 1

¹⁶The MWSS, which was active between 1909 and 1911, has been described as a "shortlived and ineffectual" suffrage group (Cleverdon 1950 in Steedman 1997: 281) that preceded the more recognized Montreal Suffrage Association (MSA), formed in 1913 by members of the MLCW (Clio Collective 1987; Darsigny et al. 1994; Gillett 1981). The MWSS included Harriet Hammond Bullock, May Odell and pro-labour activist Rose Henderson in its leadership, but despite Henderson's involvement, took a paternalist approach to working women (Steedman 1997). Press reports suggest that May Odell was also from the working-class population. Speaking before an assembly of strikers on February 27, 1910, she told the audience that she was not speaking to them as a suffragist, but as a worker. *La Patrie* 28 Feb. 1910: 1.

stores and factories, they should be on equal footing with men"¹⁷. To build an alliance with these women, May Odell, a worker and member of the MWSS, acted as a bridge between the two groups.

Being associated with the union did lead to accusations that these women were encouraging strike in the English press, therefore, they tried to downplay their role in this social uprising. In order to distance themselves from any possible transgression of their class interests, the MWSS stressed that they were only interested in organizing the women workers and building equal suffrage. The French labour press also tried to downplay their political orientation using a paternalistic discourse: "Mme Odell [MWSS] c'est montrée une bonne mère pour les jeunes ouvrières appelées à faire partie de l'union. Elle ne leur a pas parlé politique et s'en est intentionnellement gardée"¹⁸. Popular nativism also created a fear of being associated with the Jewish leadership of the union and with areas of the city where middle-class women had no place (see Frager 1992a). This distancing from the politics of the labour movement and the creation of a separate local was an important strategy. Forming a separate local was an attempt to contain and protect them from mixing with union men in the assembly halls of the 'foreign garment district'. The result of this coalition, therefore, was to impose a middle-class ideology on the garment workers by creating a separate sphere for their participation. By keeping women separate, the MWSS and the women's union could also maintain legitimacy as a women's group within the francophone Christian milieu and among the anglo-Elite.

French-Canadian women were the specific targets of this union, who had traditionally been seen as the 'unorganizable' labour force in the industry (Rouillard 1981/1982). The women strike and labour leaders, therefore, worked to gain legitimacy by stressing the importance of self-leadership and organizing women within the Christian

¹⁷*Gazette* 24 Feb. 1910: 5. See also *La Presse* 24 Feb. 1910: last page.

¹⁸"Madame Odell [MWSS] has shown herself to be a good mother for the young women workers that have been called to participate in the union. She did not speak to them regarding politics and she is intentionally holding back" (authors's translation). *La Patrie* 25 Feb. 1910: last page.

milieu. This coalition rallied the support of the Catholic church in order to quell any fears among the French-Canadian women and encourage them to join the union. A delegation was received by the Archbishop of Montreal, Mgr. Bruchési, who endorsed the organization of the woman's union¹⁹. Bruchési referred the delegation to his pastoral letter of 1903, in which he had outlined the mutual rights of masters and servants²⁰. Bruchési's support during this strike must be read carefully, as he was vehemently opposed to international unions and only supported national unions under force. His support for the strikers was a means of encouraging French-Canadian women to join the women's union in an effort to keep them from joining the ILGWA.

The French labour press responded to this strategy by supporting separate unions for women to modernize and improve the morals of the French-Canadian working classes. As *La Presse* argued, "Les aspirations communes qu'on rencontre chez nos ouvrières les achemineront peu à peu vers une oeuvre d'éducation morale qui sera, pour la nation tout entièrement d'une haute utilité"²¹. As in immigrant communities in New York at the time, industrial work was seen as an important method of adapting and assimilating the working-class family and home to modern industrial principles of rationality and productivity. Young women factory workers would act as conduits for this process, bringing values encountered in industrial labour in their own homes after marriage (Ewen 1985). The response to the organization of women into a separate union in French language labour columns also suggests that women workers were constructed as the moral guardians of the working-class and as selfless defenders of the common good in French-

¹⁹Monseigneur Paul Bruchési was the fourth archbishop of Montreal (1897 to 1939) who took especially strong stance against radical social movements and was especially concerned with the morality of Catholics in Montreal society (Linteau 1992b). His stance on the international labour movement and Catholic workers was articulated in a pastoral letter written to Samuel Gompers following the tramways strike in 1903 (Rouillard 1989).

²⁰*La Patrie* 26 Feb. 1910: 1.

²¹"The common goals that we find among our women workers will bring them closer and closer to a moral education project that will be beneficial for the whole nation" (author's translation). *La Presse* 22 Feb. 1910.

Canadian labour circles.

Ne semble-t-il pas d'ailleurs que la femme, avec sa propension naturelle au dévouement, comprend encore mieux que l'homme qu'il est légitime de chercher à être plus heureux pour soi-même, il est plus noble encore de chercher à être heureux pour les autres et de vouloir le bonheur de ses compagnes²²?

Like working-class women in other urban ethnic communities, a combined role as moral guardian and harbinger of modernisation of the working-class family made these women ideal representatives of the working-class culture, and central actors in the legitimation of working-class claims to citizenship (Ewen 1985; Klein and Roberts 1974; McIntosh 1993; Stansell 1986).

At the same time, paternalist discourses depicted female garment workers as disorganized, inherently pure, and in need of protection. Like the sweated workers before them, however, they were also a symbol of a more widespread social crisis in which their inherent purity as women was constantly under threat from the moral perils of factory life, 'foreign' unions and socialism (Klein and Roberts 1974). For these reasons, labour leaders, who shared the paternalist view of working women, endorsed the suffragists' efforts to organize a separate union. This decision ultimately meant that women workers' interests were not represented in negotiations between the manufacturers and the union (Steedman 1997). The organization of the union, however, did bring the women into the union halls. Taking the podium at large assemblies, they described their conditions of work and questioned the inequalities of the sexual division of labour in the industry. Their stories of hardship and their protests extended far beyond the confines of the walls of the factory. They demonstrate importance of such struggles to the development of a politically conscious factory worker's identity for women. They also illustrate that the specific

²²"Is it not evident that a woman, with her natural propensity for devotion, understands even better than a man, that it is legitimate for an individual to strive to be happier, but it is more noble still to be happy for others and to want happiness for one's comrades?"(author's translation). *La Presse* 11 Feb. 1910.

conditions of the labour halls of the Main that made it possible to give voice their oppressions and thereby to contest their social position.

AT STRIKE HEADQUARTERS

As historians of the period have shown, women working in factories were the 'vanguard' of their gender before World War I (Ewen 1985). Their presence in the union hall, however, was even more subversive. Few women in any industrial sector were unionized, therefore, union halls were a masculine domain. That women were an uncommon presence in the labour halls is evident in press interpretations. The solidarity of men and women in the union hall was often constructed as a subversive form of mingling between the sexes. During the Tailor's strike in 1907, for example, a journalist observed that



Figure 4.3: Female Directors, Assembly at Standard Hall, 1910. Source: *La Presse*. February 25, 1910: last page.

during meetings, the voices of the men and women 'mingled' as they unanimously proclaimed their willingness to stay out on strike²³. Garment union and strike meetings in these halls had a particular political, ethnic and religious connotation because the unions were organized by Eastern European Jewish male tailors and were associated with the Main and the immigrant enclave. Here, 'Jewish socialism' and international unionism came to the city, making these sites particularly contentious for the French-Canadian women skirt operators.

²³*Montreal Star* 22 Aug. 1907.

The meetings to organize the skirt operators' union took place in these halls. Focusing specifically on organizing the women workers, the union and the MWSS held a series of assemblies to build support for the women's union, and encouraged the skirtmakers to join the union and the suffrage movement. In a period of a week, at least three large assemblies were held at Standard Hall, St. Joseph's Hall and Auditorium Hall (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Jane Oline, a French-Canadian garment worker at Sommer's, was appointed as the



Figure 4.4: Striking cloakmakers, Assembly at St. Joseph's Hall, 1910. Source: *La Presse*. February 23, 1910: last page.

leader of the women's union in order to attract the target group²⁴. The strike leaders read Mgr. Bruchési's letter aloud to the audience, which attracted 250 skirtmakers to the women's local²⁵. The suffragists, the union and the workers heard speeches from key French-Canadian Labour leaders such as M. J. Bellemaire and Gustave Francq of the Montreal Trades and Labour Council, and J. G. Brunet of the topographers' union who also gave the women's union an important endorsement²⁶. These leaders saw the organization of women as 'patent' to the improvement of the conditions of the working-class as a whole and supported the organization of all women workers into their own union²⁷. Labour leader Henri Bourdon, for example, promised to help the MWSS to unite

²⁴*Montreal Star* 28 Feb. 1910: 4.

²⁵*La Patrie* 26 Feb. 1910: 1.

²⁶*Montreal Star* 28 Feb. 1910: 4; *La Patrie* 25 Feb. 1910: last page; *La Patrie* 28 Feb. 1910: 1.

²⁷*La Patrie* 28 Feb. 1910: 1.

all of the 20,000 women workers in the city "...into a gigantic organization that would ring from one end of the city to the other"²⁸. This endorsement from the parent community of the skirtmakers was also an important means of attracting women to the movement. Some of these leaders even argued that men and women should be equal and work in solidarity with each other, but this did not actually translate into real equality within the male union movement²⁹. While the multiethnic character of the labour force and social space of the Main had led the union to promote cross-cultural alliances between workers, when women strikers raised the issue of pay equity it was decided not to "...quarrel over this phase of the question...and to stand together in the present crisis"³⁰.

Despite the presence of these leaders and the endorsement of the Catholic church, these labour halls presented French-Canadian women workers with an unfamiliar environment. Although they were not necessarily unfamiliar with the milieu of the Main - many worked in factories such as Empire Clothing, Montreal Skirt and Cloak, and Ideal Ladies' Tailoring -- places like Standard Hall and Auditorium Hall presented them with radical union movements. Although the MWSS tried to control and make the union hall familiar, they confronted other types of working women in the garment unions. During one meeting, female members of the pantsmakers' union led 300 of their comrades into a large assembly of 2,000 striking cloakmakers at Auditorium Hall³¹. Dressed in white with red sashes across their chests Frida Bachowski, Bertha Merelin and Esther Buchman led their union into the hall carrying a flag that read "Long live the general strike, presented by the brothers and sisters, Independent Pantsmakers' of Montreal"³² (Figure

²⁸*Montreal Star* 25 Feb. 1910: 4.

²⁹*La Patrie* 28 Feb. 1910: 1.

³⁰*Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6.

³¹Support also came from the Hebrew Trades and Labour Council, the Pantsmakers' Union, which was not on strike, and from the UGWA in Toronto and New York. *Gazette* 25 Feb. 1910: 11; *La Patrie* 26 Feb. 1910: 1; *Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6; *Montreal Star* 9 March 1910: 4.

³²*La Patrie* 28 Feb. 1910: 1; *La Presse* 28 Feb. 1910: last page.

distress told by girls [sic] who have to support widowed mothers and orphans on 3\$ or 4\$ a week, brought tears to the eyes of those who were standing around..One delicate sixteen-year-old child said she worked ninety hours a week and generally made about \$3³⁵.

The press reproduced many such stories during this strike. The union also understood how important the women's tales of hardship could be for gaining public support for the strike. The young women workers were capable of garnering the most public sympathy because of popular concerns about the moral threat posed by low-wages and the physical threat that disease and exhaustion posed for the reproductive capabilities of working-class women (Glenn 1990; Steedman 1997).

The sensationalist English daily newspaper, the *Montreal Star*, turned public attention to the plight of the young women workers by publishing stories of hardship. These stories illustrate that the Christian milieu was not entirely discrete, despite MWSS attempts to target French-Canadian Christian women. In each story, young Jewish immigrant women appear as victims of immigration, fragmented families and industrial work. Dora Greenberg, for example, was a twenty year old finisher who lived in a small single room with her father, a Jewish butcher. The constraints of industrial urban life had kept her family apart and condemned Dora to labour in the garment factories. She and her father supported themselves and Dora's mother and three younger siblings in Europe on a combined income of eight dollars a week³⁶. Annie Shapiro's experience, however, was perhaps the story that captured the popular imagination. A seventeen year old garment worker who had been driven from her home in the country because of problems in her relationship with her step-mother, she had become a young woman "adrift" in Montreal³⁷. Because her wage of three dollars a week did not go very far (her room and board cost \$2.50) she was compelled to work nights in a store on the Main. Annie asked the public

³⁵*Montreal Star* 25 Feb. 1910: 4.

³⁶*Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6.

³⁷*Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6.

gathering, "...how can a girl be expected to keep right earning money like that?". She stated, "...sometimes I don't get even \$3, and if I am sick or late I am docked at the factory and am not able to pay my board, let alone dress myself"³⁸.

These testimonies also helped to build solidarity between women workers from the Jewish and French-Canadian communities³⁹. Such self-representational acts are arguably at the core of feminist forms of political activism wherein the personal is political. The press reported that when a French-Canadian woman striker, "...a poetic looking little woman, with black eyes and raven hair", stood and read the following poem during a strikers' meeting at Standard Hall, many women joined the union:

Do we live for those who love us,
For the work they can make us do?
For the middle man above us?
For the employer, landlord too?
Do we live to rise each morning?
Work and slave till eventide?
Oh, yes, we do live for others
In the saddest sense of the phrase.
We live that they may exploit us
In a thousand various ways⁴⁰.

Given voice in these gatherings, female strikers articulated critical perspectives on their social position. Women strike leaders, drawing on the socialist discourse of enslavement of the period (Frager 1992b), argued that women had a definitive role in the industrial economy. They saw themselves as women who were trapped and enslaved in both the

³⁸*Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6.

³⁹As Howlett (1996) has argued in the case of British suffragettes, accounts of the experience of forcible feeding in prison were central to the construction of a shared subject position and body for the suffrage movement.

⁴⁰*Montreal Star* 24 Feb. 1910: 6.

domestic and industrial spheres. Having established concern for their own cause, the women strike leaders endeavoured to build a more explicitly political identity for the women workers. They also pointed out the responsibilities of their allies such as the unions and the MWSS. "These women," a female strike leader said,

...are imprisoned just as surely as are political prisoners and with far more terrible consequences to themselves and to the women race. And it is as much the duty of the suffragists, as the political exponents of the working-classes, to demand justice for these girls [sic], as it is the duty to demand the release of the Mexican patriot or the protection of a Russian exile.⁴¹

In contrast with the paternalist discourse of the union and the MWSS, the female strike leaders described the workers as citizens whose lives were governed by social injustices.

These stories of hardship told by women workers during assemblies also aided the union in gaining public sympathy. The Chair of the strike committee, for example, used the women's tales of hardship to support union demands, arguing that women workers would be better protected from "the evil-disposed persons" [the manufacturers] through these measures⁴². They also allowed the middle-class suffragists to support the working women along the familiar paternalist lines and to direct attention away from any class conflict that might result from their allegiance with the strikers. As Frager (1992a) has noted, middle-class Toronto women's organisations in the early twentieth century were uninterested in the cause of working women unless they raised their moral concern with tales of hardship and threats to their purity as women. Tales of hardship depoliticized the suffragists involvement in the strike, cloaking women's struggles with a morality that further legitimized the union's struggle. Stories of long hours, low pay and household responsibilities, were only interesting to their allies because they highlighted the physical and emotional strain of their lives and suggested the possibility of 'going wrong'. Female

⁴¹*Montreal Star* 25 Feb. 1910: 4.

⁴²*Montreal Star* 25 Feb. 1910: 4.

strike leaders also recognized the power of these stories to fuel moral outrage over the exploitation of women and the threat posed by their low wages. One of the female strike leaders created great alarm when she stated:

The small wages of fathers force the young girls [sic] out to work early, and the starvation wages of the girls [sic] keep them in quest of better pay; while they are seeking improvement of their condition, they are dragged into the net of the white slaver⁴³.

Women strike leaders skilfully replied to paternalist interest in their cause by evoking moral concerns that were commonly associated with female garment workers (Stansell 1986). They highlighted the vulnerability created by their temporary and inferior status as workers and the moral and physical threats posed by this social position.

This strike was an important episode in building and communicating a worker's identity for women in early twentieth-century Montreal. The importance of this adjustment to the role of women was not overlooked by suffragists, who saw the garment workers as women who could stake claim to full citizenship because of their participation in the paid labour force. The Main played a very integral role in the definition of this identity because of its border status. It was a place workers from a variety of the ethnic groups in working-class Montreal came together for common struggles as well as entertainments and work. Although the MWSS was reluctant to be associated with these movements, the centrality and heterogeneity along the Main made it possible for these Anglophone middle-class women to participate in this process. Working in the garment industry also drew French-Canadian women workers into the unions and their institutions in the area. In these halls they met other women who were associated with labour unionism and they entered an arena where they could, in a limited sense, contest their low wages and conditions of work. The intersection of many interests around the organization of the women workers was a product of the heterogeneous character of the street and its

⁴³*Montreal Star* 25 Feb. 1910: 4.

institutions. For a brief moment in time meetings in these halls centred on integrating women into the labour movement and defining their role as working women. But the convergence of these interests and the participation of French-Canadian women was rare during the period. The street space of the Main, used for union and strike parades and frequently blockaded by picket lines, was also an important site for women garment workers to contest their treatment as workers and demonstrate their membership in the union. We now turn to the 1912 strike of the tailors to examine how another group of women used the public spaces of the street to contest these same conditions and express their membership in the labour movement.

FOREIGN AGITATORS, ALIEN LABOUR

Conditions for women workers in the Montreal men's clothing industry were not as bad as in the women's wear sector, but they were infamous within a national context. While workers in other North American cities had secured union conditions by 1912, Montreal workers were still subject to very poor conditions of work, long hours, and a system of production that was oriented towards piecework and the task system⁴⁴ (Frager 1992b; Rome 1987b; Strong 1940; Tulchinsky 1992; Zaretz 1934). The Montreal manufacturers came to dominate Canadian manufacturing in this sector due to low wages, creating a serious obstacle to unionization throughout Canada (Frager 1992b). To fight union pressure for the 'closed' shop the larger manufacturers had also formed an association, the MCMA (Montreal Clothing Manufacturers' Association) (Rouillard 1981/1982). The UGWA attributed the weakness of the union in Montreal to the difficulty of attracting French-Canadians to join their ranks (Frager 1992b), and to the high proportion of women workers that increasingly dominated certain areas of production. After numerous successful strikes in North America, the UGWA launched an aggressive offensive on the clothing manufacturers in the men's wear sector in Montreal⁴⁵. Essentially, it was a struggle for control of the Montreal factory floor that extended beyond this space, spilling

⁴⁴*Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15.

⁴⁵*La Patrie* 10 June 1912: 2; *Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15.

out onto the streets and public spaces of the city. When the workers took their struggle to the streets, the Main was the axis of their activities, wherein workers defined their questioned their labour conditions and expressed their allegiance with the union.

In May 1912, with a membership list of 5,000 in Montreal, the UGWA began drafting a manifesto to establish their presence in the city. They presented their demands to the Montreal manufacturers during the busy season, but by the time the manufacturers responded to their demands, the spring and summer rush was over⁴⁶. By June 8, 1912, the union decided to launch a strike against the MCMA to establish control over the labour process⁴⁷. This strike involved over 4,500⁴⁸ workers, the largest strike in any industry in Montreal in 1912 (Copp 1974). The strike officially involved only the twenty largest firms in the industry, few of which were on St. Lawrence Boulevard. The smaller firms, the names of which were not listed in the press, were located on the Main, the future site of the men's clothing industry in Canada (Figure 4.6). The strike began with 3,000 tailors and expanded when non-unionized workers joined the union to participate in the strike⁴⁹ (Rouillard 1981/82). The union's demands addressed many of the injustices that were present in the industry, especially the long hours of work, subcontracting and the piecework system⁵⁰.

⁴⁶Before this strike the work week was formally 60 hours, with many more hours worked off the books. Piece work was abolished during this strike, as was sub-contracting. The week was shorted to 52 hours. Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts* TO2688 RG27 Vol. 300 Strike 3509, June 1912; *Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8; Rome 1987b: 133.

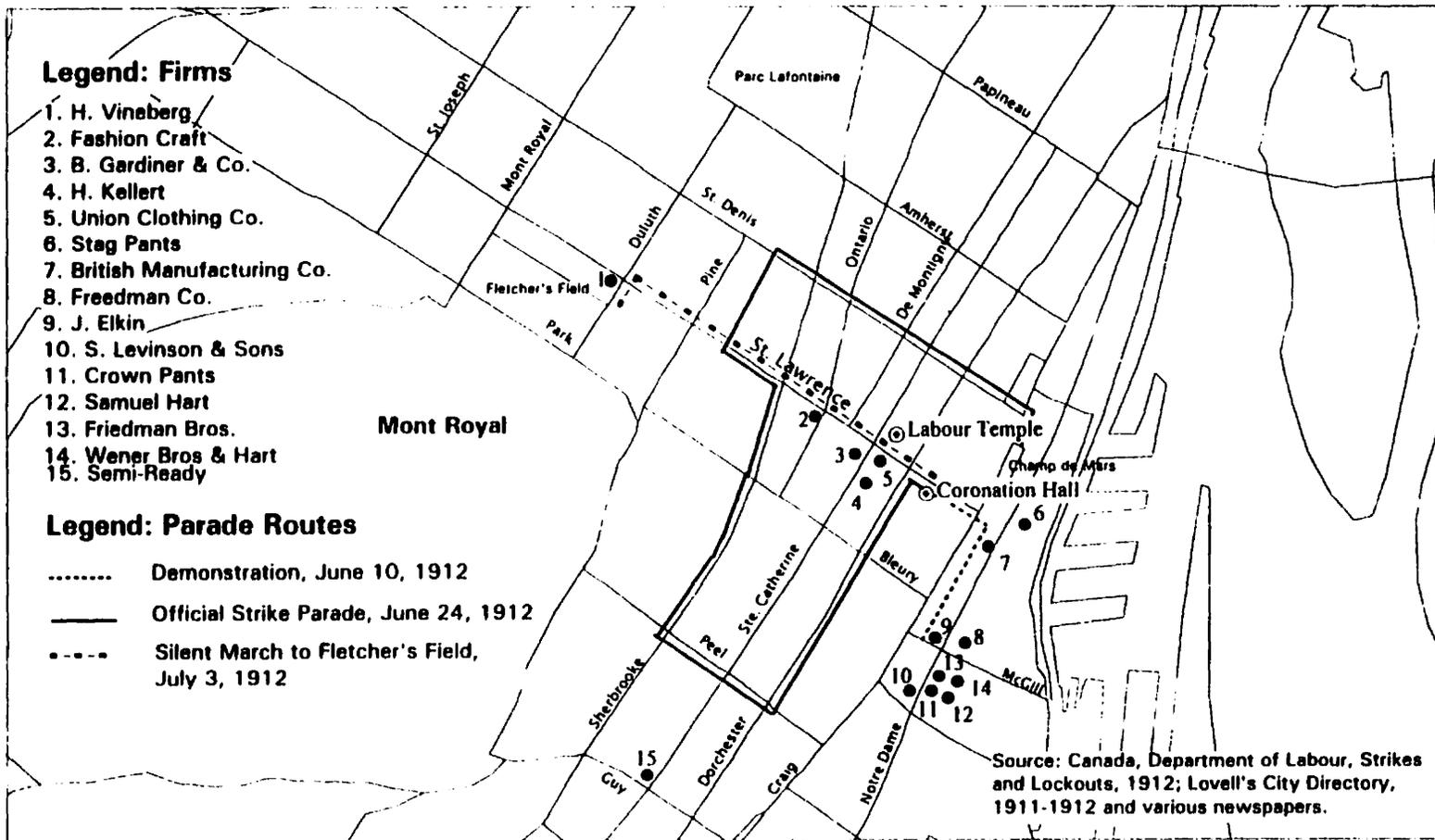
⁴⁷*La Patrie* 10 June 1912: 2.

⁴⁸Although the total number of strikers is uncertain, on June 11, the *Gazette* reported that the UGWA had issued strike cards to 4,000 workers. *Gazette* 11 June 1912: 16. By the following week, conservative estimates suggest that the strikers totalled 4,500. *Labour Gazette* Vol. 13, July 1912: 83.

⁴⁹These workers were members of UGWA locals #167 (Pressers), #209 (Coat and Vestmakers), and #277 (Pantsmakers). UGWA Local Nos. 61 and 19 were also involved in this strike, but their trade is unknown. Canada, Department of Labour, *Strikes and Lockouts* TO2688 RG27 Vol. 300 Strike 3509, June 1912. When the Cutters from UGWA local #116 joined their ranks on June 15, they also added great strength to the union's challenge to the MCMA. *Montreal Star* 15 June 1912: 1.

⁵⁰*La Patrie* 10 June 1912: 2; *Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15.

FIGURE 4.6: MAJOR FIRMS, PARADE ROUTES AND LABOUR HALLS IN THE 1912 TAILORS' STRIKE



As Strong once argued (1940) successful strikes require high morale, adequate funds, public sympathy and aggressive activities. Well aware of the importance of these strategies to the success of the union's efforts, manufacturers constantly tried to call each of these methods into question. They typically denied that they paid low wages⁵¹ and questioned the union's ability to support the strikers⁵². They also raised issues of nationality and patriotism (Zaretz 1934). As Frager (1992b) has shown, nativism and ethnocentrism could be used by manufacturers to mount public support against international unions, by calling into question the nationality of the strike leaders and labelling strikes and union institutions as 'Jewish'. This method prevented strikers from building alliances and could be used to discourage the majority of their unskilled labour force, Christian working-class women, from being involved with the strike or the union (Frager 1992b). The MCMA played on the nativism of the public to delegitimize the unions and the strike leaders. The manufacturers called into question the nationality of the strikers, especially the strike leaders⁵³. Labelling the union leaders as 'professional agitators', the MCMA appealed to 'Canadian' patriotism by arguing that the UGWA did

⁵¹The president of the MCMA, B. Gardiner of B. Gardiner and Co., denounced accusations that the men and women in the industry were poorly paid. Canada, Department of Labour, Trade Dispute Report, 11 June 1912, *Strikes and Lockouts* TO2688 RG27 Vol. 300 Strike 350. Pressers, they claimed, earned between \$15 and \$35 a week depending on their task. To avoid accusations of exploiting women workers, they added that, in some departments, women receive at least as much as men, and many made \$10 to \$17 a week. *La Presse* 12 June 1912: 1; *Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15. To counter these claims the UGWA made a public request that a citizen's committee be formed to examine the manufacturers books and offered to donate \$100 to a charity chosen by the citizen who could substantiate the MCMA's claims. *Gazette* 11 June 1912: 16; *La Presse* 11 June 1912: 1.

⁵²Upon hearing the UGWA had printed strike cards for a four month period, the MCMA told the press that the union did not have the financial means to support the strikers for such an extended period. Despite the fact that the union had recently supported 40,000 workers in Chicago for a four month period, the MCMA calculated that the strike would be too costly for the UGWA. *Gazette* 11 June 1912: 16; *La Presse* 12 June 1912: 1; *Montreal Star* 17 June 1912: 2. By 1912, however, with locals in large manufacturing centres in North America, including Toronto and Hamilton, the UGWA was relatively powerful and had the money to support strikers for extended periods of time. *Gazette* 11 June 1912: 16.

⁵³In response to a letter by unionist Isidore Boltuck arguing that labour interests are international not national, a letter appeared in the *Gazette* that questioned the citizenship of the strikers and called for an investigation into the nationality of the strike leaders. *Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8; *Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

not understand that Canadian workers were happy with their conditions⁵⁴. They dismissed union demands by arguing that the 'American' leaders of the UGWA had "...been here for some time arranging the trouble"⁵⁵. They described the strikers and their leaders as rootless and non-productive men, a common technique used when employers faced international unions (Morton 1980).

This nativism did not serve as a method to fragment the labour force⁵⁶. Many more tailors joined the strike on June 17, when they heard that the employers were threatening to bring in tailors from 'the Old Country' [Britain]⁵⁷. While the MCMA contested the presence of 'foreign' agitators, they reserved the right to import workers and threatened to move their factories to smaller cities⁵⁸. To defend their position, the manufacturers turned the 'alien' discourse on its head, arguing that the only aliens were the strike organisers⁵⁹. Pressure mounted, however, when the union threatened to take action against

⁵⁴*La Patrie* 27 June 1912: 4.

⁵⁵*Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8.

⁵⁶One week after the strike began, a group of 50 cutters who were discontent with UGWA methods met at a tavern next the Monument National on the Main and formed the Canadian Garment Workers Union No. 93. The reasons behind the formation of this union remain unclear. The press suggested that these workers were never really in sympathy with the strike and were suspicious of the UGWA's ability to pay strike pay. *Gazette* 2 July 1912: 3; *La Patrie* 19 June 1912: 12; *La Presse* 26 June 1912: 16; *Montreal Star* 26 June 1912: 6. This union supported a national union movement with the Canadian Federation of Labour (CFL) and stated that they did not want to "... be at the behest of agitators from across the line". *Gazette* 25 June 1912: 2.

⁵⁷*Montreal Star* 15 June 1912: 1.

⁵⁸Companies such as Semi-Ready, initially tried to replace their workers with the workers of affiliated merchant tailors. *Gazette* 11 June 1912: 16. This company also successfully replaced 67 of the 106 strikers in their firm with workers from the US. *La Patrie* 27 June 1912: 4. Other large manufacturers such as J. Elkin, the owner of the larger men's clothing firms, told the press that he was planning to move his head office to Joliette, a small town north of Montreal that he had visited and was welcomed by the local city council. *La Patrie* 11 June 1912: 1; *La Presse* 14 June 1912: 20. Because there was a large pool of non-unionized women workers in outlying towns, Wener Bros. and Hart, Crown Pants and Union Clothing Co. also threatened to leave the city. *Montreal Star* 4 July 1912: 17.

⁵⁹*Montreal Star* 26 June 1912: 6; *Montreal Star* 3 July 1912: 2.

all manufacturers who were violating the Alien Labour Act⁶⁰ and the court granted the union permission to take action against Freedman and Co., a company that had employed four American mechanics⁶¹. The manufacturers then moved to fight the Alien Labour Act, describing the act as 'fake labour legislation' that prevented them from continuing important business. They appealed to the public by arguing that labour, regardless of nationality, enabled them to continue their production while foreign agitators halted Canadian manufacturing⁶². An attempt to break the ranks of the strikers by bringing in workers from Toronto also reinforced union solidarity and demonstrated the power of transregional solidarity⁶³. On July 19, towards the end of the strike, the MCMA summoned as many workers as possible from Toronto (Rome 1987b: 133). When the 65 workers arrived, the union met them at the train and informed them that they were strike breakers. The workers followed the unionists to union headquarters and accepted the union's offer to pay their return fare back to Toronto. The press reported that the MCMA were incensed when they heard that the strike breakers went back to Coronation Hall, gathered around the sanded floor with the strikers, and joked about the MCMA's wasted efforts⁶⁴.

Ethnic fragmentation tactics were also intended to inscribe the Main and the institutions of the UGWA as a contentious 'foreign' space. Although some were suggesting

⁶⁰*Montreal Star* 10 July 1912: 17.

⁶¹In July, Freedman Co. imported four mechanics from Newark, New York and Brooklyn. *Gazette* 10 July 1912: 3.

⁶²Turning the tables on the union, the MCMA began collecting evidence against the union organisers in order to have them deported under the same act, a position that helped the union to attract the support of the Montreal Trades and Labour Council. *Montreal Star* 10 July 1912: 17; *Montreal Star* 19 July 1912.

⁶³The union was powerful enough to combat these methods and promptly wired British, American and Canadian labour leaders in other cities. The Hamilton and Toronto chapters of the UGWA informed the strike leaders that the strike had increased trade, therefore, strike breakers would not be coming to Montreal, but manufacturers reported that they were receiving applications from these cities. *Gazette* 13 June 1912: 3; *Gazette* 19 June 1912: 3; *La Presse* 19 June 1912: 13.

⁶⁴*Montreal Star* 22 July 1912: 17; *Montreal Star* 24 July 1912: 1.

an independent committee, the liberal capitalist middle-class public clearly sided with the manufacturers' nativist position. On July 12, a letter to the editor of the *Gazette* illustrated the middle-class public's resentment of foreign agitators and appealed to the protection of local interests⁶⁵. While this position may reflect class interests, further analysis of the depiction of strike leaders illustrates that it was also anti-'cosmopolitan' and anti-Semitic. The construction of the Main as a space of difference was also part of this discourse. The author of the letter stressed the use of the Yiddish language among the strikers and strike leaders in the labour halls of the Main:

I attended a meeting recently in a hall on St. Lawrence street, when the British labour MP Mr. Beaumont addressed the strikers, and was surprised to find that a large percentage of them could not understand the English language, and that all notices were given out in Yiddish. From the air of authority exercised by this alien labour leader, a stranger might have mistaken him for the mayor of Montreal.⁶⁶

Letters to the *Gazette*, also illustrate that public opinion was mounting against the women associated with this movement. While the union used women workers as examples of the problem of piecework, the public countered these claims. Some defended the piecework system as the only fair method of payment because it rewards hard work⁶⁷. One letter stated that a significant proportion of those present at another union assembly on the Main were young unmarried women who were well-dressed, which was seen as evidence of their prosperity⁶⁸. The women who were associated with the strike, the union, and the spaces of the Main were seen by a middle-class public as opportunists who had been misled by foreign agitators who spoke their mother tongue⁶⁹. For these women, however,

⁶⁵*Gazette* 12 July 1912: 9.

⁶⁶*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

⁶⁷*Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8; *Gazette* 25 July 1912: 5.

⁶⁸ *Gazette* 25 July 1912: 5.

⁶⁹*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

the strike was a civic forum in which they represented their class and ethnic communities and demanded recognition of their role as workers (Glenn 1990). A very unsympathetic press and public, however, depicted them as aggressive women preying on capitalists and businessmen in the streets, gaily protesting and turning union halls into sites of heterosexual sociability.

TAKING IT TO THE STREET: SLUGGERS AND VIOLENT FEMMES

Conflicts between the strikers and the manufacturers were fought in the public spaces of St. Lawrence Boulevard. Unlike the May and Labour Day parades, the use of the Main by strikers to demonstrate their cause involved small tactics employed at the doors of the factories and on street corners, spontaneous demonstrations and sometimes riots. These oppositional practices were negatively reported in the press, creating a cartography of violence that served to reinforce the distance between the international union movement and the middle-classes. When Cohen, an employee at B. Gardiner and Co., was badly beaten while walking along St. Lawrence Boulevard, press coverage of the incident served to instill fear of the area in the public. Cohen, who lived in a boarding house in the St. Louis Ward had been threatened in his home earlier that evening, when strikers had tried to get into his boarding house. When he later went out for a walk, he was 'set-upon' and "...beaten and kicked into insensibility on St. Lawrence street...by four men, whom he said were strikers"⁷⁰. Due to the severity of his beatings, this case was long and drawn out and appeared periodically in the news during the strike⁷¹. This dialogue between the manufacturers, the court cases and the 'violated', hard-working strike breakers destroyed public sympathy for the strikers. The press reported bomb threats and told the public that strike breakers felt so threatened they were carrying around revolvers and lead pipes⁷². The MCMA assured the public that, "...every effort was made to run-down the strikers

⁷⁰*Gazette* 14 June 1912: 5.

⁷¹*Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8; *Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15.

⁷²*La Presse* 2 July 1912: 16; *Montreal Star* 28 June 1912: 23.

guilty of brutally assaulting employees"⁷³.

Along the Main, picket lines were also particularly threatening barriers in public space for strike breakers. As always, pickets lines served not only as a forum to persuade workers to join the strike, but also as a means to report the identities of strike breakers to the union⁷⁴. As in other strikes in the industry, the picket line around the factory of Harris Vineberg at St. Lawrence and Duluth was the site of many struggles. By mid-July, fear of the violence on picket lines around this factory had become so extreme that Vineberg decided to lodge his workers on the fourth and fifth floors of his factory. In an attempt to control uprisings at the door, Vineberg forbade his employees to leave the factory unless they were accompanied by the police. Well known for his resistance to the union, Vineberg gave the impression of taking great care of his workers. Under this state of seige, the fourth and fifth floors were used as dormitories. Camp beds and trunks were installed. Each 21,860 square foot floor had a separate section for young women. To keep the workers healthy, he arranged for each one to go out once a day under police protection. Vineberg also assured the public that the workers would get all the air that they needed through the western windows. He even arranged for the friends and family of the workers to visit the factory with police protection⁷⁵.

Manufacturers, however, were involved in heightening violence on picket lines, hiring private detectives to harass picketers. These 'sluggers' made picket lines dangerous for strikers, and many strikers were arrested⁷⁶. Despite the manufacturers' attempts to deter

⁷³*Montreal Star* 3 July 1912: 2.

⁷⁴*Gazette* 13 June 1912: 3.

⁷⁵*Montreal Star* 15 July 1912: 17.

⁷⁶Press reports indicate that strikers on picket lines were often arrested for refusing to circulate, and were falsely accused of causing bodily harm to strike breakers. By July 14, a large assembly took place at Auditorium Hall where the strikers protested against the severity of Recorder Dupuis by contacting the federal Attorney General. *La Presse* 15 July 1912: 1. Recorder Dupuis, however, clearly sided with the manufacturers and strike breakers, stating that he would always put down attempts to harass workers. *Gazette* 26 July 1912: 9.

women workers from union activities and spaces, they were actively involved on both sides of the line. Two specific cases of violence among strikers and strike breakers received a great deal of press coverage. The first is an unusual case of a young woman strike breaker. Leah Silverman accused Rubin Yenkin of assaulting her with an umbrella when she arrived one morning at her workplace, Sugerman's pants factory at 68 St. Lawrence Boulevard⁷⁷. Yenkin, who was part of a picket line in front of the factory, allegedly "...assaulted her with an umbrella and swore at her"⁷⁸. Ridiculing the union's claim that it was Yenkin who attacked Silverman for crossing the picket line, the *Gazette* subheading read "Claim picket beaten by girl". The union argued that Yenkin was beaten by Silverman with the help of the manufacturer, and scoffed at the accusation that Yenkin could have assaulted Silverman. The union representative stated:

One of our pickets, a fellow about four feet tall, who weighs about ninety pounds, came in this morning and said two fellows caught him while he was standing opposite a clothing establishment at 68 St. Lawrence street, pulled him over into the establishment, where the boss held him while a girl whacked him with an umbrella⁷⁹.

Eventually, the union did provide legal support for his case, but Yenkin was nevertheless charged⁸⁰.

In this case, the union tried to play with the gendered corporality of the two people involved in the struggle. They diminished Silverman's accusations by questioning the strength of Yenkin, whom they turned into a victim. The accepted story, the one printed in most of the papers, depicted Silverman as the victim, a courageous 'working girl' who was aggressively assaulted by a troublemaking striker attempting to control the

⁷⁷*Montreal Herald* 13 June 1912: 1; *La Presse* 14 June 1912: 22; *Montreal Star* 14 June 1912: 20.

⁷⁸*Montreal Herald* 13 June 1912: 1.

⁷⁹*Gazette* 14 June 1912: 5.

⁸⁰*Gazette* 14 June 1912: 5.

space around the factory. The press was fixated on this case, but few women involved in this strike were seen as victims of union's attempts to control the entryways to the factories and the streets. More often they were the 'aggressive' adversaries of 'hard-working' strike breakers. In one case, they were depicted as threatening the wife and home of a strike breaker. Women strikers were among the assailants who were arrested for threatening Mrs. Albert, the wife of a union member who had returned to work⁸¹. These arrests did not halt the strikers. A crowd of 100 people returned to Albert's home *en masse* the next day after Mr. Albert had left for work and demanded his wife's life if she could not persuade her husband to stop working. Although these strikers escaped the police⁸², later that evening, the police arrested two women on picket duty in front of Kellert's. Mrs. Judriman and Mrs. Jacobson were arrested with their babies and baby carriages and charged with threatening Mrs. Albert's life⁸³. Kellert and Sons quickly rallied behind their worker, providing him with protection and relocating his family to a new home on Plateau Mont-Royal⁸⁴. This protection was not enough to deter the strikers. Later that month, 500 strikers met on the corner of St. Lawrence and Ontario streets and proceeded to Mr. Albert's new home apparently shouting "Scab, scab. We'll get you yet"⁸⁵. The newspapers described a chaotic mob scene that was beyond the control of the three police officers on duty. As the police attempted to load the strikers into the patrol car, other strikers tried to free them. There were at least fifty men and women clinging to the patrol car during this struggle⁸⁶. According to the *Star*, the strikers used the gender of the women involved to defend themselves from the police:

⁸¹Arron Suna, Dora Midelman, Leah Jacobson and Nathan Kisisky were arrested on July 9 for threatening the life of Mrs. Albert if she could not persuade her husband to join the strike. *Montreal Star* 9 July 1912: 17.

⁸²*Montreal Star* 9 July 1912: 17; *Montreal Star* 10 July 1912: 17.

⁸³*Montreal Star* 10 July 1912: 17.

⁸⁴*Montreal Star* 27 July 1912: 1.

⁸⁵*Montreal Star* 29 July 1912: 17.

⁸⁶*Gazette* 27 July 1912: 11.

When the wagon arrived the three prisoners were hustled into No. 4, but not without a fight. Women crawled over the sides of the wagon in an attempt to free their friends and when the officers would attempt to shove them back, the crowd would yell, "Don't you dare lay your hands on a woman".⁸⁷

When women did not appear in the historical record of this strike as violent and aggressive defenders of the international union, they were depicted as frivolous participants in parades and assemblies, or as the assailants of middle-class men in the public spaces of the business district. While the *Gazette* and the *Star* were busy depicting the strikers as violent and threatening, controlling the urban spaces around the factories, the French papers reported that strikers had taken to singing and dancing rather than threatening strike breakers. *La Patrie* reported that "Les grévistes ont suivi les conseils qui leur ont été donnés, et passent leur temps maintenant à chanter et à faire de la musique, au lieu de maltraiter leurs camarades qui ne pensaient pas comme eux"⁸⁸. *La Presse* similarly described the strikers as entertaining themselves joyously like "...des écoliers en vacances"[school children on holidays]⁸⁹. In part, these descriptions are related to the season during which the strike occurred. The *Gazette*, for example, reported that the strikers were taking full advantage of the summer months to have a rare holiday⁹⁰. On the other hand, the mixing of the sexes and the youth of the women played a large part in inscribing the strikers' demonstrations and spaces with an air of sociability. For example, on the first day of the strike 1,000 men and women marched along St. Jacques and St. Lawrence, ending at their headquarters at Coronation Hall below Dorchester Street (Figure 4.6)⁹¹. This vibrant parade apparently attracted a great deal of attention, "...almost

⁸⁷*Montreal Star* 29 July 1912: 17.

⁸⁸"The strikers followed the advice that was given to them and are now spending their time singing and playing music instead of bullying the other workers that do not share their views" (author's translation). *La Patrie* 11 June 1912: 1.

⁸⁹*La Presse* 10 June 1912: 16.

⁹⁰*Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8.

⁹¹*Gazette* 10 June 1912: 8.

as much attention as the circus parade", and caused "...a great deal of excitement due to the cheers of those in the procession and their sympathizers on the sidewalk"⁹². This was followed by a large assembly with keynote speakers and a party, where hundreds of young people danced to an 'excellent' orchestra⁹³. On a more serious note, the strikers also held a silent parade on July 3 (Figure 4.6). 300 strikers met in front of Coronation Hall and "...unceremoniously walked up to Fletcher's Field where a good many of the strikers were already present, and a small picnic was held"⁹⁴.

Throughout the strike, the strikers continually took their cause to the streets and congregated at Coronation Hall and the Labour Temple for meetings and speeches⁹⁵ (Figure 4.6). The two most impressive and unique acts of public protest during this strike were the June 22 parade and the July 19 tag-day. Although the press reported different numbers for the parade, it was certainly a large demonstration and the hallmark of the strike. Most papers reported that 4,000 strikers participated in this strike. Four hundred to 500 of were young women and another 400 were children who worked as basters in the industry⁹⁶. The parade left Champ de Mars, went along Craig, to St. Denis Street, across Prince Arthur, down St. Lawrence Boulevard, along Sherbrooke, down Windsor, east along Dorchester and back to their headquarters at Coronation Hall on St. Lawrence⁹⁷ (Figure 4.6). It was an impressive parade led by the arrested striker Harry Barsky, the parade's marshal, local strike leaders and officials from the head office of the UGWA in

⁹²*Montreal Star* 10 June 1912: 15

⁹³*La Presse* 10 June 1912: 16; *La Presse* 11 June 1912: 1.

⁹⁴*Witness* 3 July 1912.

⁹⁵*La Patrie* 11 June 1912: 1; *La Presse* 11 June 1912: 1.

⁹⁶The 4,000 reported by the French press was said to reflect UGWA predictions. *La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2; *La Presse* 24 June 1912: 5.

⁹⁷*La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2; *La Presse* 24 June 1912: 5.

New York⁹⁸. The leaders were followed by 42 men marching two abreast, then by more men marching four or five deep, and finally by the young women and children workers, who attracted a great deal of support from the public. The sympathizers, it was reported, numbered almost as many as the marchers in the parade itself⁹⁹.

This large display troubled authorities, who sent 300 constables to "...guard against any breach of the peace"¹⁰⁰. All of the papers, however, reported that the parade was peaceful and without disorder¹⁰¹. The marchers did have strong messages for the public. As they paraded up the Main all the men wore signs and carried banners that read: "...Our demand is not for closed shop but for the abolition of the sweating and task system"; "The Determined Attitude of the Clothiers' Association is the destruction of the clothing industry in Montreal"; "The bosses deny us the right of organization while they themselves are organized into an association"; "Will public-spirited citizens endorse the action of the clothiers in starving fifteen thousand souls into submission?"¹⁰². All, including the women and the children, wore badges that read "Striking Garment Workers. Do not be a scab"¹⁰³. The press expressly remarked on the children's public appeal against strike breaking.

In terms of the women strikers, the press primarily commented on their appearance, their mood and their ethnicity. *La Patrie* described the young female strikers:

⁹⁸*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7; *Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7; *La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2.

⁹⁹*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰⁰*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7; *Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7; *La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2.

¹⁰¹*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7; *Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7; *La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2.

¹⁰²*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7; *Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰³*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

"Les jeunes filles [sic] au nombre d'environ quatre cent en causant et riant"¹⁰⁴. The *Herald* reported that "The girls [sic] were joyous", and well-dressed in bright and stylish costumes. They were a surprising element of the parade: "Then came the girls -- the big girls. There were little girls with badges at the tail end of everything"¹⁰⁵. They built a flirtatious scenario for these public women that was highly political: "The girls [sic] were out in their joyous costumes, and gave back the waves and smiles of the clerks in the city hall windows in a fine responsive style"¹⁰⁶. The *Gazette* also commented on their appearance, but also, probably inaccurately, stressed their fragility: "The girls [sic], well dressed, many of them pretty, marched linked arm in arm, but they were rather tired at the end of the parade and many out of the five or six hundred starting dropped out before the end through their fatigue during the heat of the day"¹⁰⁷. These radical women, mistakenly coded as fragile, were further marked by their apparent ethnicity. According to the *Herald*, "They were a rather good looking lot with all the extremes of brunette and blonde, which mark the Jewish race"¹⁰⁸.

These 'joyous paraders' were seen as more threatening when they took to the streets to raise money for the union during the July 19 Tag-Day. Three hundred female strikers occupied public spaces around the Main and down into the business district distributing a Jewish Socialist paper, *Cotton's Weekly*, the cover of which featured a picture of the Montreal strike leaders¹⁰⁹ (Tulchinsky 1992). Their public presence was the primary cause for alarm: "With a badge across their breasts, the girls [sic] announce their cause in the public and each person who deposits an amount of some kind in the little

¹⁰⁴"About 400 girls were demonstrating and laughing" (author's translation). *La Patrie* 24 June 1912: 2.

¹⁰⁵*Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰⁶*Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰⁷*Gazette* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰⁸*Montreal Herald* 24 June 1912: 7.

¹⁰⁹*Montreal Star* 19 July 1912.

cardboard box receives in return a small painted paper in which the strikers explain very thoroughly their side of the troubles"¹¹⁰. The public discourse that surrounded this action was one of gendered fear in which aggressive women were seen as chasing down and harassing respectable businessmen on their way to their downtown affairs. As the *Star* reported, "The girls were very enthusiastic about the work and were out the first thing in the morning to secure the contributions of those who leave for their offices early in the morning"¹¹¹.

As Glenn (1990) has argued, Jewish immigrant women in the garment unions in New York at this time were participating in a process of self-definition by breaking feminine stereotypes and constructing a new world identity for themselves as young Jewish working women. Jewish immigrant women in Montreal perhaps participated in the union on similar terms, playing a very similar role as visible participants in civic culture. Unlike the women skirtmakers in 1910, they defended their cause and participated in the union from within its ranks. While this was a method of demanding recognition for their role in the working world, they were constructed as aggressive occupants of the public spaces of the city. They were also women who sparked anxieties about gender, 'race', class and political identity. To be associated with factory work as a woman was one thing, but to be an ally of the international union who demonstrated this alliance publicly was something else altogether. Women occupying public space by way of tag-days and parades were not necessarily radical or uncommon at the time. Being associated with these 'foreign agitators' made public sympathy for women workers practically impossible in the eyes of the nativist middle-class population. To do so in the name of the international union movement, was a highly contentious act for a woman of any class.

During this strike, the UGWA cemented the relationship between the Main and the international labour movement by centring their organizing efforts at Coronation Hall.

¹¹⁰*Montreal Star* 20 July 1912: 1.

¹¹¹*Montreal Star* 20 July 1912: 1.

It was in this hall that the manufacturers finally, after eight weeks, signed the union agreement granting men and women a shorter work week and a small raise in piecework rates in all firms¹¹². The signing of this agreement marked the first great union victory in the men's clothing industry in Montreal (Rouillard 1981/1982). After this strike, the UGWA opened a permanent headquarters near Coronation Hall (Rome 1987b: 139). Using this hall and the spaces of the Main, Jewish immigrant women constructed an identity for themselves as participants in the working world and as representatives of their ethnic and class group in Montreal. Their version of 'modern' womanhood emanated from the halls, picket lines, sidewalks and street corners of the Main.

CONCLUSION

By the mass strike of the garment workers in 1917, the acceptance of young working-class women in the factory was widespread. Representations of women workers were no longer part of press coverage of strikes during this period. Before World War I struggles over the gender division of labour had an important impact on the labour movement -- gender would not again be so central until the dramatic strikes in the dress industry during the 1930s. The expression of oppositional female identities within the labour movement in the garment industry was tightly linked to the material and spatial evolution of the St. Lawrence Boulevard garment district. In Chapter 3, I argued that the garment district produced two identities for female garment workers, the sweated worker and the 'red woman'. The analysis of two strikes in this chapter has illustrated how these two identities shifted according to the political alliances and ethnic cleavages that were strongly linked to the social world and representations of the street in public discourses. Each strike was clearly about industrial and social conditions, but they also demonstrate the importance of the labour movement in the industry to communicating and defining the female factory worker as new form of public womanhood (Ewen 1985; Glenn 1990). The association of the Main with the immigrant enclave and the international garment unions made it a site of transgression for French-Canadian women workers and a site of

¹¹²*La Patrie* 29 July 1912: 2

resistance for Jewish immigrant women.

The border status of the street also created possibilities for cross-class and cross-cultural alliances between groups that were integral to the expression and representation of these identities. The campaign to organize the skirtmakers into a separate union coincided with the recognition that there was more power in solidarity across sectors of the labour force. French-Canadian skirtmakers were viewed in paternalist terms by their allies and organized into a separate union. The campaign, however, drew large numbers of women to the union halls and created the opportunity to oppose the inequalities that they experienced in the industry. In the 1912 strike of the tailors, the Main was similarly constructed as a space of difference, but the women workers in the strike received little public sympathy. Women who belonged to the UGWA participated from within the ranks of the union and were consequently constructed as aggressive opportunists. Their ethnic association with the 'foreign agitators' in the union and the Main itself placed them outside of the realm of concern for the nativist middle-class public.

Factory workers and strike participants were not the only forms of radical 'womanhood' associated with and expressed along the Main during this period. If we look at other locales on the street, we find that working-class women from several linguistic and cultural backgrounds participated in prostitution and thereby helped to construct yet another form of radical womanhood in this border zone. As was true of garment workers, this form of womanhood implicated and drew the attention of social groups living beyond the borders of the Main. In the next chapter, I explore the relationship between prostitution and the construction of the Main, a gendered space that coexisted with the garment district throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 5

RED-LIGHT ON THE MAIN

At the corner of St. Lawrence Boulevard and Ste. Catherine Street in the 1999 lies a short strip of taverns, strip clubs, hot dog restaurants and vacant lots. This corner was once a bold signifier of the sexual and class disorder of the 'open city', a reputation that Montreal acquired in the first half of the twentieth century. Vestiges of various epochs of cheap entertainment are still evident in the landscape. Café Cléopâtre, the ruins of the Cinema Eve, the Taverne Midway, and the Montreal Pool Room, give material grounding to the mythical status that this corner occupied in the imagined sexual and class geography of the metropolis. Between 1900 and 1950, the portion of the Main between Craig and Ontario streets was the public facade of Montreal's residential red-light district located in the St. Louis Ward to the east of the street. During this period, the Lower Main came to represent broader anxieties regarding the development of a metropolitan sexuality. The commodification of bodies and sexual



Figure 5.1: Café Cléopâtre, 1999.

acts, and the accessibility of 'public sex' raised concerns about the ways in which women in general were gaining access to public space (Connelly 1980; Gilfoyle 1992; Rosen 1982; Walkowitz 1992). Shifts in the geography of prostitution during this period slowly transformed the activities along the Main, and the corner of la Main and la Catherine became a nexus of a variety of discourses regarding the commodification and 'disorder' of sexuality in the modern city (Gilfoyle 1992; Rosen 1982). It was a geographical location that attested to the fact that the city could not be divided into feminine private and masculine public spheres, a place where 'private' bodies became 'public' through commodification (Gilfoyle 1992; Rosen 1982; Swanson 1995; Walkowitz 1992).

In this chapter, I analyze the role played by the Lower Main in the city's persistent and well protected red-light district and the process of displacing red-light activities onto the street and its entertainment spaces. The destruction of the residential prostitution networks in the adjacent red-light district transformed the cabarets and street space of the Lower Main. From a diversified and complex world of entertainments, the Lower Main became a place where female prostitution was explicit and shaped the social character of spaces and entertainments. As we will see, the Lower Main acquired a reputation for prostitution in reform and popular discourses, adding a contentious sexuality to the street's 'third city' status. Beyond the internal geography of the Main, it became a central symbol of changing geographies of gender, sexuality and class in Montreal in the first half of the twentieth century (Gilfoyle 1992; Walkowitz 1980, 1992). As historians have shown, reform discourses regarding prostitutes and prostitution districts intensify during periods of dramatic social change. Inflaming public health concerns, such as the spread of venereal disease and generating concern regarding the exploitation of women, these discourses are important for what they reveal about middle-class anxieties regarding shifting geographies of gender and sexuality in the modern metropolis (Connelly 1980; Gilfoyle 1992; Meyerowitz 1993; Stansell 1986; Walkowitz 1980). I begin by exploring the depiction of the Lower Main in reform discourses regarding the red-light district during the first half of the twentieth century. Next, I analyze how the destruction of the residential red-light district in the 1940s altered the entertainment world of the Lower Main. I argue that the displacement of prostitution from the red-light district to the cabarets, restaurants and taverns of the Lower Main changed the ways in which women were represented and experienced its material sites. By analyzing a middle-class reformer's observations in the cabarets, theatres and tourist rooms, I question what this locale of the Main came to represent in broader discourses about gender and sexuality. I conclude with an analysis of the shifting meaning of this portion of the Main in relation to changes to the built environment and population brought on by urban redevelopment projects in the 1950s and 1960s.

THE RED-LIGHT'S PUBLIC FACADE: THE LOWER MAIN, 1914-1944

In 1924, an English guide book described the St. Louis Ward as "the 'yoshiwara' of Montreal"¹. From the 1880s until the 1950s, residential prostitution was central to the economy and image of this ward (Lévesque 1995). Like most red-light districts, it is the product of declining central-city land values and the increased segmentation of entertainment, residence and industry shaping urban space at the turn of the century in North American cities (Gilfoyle 1992). It was also a bold representation the 'public' nature of sexual behaviour in the modern metropolis (Gilfoyle 1992) and a constant reminder to reformers that Montreal was a 'wide open town' where 'vice' flourished under police protection. Despite many attempts by reformers, feminists and the clergy to "put out the red-light" (Lévesque 1995), this district survived the Progressive Era (1900 to 1918) and expanded throughout the Depression and World War II (Lévesque 1995; Lacasse 1994; Myers 1996). Although the western boundaries of this district shifted slightly throughout the period, the zone from Bleury to St. Denis, and from Sherbrooke to Craig, remained rather permanent from the 1920s until the end of the World War II² (Myers 1996; Lacasse 1994; Lévesque 1995; Plante 1950; Proulx 1997). At the end of World War I, it was estimated that the district housed 300 'disorderly' houses which employed

¹Charles W. Stokes, *Here and There in Montreal and the Island of Montreal* (Toronto: Musson Book Co, 1924) 62. For an early description of prostitution in Montreal see, B. A. Testard de Montigny, *Rapport du Recorder de Montigny sur l'état moral de la cité de Montréal au comité de police* (Montreal, 1898).

²For the definition of the red-light district and its boundaries in the early 1900s see Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de Montréal par son conseil de ville (Cannon Commission) 1909. In 1920, the Committee of Sixteen had much more contained definition of the red-light district, locating it between St. Lawrence, St. Denis, Ontario and Craig but they noted a westward trend in the location of residential prostitution to Bleury St. and a northward trend above Ontario Street. Committee of Sixteen, *Some Facts Regarding Toleration, Regulation, Segregation and Repression of Commercialized Vice. Second Annual Report* (Montreal, 1920). Evidence from both the Coderre (1924) and Cannon (1909) commissions, however, clearly indicates that there were many brothels located to the west of St. Lawrence, especially on Clark street below Ste. Catherine. See Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'enquête judiciaire sur la police de Montréal (Coderre Commission), 1924-25. Reports of the period also indicate that the western boundary extended to Bleury street encompassing the furnished room districts where many young working women lived. See "The University Settlement," *McGill News* Vol. 2 No. 3, 1921: 22 and Pinzer (1977).

approximately 2,000 to 3,000 prostitutes³ and constituted between 60 and 75 percent of all prostitution in Montreal (Lévesque 1995; Myers 1996). Accounts of the scale of the red-light during and after World War II are less consistent. In 1945, the morality squad reported that there were 81 houses and 143 addresses in the red-light that were brothels. In the 1940s, however, the squad reported 259 addresses known to police. The vast majority were located in the red-light district (Lacasse 1994: 62; Plante 1950: 45).

The most permanent site of residential prostitution was in the blocks directly to the east of St. Lawrence Street, where much of the housing stock was entirely occupied by the sex trade. Streets such as Cadieux (de Bullion), Charlotte Lane, St. Dominique and City Hall (Hôtel de Ville) were well known throughout the Province as sites of prostitution. As one reformer told the Coderre Commission in the 1920s: "There are rows of houses on such streets as Cadieux and City Hall Avenue, that are devoted entirely to commercialized prostitution -- five, six, seven houses in a row"⁴. Morality squad records from the 1930s and 1940s indicate that these same streets continued to be dominated by residential prostitution throughout the Depression and World War II⁵. According to these records, entire blocks in the district were occupied by brothels. The highest concentrations were in the 1200 block of Berger Street and between the 900 and 1200 blocks of both St. Dominique and de Bullion streets (Brodeur 1984; Lacasse 1994; Plante 1950). As Lacasse (1994: 62) has shown, on some streets these concentrations were composed of a very large number of brothels. On Berger street, for example, there were 42 brothels located between the 900 and 1200 blocks in the 1940s (Lacasse 1994: 62).

³Testimony of Owen Dawson, Secretary of Boy's Farm, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 425. See also, Committee of Sixteen, *Some Facts Regarding Toleration...* and Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report of an Unofficial Organization upon the Vice Conditions in Montreal* (Montreal, 1918).

⁴Testimony of Owen Dawson, Secretary of Boy's Farm, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 425.

⁵See Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Minutes and Report*, 1950-1954 and Pacifique Plante, *Mémoire présenté par M. Pacifique Plante au Comité exécutif de la cité de Montréal* (Montreal, 1948).

Red-light districts were the locus of multiple experiences and perceptions regarding sexuality in the metropolis. For the average male urban dweller they were publicly accessible private spaces that represented the sexual freedom associated with urban life (Gilfoyle 1992). The segregation of prostitution to red-light districts also contained 'public' sex to one site, freeing male city dwellers from encountering it elsewhere in the city and creating a distinctive and manageable cartography of pleasure and danger (Ryan 1990). For the women who worked in such districts, these economies provided a solution to difficult life circumstances and served as alternatives to socially sanctioned occupations for women (Rosen 1982). In red-light districts, women who engaged in prostitution entered a distinctive subculture not only on the basis of economic necessity, but often as a solution to the long hours, low wages and forms of social control encountered in factories and through working as domestics (Stansell 1986). The containment of prostitution in segregated residential districts has long served many interests. For the police and madames spatial concentration in 'private' dwellings enhanced the ability to control and protect the sex trade. Entwined as they were with the working-class neighbourhoods and bright light districts of the central area, red-light districts also kept the sexual marketplace at an arms length from outlying neighbourhoods (Gilfoyle 1992). At the same time, containment meant that red-light districts became evidence of the prevalence of prostitution in urban life, even if its boundaries were very permeable and prostitution was never entirely contained. For 'concerned' citizens of the middle-classes, red-light districts were an illustration of the possible effects of industrial life on the working classes (Rosen 1992; Stansell 1986). They were also definitive evidence of the distinction between 'moral' and 'immoral' women (Wilson 1991).

As in other large metropolitan areas in North America and Europe, the prostitution debate in early twentieth century Montreal centred on repression or tolerance. In spatial terms, this translated into a debate about whether to confine prostitution to the red-light district, where it could be controlled and regulated, or to destroy it completely, dispersing prostitution to locales throughout the city. Although a variety of groups struggled over this issue between 1890 and 1945, the red-light district remained entrenched due to the

adoption of what has been described as 'the Montreal System' (Myers 1996; Brodeur 1984). Existing legislation could have been used to counter any form of tolerance by the city's justice system, but the Montreal police force and the Judges of the Recorders' Court created their own hybrid system that lay somewhere between the European preference for 'regulation' and the 'repressive' American approach of the Progressive Era (Brodeur 1984; Lévesque 1995; Myers 1996). Although municipal authorities generally favoured regulation, opposition from religious groups and public opinion meant that openly controlling prostitution was seen as 'tolerance'. For example, the police began a project of inspecting the health of prostitutes in known brothels in the red-light in 1907, but this practice was promptly cancelled after Archbishop Bruchési insisted that this practice was illegal⁶.

Throughout the period, the police adopted a policy to control the red-light, a system of surveillance which Police Chief Campeau described as "la tolerance entre quatre murs" [tolerance between four walls]⁷. Exhibiting a Victorian interpretation of prostitution, legal authorities argued that prostitution could not be eliminated in a city the size of Montreal. They argued that commercial sex was a 'necessary evil' and tried to control its operation confining the trade to one particular place. This served as a means to prevent prostitution from occupying public spaces such as the streets or the theatres of the district, and to prevent the dissemination of prostitutes into residential areas, maintaining a distance between 'fallen' and 'honest' women of the city⁸. It was a central means of maintaining public credibility and desexualizing the rest of the city for men by

⁶Québec, Commission Royale d'enquête sur l'administration de Montréal, *Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de Montréal par son conseil de ville. Rapport de M. le Juge L. J. Cannon, Commissaire*, (Québec, 1909), and Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Commission royale d'enquête sur l'administration des affaires de Montréal par son conseil de ville (Commission Cannon) 1909, *Témoignages de la Commission royale*.

⁷Testimony of Olivier Campeau, Chief of Police, *Cannon Commission*, Vol. 17: 51.

⁸Testimony of Joseph Hébert, Captain of the Police, Poste No. 4, *Cannon Commission*, Vol. 17: 37 and Testimony of Olivier Campeau, Chief of Police, *Cannon Commission*, Vol. 17 and 18, and Testimony of Dr. Joseph Picotte, Official Police Doctor, *Cannon Commission*, Vol. 22: 2.

keeping other public spaces free from sexual danger. In exchange for the confinement to brothels, moreover, the authorities offered more than tolerance. The police conducted periodic raids to assure the public that the red-light was under control, and the madames paid their fines, a practice that amounted, reformers argued, to an informal form of licensing⁹. This system, in addition to its central location in the dual city is what gave Montreal's red-light district its longevity (Lévesque 1995; Myers 1996).

The area to the east of the St. Lawrence Boulevard became the centre of the red-light for a variety of reasons. Its proximity to the port and the a cluster of hotels and taverns along the Lower Main, made this a district for transients. As was demonstrated in Chapter 2, it became a neighbourhood of cheap rental housing. As the population was increasingly composed of poor rural migrants and immigrants, brothel owners became more reliable and lucrative tenants (Brodeur 1984; Gilfoyle 1992). Like the Tenderloin district of New York (Gilfoyle 1992), the population had very little power in neighbourhood politics. Known as the largest 'foreign' district, the St. Louis Ward only attracted the attention of religious leaders in so much as it affected their own parishes¹⁰. Abbé Gauthier of the St. Jacques parish, for example, was concerned about the 'honest' families of the district in the 1920s, but his initial investigation of the district was driven by concerns about its effects on parish life in St. Jacques¹¹. Seen as a cause of 'immorality', some religious leaders focused on 'converting' the non-Christian residents of the district to prevent the expansion of 'vice'¹². The Chinese and Italian communities before 1920, moreover, were seen as the cause of the red-light because they were primarily male work communities and supposedly provided the area with its most

⁹For more details on this elaborate system see Lévesque (1987, 1995).

¹⁰Rev. E. I. Hart, *Some Serious Local Conditions* (Montreal, 1919).

¹¹Testimony of Abbé Gauthier, Curé of the Parish of St. Jacques, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 976.

¹²Hart, *Some Serious Local Conditions*.

important clientele¹³. Finally, the concentration of prostitution and other illegal activities in this district was also bolstered by to the presence of organized crime beginning in the 1920s. During this era, Montreal was one of the only cities in North America to vote against prohibition, and it became an attractive site for American bootleggers and organized crime¹⁴. Leaders of organized crime took control of gambling, created a protection system to control the restaurants and cafés of the area and worked with the madames to protect the prostitution system (Proulx 1997). Alcohol consumption in restaurants and cabarets, moreover, fuelled the night life of the city and it became known throughout the continent as a 'wide open town', a permissive and lively city full of pleasures and dangers (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gilmore 1988).

While segregation was a means keeping certain populations and activities in distinct and marginal spaces, reform groups contested the entrenchment of this red-light district throughout the first half of the twentieth century. This was particularly true in times of great social change and upheaval such as the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation that occurred in the first years of the twentieth century, and following the First and Second World wars. During World War I, debates regarding the regulation, elimination and toleration of the red-light district were usually constructed in relation to the spread of venereal disease. Reformers were also concerned about the moral effects of secondary activities of the district such as gambling and drug trafficking. After the war, however, a variety of social groups, rallied around the issue 'immorality' and exploitation, specifically targeting 'commercialized vice' defined as all commercial sexual transactions that involved a third party (Lévesque 1995). Following the lead of the American progressive movement in other cities, they formed the Committee of Sixteen in 1918¹⁵.

¹³Hart, *Some Serious Local Conditions*.

¹⁴During the Coderre Commission the Police tried to blame all of Montreal's criminal activities on American visitors to the city in order to absolve themselves of any suspicion regarding protection and blamed American gangsters for corrupting and exploiting young women. Testimony of M. Germain, Police Captain, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 745.

¹⁵Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report of an unofficial organization...*

While streetwalking and casual prostitution were certainly problematic for this group, they targeted the infrastructure through which the sex trade was organized.

With the aid of the New York research bureau of the Committee, this group investigated the residential prostitution system and mapped the concentration of the houses in the district that had been repeatedly raided by the police in 1918¹⁶ (Figure 5.1). For the Committee, the red-light district was cartographic evidence of "the spectacle of triumphant vice" that in Montreal was beyond appropriate proportions and stood in the way of civic betterment efforts¹⁷. The very existence of the red-light, moreover, illustrated the extent to which prostitution, gambling, drug trafficking and other illegal activities were protected as long as they were located in this prescribed zone of 'deviancy'.

The process of mapping the district served to raise concern about the social and physical environment of the district and its effects on public health. Adopting an environmental determinist discourse that was typical of medical and social reform groups of the time, the Committee called attention to the vortex from which 'disease is spread'. Being careful not to provide a guided tour to the district, when the Committee's map was published in their promotional literature, street names were omitted and the image was inverted,

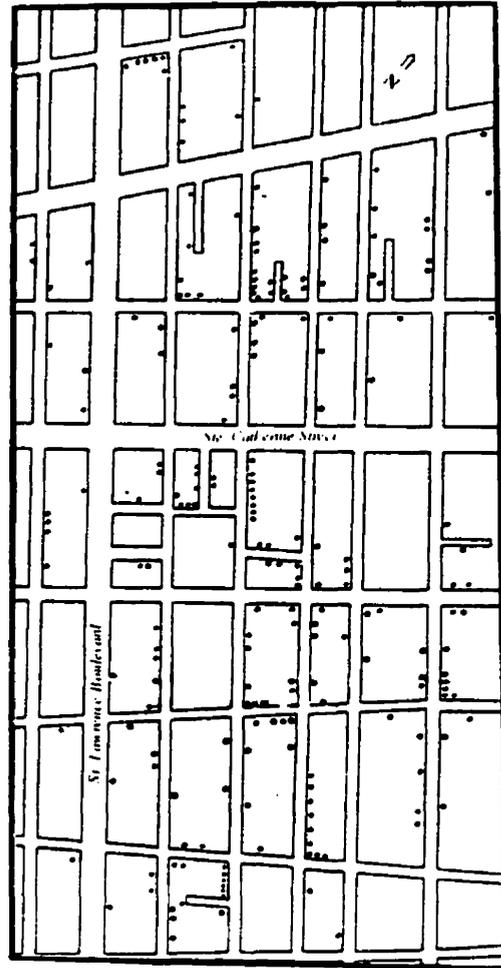


Figure 5.2: Map of Disorderly Houses in Montreal, 1918. Source: Committee of Sixteen (1918).

¹⁶Committee of Sixteen, *Some Facts Regarding Toleration...*5.

¹⁷Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report of an unofficial organization...*

ensuring that the location of the houses and district remained hidden¹⁸.

Reformers from the Francophone, Anglophone and Jewish sectors of the city were concerned with the social dynamic within the district. The presence of a stable residential working-class community in the area after World War I did shape the reformers discourse at this time, making it distinctive from that of later periods. During the Coderre Commission in 1924, reformers from the Committee and welfare workers told described the lives of the working-class families in the district. Their testimonies contain stories of parents putting their children into brothels, young boys with syphilis, and young female lodgers falling prey to 'the evil of prostitution' because their living conditions were inadequate and their wages low, and they generally lacked 'healthy recreation'¹⁹. Owen Dawson, who ran a reformatory for delinquent boys described the committee's investigation in this respect during the Coderre Commission:

I think one of the saddest things in our investigation your honor, was the fact that in this district, mixed up in that web of vice, there are hundreds of respectable families, hardworking charwomen, decent fathers and mothers, whose children have nowhere to play but on the streets in the midst of this filth²⁰.

Because the area had five schools and a number of commercial establishments, many people had to pass through the district daily. Many young working girls on their way to their jobs as stenographers and shop workers had to "...pass up and down the district because there are a lot of commercial establishments located all through this section of the city"²¹. The red-light, therefore, was not just a place where venereal disease would be spread to the population participating in the sex trade and threatening the 'moral' homes

¹⁸Committee of Sixteen, *Preliminary Report of an unofficial organization...*

¹⁹Testimony of l'Abbé Gauthier, Curé of Paroisse St. Jacques, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 2: 979.

²⁰Testimony of Owen Dawson, Secretary of Boy's Farm, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 436.

²¹Testimony of Owen Dawson, Secretary of Boy's Farm, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 438.

of the middle-classes, its immorality was contagious, especially for children and young female workers.

The lower regions of St. Lawrence Boulevard had a particular role in the local economy and symbolic geography of the red-light district. As we saw in Chapter 2, it was already seen as an 'immoral region' in the eyes of reformers in the late 1890s because it was a central site of commodity exchange and entertainment. While oral histories and memoirs from the city's many ethnic populations describe the Main as a site of popular entertainment, the characterization of the Main as an 'immoral region' is prevalent in many accounts. In Maimie Pinzer's descriptions of Montreal during World War I, the Main is the place where young women 'go wrong'²². Pinzer founded the *Montreal Mission for Friendless Girls* in 1915, and her search for young women 'adrift' in the city takes her readers into the boarding houses, theatres and cafés of the Montreal's furnished room and red-light districts. Two accounts of her charges suggest that the Main was a 'corrupting influence'. One afternoon in 1915, Maimie sends Stella to buy a cucumber as tea-time treat along the Main, but Stella does not return to the Mission right away. While shopping she is temporarily drawn back into the world of the bright lights district when she meets a 'chap' from her 'flapper' days. Another story of a young 'flapper' named Lillian provides a clear picture of what the relationship between the Main and the red-light. Maimie finds Lillian when she is working at the Maple Leaf Theatre on the Main above Dorchester as a dancer. Although unable to dance, Pinzer records that Lillian was hired by the manager because she "looked well in tights". Unaware that her job involved prostitution, she soon learned that she was required to make 'dates' in front of the theatre to earn a her wages.

From the 1910s until the 1950s, the Lower Main served as the public facade and

²²Following the promise of a stenographer's position, Maimie Pinzer boarded a northbound train from Delaware to Montreal in 1913. A reformed prostitute from Philadelphia who lived in this city until 1922, Maimie's letters to her patroness Fanny Quincy Howe in Boston are provide rare descriptions of Montreal before and after World War I. For a detailed discussion of Maimie Pinzer's life see Ruth Rosen and Sue Davidson eds. *The Maimie Papers* (Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press/The Schlesinger Library of Radcliff College, 1977).

conduit for the red-light district, a role that intensified and came to dominate by the 1950s. Although by day the street bustled with shoppers, commuters and workers the commercial establishments on this street developed close connections to the social world of the red-light. As Ste. Catherine Street became the city's primary commercial artery after 1920, the businesses along the Lower Main developed more marginal vocations. Movie theatres along the Lower Main began to play second-run movies (Lanken 1993), and the district was increasingly dominated by restaurants, taverns, cheap hotels and small variety theatres. Establishments that served male clientele such as barbers, shoeshine parlours and taverns were the conduits through which men gained access and an assortment of illegal activities. For example, as Police Captain Roch Sauvé told the Coderre Commission in 1924, poker games could be found, "Sur la rue St-Laurent. Généralement ils rencontraient un homme sur la rue et ils l'entraient dans une salle à manger"²³. In restaurants, shoe shine parlours and barber's shops, men were also directed to particular brothels, and the patrons of these establishments usually earned a commission for this information from the brothel keepers²⁴. As two American investigators who researched the district told the same commission, "In every tavern we visited, someone would direct us to some place of shame. Men in several cigar stores, drug stores, pool halls, gents' furnishing stores, shoe shining parlours and restaurants directed us to places of shame"²⁵.

Due to its proximity to the red-light district and the protection given by organized crime and the police, the Main below Ste. Catherine developed as a vibrant commercial entertainment district. Unlike the uptown or eastern districts, the audiences and shows

²³"On St. Lawrence Street. Generally, they meet a man on the street and he brings them to a restaurant" (author's translation). Testimony of Roch Sauvé, Captain of Poste. 4, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 3: 2137.

²⁴Testimony of Owen Dawson, Secretary of Boy's Farm, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 499.

²⁵These investigators were hired by the Committee of Sixteen to research the extent of 'commercialized vice' in Montreal. Testimony of Alexander Schwaren, Detective, Committee of Fifteen, Chicago, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 781, and Testimony of George O. Hadick, Chief Investigator, Committee of Fifteen, Chicago, *Coderre Commission*, Vol. 1: 599.

reflected the border status of the Main. In the theatres and night clubs, men and women of diverse class groups and ethnic origins were spectators of an equally diverse entertainment world. It was an important site of heterosexual sociability, especially for central-city residents. Already coded as outside the moral order of the city through its association with the red-light district, the Main was a permissive space, a vibrant bright-lights district with dance halls, cinemas, popular theatres and night restaurants. Between 1920 and 1940, there were many jazz clubs and vaudeville theatres in the area: the Blue Sky (65 Ste. Catherine West), the Starland Theatre (1174 St. Lawrence), the Gayety Theatre (Ste. Catherine at St.



Figure 5.3: Advertisement for Connie's Inn, 1930s
Source: Gilmore (1988).

Urbain). The Frolics/Connie's Inn (1417 St-Lawrence), the Commodore (984 St. Lawrence), the Rendez-Vous (1224 St. Lawrence) and the Montmartre (59 Ste. Catherine West) were among the most long-lasting and well-known (Gilmore 1988). As oral histories and memoirs from various communities indicate it was a place of working-class sociability for youth cultures (Brisson and Coté-Gauthier 1994; Medresh [1947] 1997). Young French-Canadian and Eastern European Jewish couples went to the Starland Theatre in the Monument National to see French or Yiddish vaudeville acts. At the King Edward people from all over the city came to see tap dancing. 'Slumming' was also an integral part of this social space. Middle- and upper-class Anglophones dined at the

elegant and chic Roncari Hotel at the corner of Dorchester²⁶, but also went to see vaudeville shows at the Gayety that featured slapstick comedy, female impersonators, acrobats, singers, dancers, ventriloquists, and high-kicking dancers (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gilmore 1988). The early association of the Main with 'black jazz', moreover, gave many of its clubs an 'exotic' appeal. Located outside the African-Canadian neighbourhoods of the Southwest, these clubs were more accessible to white audiences than the jazz clubs of St. Antoine Street (Gilmore 1988). The Canadian Ambassadors one of the first Canadian 'black' jazz bands were the house band at Connie's Inn (formerly the Frolic's) throughout the 1930s. The owners of this club also capitalized on 'exotic' appeal of the jazz world, advertising that they featured a chorus line of "stunning Créole Beauties" (Figure 5.3).

Events during World War II made the Lower Main more contentious than ever before. Evidence suggests that during the war men from other parts of Canada met the local population in the dance halls, restaurants, cabarets, brothels and tourist rooms of the district. While the same controversies surrounded them during the 1940s, the area was now an ensemble of contentious activities at a time of dramatic social upheaval. It was also a period in which two changes affected the female working-class population of the city. First, during World War II Montreal became was a centre of heavy industry devoted to the war effort. With high levels of employment, women entered the labour force in new sectors, such as in the munitions and steel factories (Linteau 1992b). Secondly, with this increase in the number of women earning independent incomes and the presence of young soldiers based in Montreal, alcohol consumption, night-life and the red-light were objects of concern. French-Canadian Catholic middle-class reform groups such as the Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal and Les Lignes de Sacré-Coeur began to investigate the 'effects' of these night spots on the local population. Interaction between men and women in the spaces of the Lower Main also posed problems for the military.

²⁶Christiane Berthiaume, "Albert Gagnon raconte l'époque joyeuse de la rue Saint-Laurent," *La Presse*. 15 July 1974.

For the army, the district of Montreal caused great problems of management and regulation, intent as it was on safe-guarding the sexual behaviour of young Canadian men. These forces, related to an unusual era of social upheaval, fuelled reform movements and eventually led to the destruction of residential prostitution and an increase in the commodification of sexuality along the Lower Main.

CONTAGIOUS SPACE

World War II temporarily changed the social climate and population of Montreal, but it permanently changed the Lower Main. In the early 1940s the Lower Main housed a concentration of activities connected to the entertainment district and red-light activities. Tourist rooms, hotels, restaurants, taverns and 'grills' now lined the street below Ste. Catherine. It was, as a writer for *MacLean's Magazine* in 1940 wrote, a place catering to the travelling man or the soldier with dinners for a dime, cheap hotels, tattoo parlours, bookies, and street prostitution. "*Salles de poule*, second-hand stores, nickelodeons: the waterfront at one end and residences at the other. In between movies and sideshows, armouries and breweries -- that's the Main, or St. Lawrence Main, as it is sometimes called"²⁷.

Canadian troops and the local population met in the city's lively underworld of gambling, prostitution, and popular entertainments. In the geography of prostitution at this time, the brothels of the red-light were situated at the lower end in the hierarchy of prostitution because they were the most 'public'. Unlike the 'maisons semi-close' of the upper-middle and bourgeoisie classes, the brothels in this district were frequented by a diverse population of men, ranging from shopkeepers and manual labourers to tourists and, during the war, soldiers (Lacasse 1994: 62). The number of prostitutes swelled during the Depression, and although many arrests were made, the red-light flourished under the control of a handful of madames who were protected by organized crime and the police (Lévesque 1995; Proulx 1997). Prostitution still remained relatively contained

²⁷Blair Gilmour, "St. Lawrence-Main," *MacLean's Magazine* 15 Sept. 1940: 19, 34.

within the brothels of the district although some regulatory changes began to affect the system. The 1935 Padlock Law, applied to establishments that had more than two infractions, at times served to close down some brothels -- presumably when the madames did not pay their fines -- driving some sex-trade workers onto the streets and into the cabarets (Proulx 1997). But this law was rarely used, and when it was, the police often locked side entrances and even internal doorways (Plante 1950). Between 1935 and 1944, therefore, Montreal was 'wide open'. Throughout this period, street prostitution became more prevalent and the prostitution system permeated the cabarets, restaurants and tourist rooms of the Main.

The strongest force in turning the Main into 'the red-light', however, came in 1944, when the Canadian Army sent Mayor Adhémar Raynault a letter stating that the Canadian army would declare Montreal off-limits to soldiers stationed in the city unless the red-light district was closed (Lacasse 1994; Plante 1950; Proulx 1997). This decision was due to a high incidence of venereal disease among soldiers stationed in the city. The military claimed that between January 1, 1940 and Dec. 31, 1943 there had been 4,007 cases of venereal disease reported among the men stationed in Montreal, which constituted sixteen percent of all Canadian military cases²⁸. Seventy-eight percent of these cases had been contracted in the red-light district. After a meeting between municipal and army officials, the police launched an attack on the red-light by making arrests and applying existing laws. This practice actually signalled the beginning of an end to police protection for the district's brothels. After claiming that the red-light was a necessary evil for a period of over forty years, the red-light was supposedly 'cleaned-up' in a matter of weeks (Brodeur 1984). By the following summer, although many of the most important brothels in the city had been closed, the spread of venereal disease, the Army reported, had continued at a rate 64 to 1000 in Montreal in the first months of 1944, while elsewhere in Canada

²⁸Ville de Montréal, Service de Santé, *Rapport du Comité chargé d'étudier la question des maladies vénériennes* (Montreal, 1945).

the rate of infection was only 27 to 1000²⁹. Prostitution was still being practiced on the streets and in the rooming houses on St. Dominique and de Bullion, and especially in the area near the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine streets: "Le racolage se pratique encore sur une grande échelle dans la rue (coin de S. Laurent - S. Catherine surtout) dans certains restaurants, clubs de nuit, grills et salles de danse"³⁰.

Aside from police repression, the City also formed a committee to study the issue of the spread of venereal disease in 1945 (Lacasse 1994). Although they saw the destruction of the red-light as the most effective means of preventing the spread of venereal disease, they included all forms of prostitution in their assessment of the problem:

The prostitute in a house of ill-fame is the greatest source of spreading venereal contagion because she deals with more men than the women street walkers and solicitors. Street-walkers, being more numerous, contact, a more limited number of men but, because of their number, they are also a prolific source of promiscuity and contagion. To the problem of street-walking and loitering we must add that of rooming-houses, cafés, grills, hotels, etc...³¹.

The formation of this committee and its recommendations had two effects on the space of the red-light and the conditions of labour for sex-trade workers. First, as Lacasse (1994) has argued, this committee blamed all prostitutes, in the brothels and on the streets, for the spread of venereal disease, and the report resulted in the creation of laws requiring medical exams for all prostitutes who were incarcerated. Stripping them of consent, prostitutes were now under the control of municipal authorities. Forced out of

²⁹Canada, Department of National Defense, *Report*, 19 July 1944, in *Caron Commission, Moralité -- Maladies vénériennes*, 1944-48.

³⁰"Prostitution is still being practiced at a large scale on the on the street (especially on the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine) in certain restaurants, night clubs, grills and dance halls". (author's translation). Canada, Department of National Defense, *Report*, 19 July 1944.

³¹Canada, Department of National Defense, *Report*, 19 July 1944.

Place of Meeting	Address	# Cases
Val d'Or Grill	1417 St. Lawrence	30
American Spaghetti House	64 Ste. Catherine East	26
Riviera Grill	1236 St. Lawrence	19
Laval Lunch	286 Ste. Catherine East	13
Ford Hotel	1425 Dorchester West	6
Restaurant Paul	1229 St. Dominique	6
St. James Hotel	1006 St. James West	6
Jimmy's Rooms	1114 St. Lawrence	5
Café Lion D'Or	1676 Ontario East	5
Café St. John	984 St. Lawrence	5
Capitol Grill	1106 St. Lawrence	5
Queen's Hotel	700 Windsor	4
New Carleton	909 Windsor	4
Place Viger		4
Hotel Modern	905 Papineau	3
St. Lawrence/Ste. Catherine		2
Mont-Royal Hotel	1455 Peel	2
St. Denis/Ste. Catherine		1
Vienna Grill	1964 Ste. Catherine East	1
Midway Theatre	1235 St. Lawrence	1
Drummond/Ste. Catherine		1
Mansfield/Ste. Catherine		1
St. Denis/Villeneuve		1
de Bullion/Ste. Catherine		1
Windsor Hotel	1160 Peel	1
Yankee Café	1352 Dorchester West	1
El Morrocco Club	1410 Metcalf	1
Royal Café	93 Ste. Catherine East	1
Mont-Royal/Papineau		1
White Palace Restaurant	1414 St. Lawrence	1
Coney Island Restaurant	4002 Wellington	1
Taft Restaurant	4483 Laval	1
Windsor Delicatessen	745 Windsor Street	1
St. Denis Dancehall	906 Ste. Catherine East	1
Auditorium Dance Palace	371 Ontario West	1
Amherst Theatre	1004 St. Catherine East	1

Figure 5.4: List of Meeting Places for Prostitution Recorded by the Canadian Army, 1943-1945. Source: Canada, Department of National Defense, Military District No. 4, *Report*, July 19, 1944, in Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'enquête présidée par le juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Moralité – Maladies vénériennes, 1945-1948* and *Lovell's City Directory, 1943-44, 1944-45*.

the brothels and onto the street, they were increasingly subject to increased police surveillance and repression. Secondly, the city focused their clean-up efforts on the houses of the red-light district, while, in most cases, the men who had contracted venereal disease reported that they had met prostitutes in a 'grill' or on the street (Figure 5.4). Although there were other sites of street and public prostitution, the vast majority had met in grills located at the intersection of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine Streets such as the Val d'Or Grill (1417 St. Lawrence), the Riviera Grill (1236 St. Lawrence), the Laval Lunch (286 Ste. Catherine East) and the American Spaghetti House (64 Ste. Catherine East).

This offensive by the police did not end the red-light entirely. When the Second World War ended, Camillien Houde, renowned for his protectionist practices, was re-elected as mayor and Montreal was once again an 'open city'. There was, however, an alteration in the role played by St. Lawrence Boulevard in the red-light district. As Figure 5.5 demonstrates, between 1936 and 1947 the number of women arrested for vagrancy remained relatively low as compared to the number of arrests for found-ins and managers. In 1944, the year the red-light was 'closed', arrests for street prostitution dramatically increased and there is clearly an inverse relationship between these two events. From 1944 to 1947, even after the red-light was 're-opened', the number of arrests for vagrancy continued to increase, while the number for found-ins declined dramatically. In 1946, the year following the war, arrests for street prostitution were at their highest totalling 2,832. The location of arrests in 1946 is also somewhat exceptional³² (Figures 5.6 and 5.7). While the proportion of women arrested for loitering on the streets of the red-light district consistently hovered around 75 percent, it rose to 91 percent in 1946. With the residential prostitution district partially dismantled and the displacement of women from the munitions factories after the war, street prostitution increased, and because it was so visible, the police had to give the appearance of control (Lacasse 1994).

³²Figures 5.7, 5.8 and 5.9 were calculated based on a three-month sample of monthly morality squad reports for each year. The months of February, June and October were selected to maintain a seasonal balance for each year. Figures 5.7 and 5.8 represent the three month sample for 1945-1947 and Figure 5.9 is for 1945-1948. Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Caron Commission, *Rapports mensuels du bureau de la moralité. 1945-1948.*

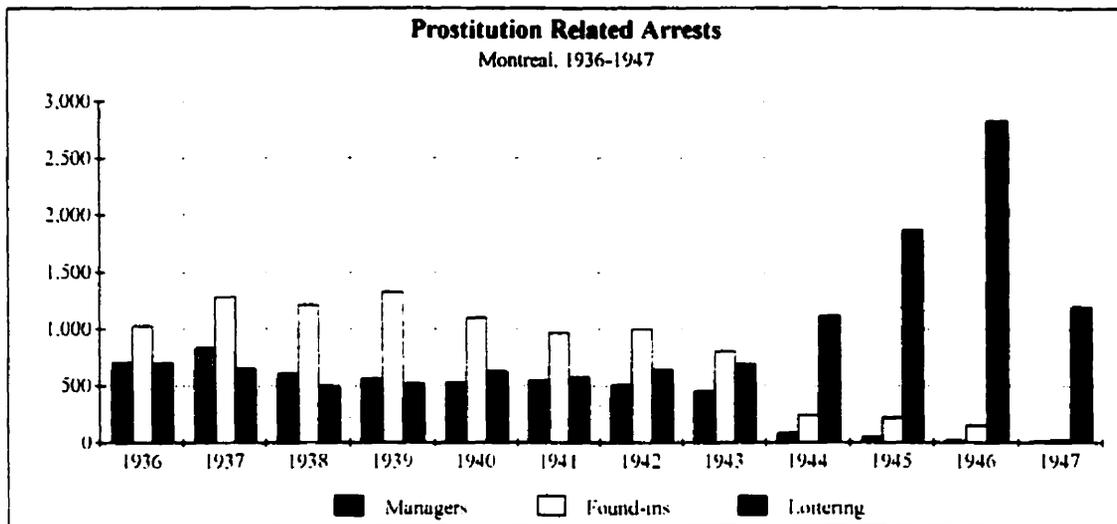


Figure 5.5: Number of Prostitution Related Arrests in Montreal, 1936-1947. Source: Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'Enquête par le Juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Memoire présentée par Me P. Plante au Comité exécutif de la Cité de Montréal*, 1948.

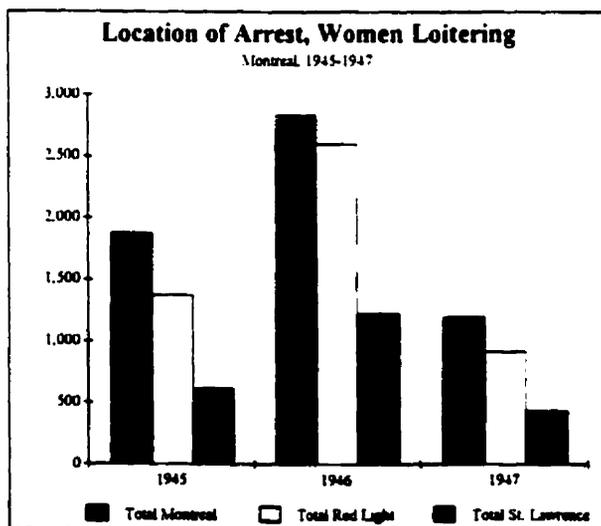


Figure 5.6: Location of Arrest, Women Loitering, Montreal 1945-1947. Source: Based on a three month sample for each year, Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'Enquête par le Juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Rapports mensuels du Bureau de la moralité, 1945-1948*.



Figure 5.7: Street Scene, Red-Light District, 1947. Source: National Archives of Canada, in Lessard (1995).

The geography of street prostitution at a micro-scale reveals the importance of the Lower Main for its practice. From a three month sample for each year of all arrests for loitering from 1945 to 1947, St. Lawrence constituted between 32 and 39 percent of all arrests for the city as a whole (Figure 5.8). Within the red-light district, however, the Lower Main was a very significant locale, constituting the location of arrest for almost half of the cases. These statistics also demonstrate a slow increase in arrests on this street, one of the only consistent patterns in the data. The location of these arrests between 1945 and 1947 on St. Lawrence Street, moreover, corresponds with the north-south boundaries of the red-light. The monthly reports of the morality squad of the period indicate that many women

were arrested on St. Lawrence at the intersections of Ste. Catherine, Dorchester, and de la Gauchetière (Figure 5.9). Although they were most frequently arrested on street corners, prostitution was also common in front of the grills, cafés, restaurants, barber shops and tourist rooms in the blocks between Ste. Catherine and Dorchester.

With the decline of residential prostitution, women were forced out onto the street and into the tourist rooms to conduct their trade. The 'grills' and cafés of the Lower Main moreover, became known as 'nids de racoleuses', a reputation that began to deter a more diversified clientele and attract 'unaccompanied men' (Lacasse 1994: 69). For sex-trade

**Location of Arrest, Women Loitering, 1945-1947
Streets in the Red-Light District**

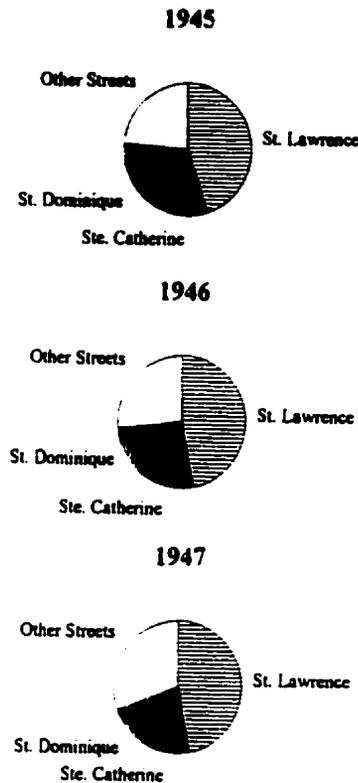


Figure 5.8 Location of Arrest, Women Loitering, 1945-1947, Streets in the Red-Light District. Source: Based on a three month sample for each year, Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'Enquête par le Juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Rapports mensuels du Bureau de la moralité, 1945-1948*.

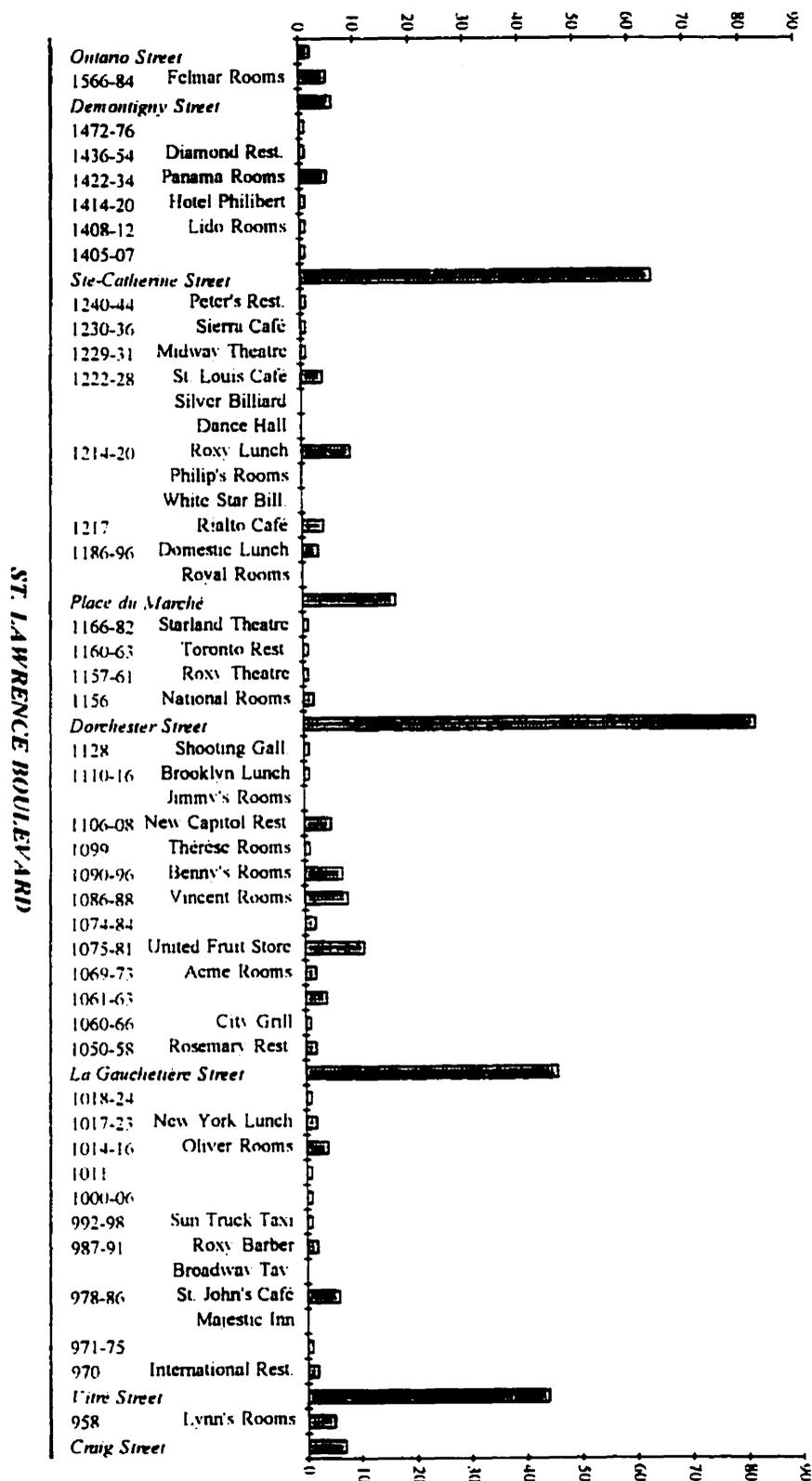


Figure 5.9: Number of Arrests by Site on St. Lawrence Street, 1945-1948. Source: Based on a three month sample for each year, Archives de la Ville de Montréal, Fonds de l'Enquête par le Juge François Caron (Caron Commission), *Rapports mensuels du Bureau de la moralité, 1945-1948* and *Lovell's City Directory, 1944-45 to 1948-49*.

workers the destruction of the residential prostitution system in the 1940s and 1950s led to a deterioration of their working conditions. Prostitutes were displaced to the streets, restaurants and cafés where they became vulnerable to the exploitation of waiters, hotel owners, taxi drivers and pimps. The destruction of the residential red-light district also led to a masculinization of control over the system as it moved into the commercial sites of the Lower Main. As protection became more fragmented, prostitution had a less definitive location and was now a shared source of revenue for organized crime and the police. As Lacasse (1994: 88) argues, "Après la fermeture des bordels, on assiste donc à une masculinisation des mécanismes de contrôle de ce milieu. Cette mainmise des hommes laisse entrevoir de nouveaux rapports de force et de pouvoir fondés ceux-là, sur la sexe, et souvent générateurs de violence"³³. Street and cabaret prostitutes occupied a more vulnerable position in the sex trade and they were also much more visible. 'Public' womanhood was now 'in public' along the Lower Main. Not only were these women more vulnerable to control by men, but their presence also transformed the meaning of the Lower Main. More visible, the reformers saw these women as evidence that its popular entertainments such as taverns, grills and theatres were 'immoral' because commercial sex was an integral part of these social spaces.

GRILLS, TAVERNS AND TOURIST ROOMS

In the 1940s and 1950s, reform and popular discourses suggest that the Lower Main shifted from a bright-lights district with a diversified clientele to a regulated and protected site of male pleasure defined primarily by the public presence of prostitution. This visibility of prostitution in public space raised concern among a new group of social and moral reformers in the 1940s, whose research on the cabarets would lead to the largest inquiry into police protection in Montreal's history, the Caron Commission (1954). The Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, Les Ligues de Sacré-Coeur and the Comité de Moralité Publique were specifically organized by middle-class French Catholic

³³"After the closing of the brothels, we witness a masculinization of the mechanisms of control of this milieu. This takeover by men gave way to new relationships of power and force based on gender and often led to violence" (author's translation) (Lacasse 1994: 88).

reformers and their anxieties centred around the protection of the French working-classes from what they perceived to be 'new disorders' associated with commercial entertainments and the proliferation of new sexual sites in the city directly following the war.

Although much of the red-light had been broken-up, other forms of prostitution and gambling continued in Montreal, and reformers re-opened the search for evidence of protection (McKenna and Purcell 1980). The Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal had become concerned about the number of liquor licenses being issued in the province after the war and began investigating the licensed establishments for infractions in 1946³⁴. This group of reformers from the Francophone petit bourgeoisie were more directly concerned with the conditions of the working-classes than their predecessors. They argued that working-class districts had a disproportionate number of liquor permits and that such concentrations developed without consideration for the local population that was adversely affected by their presence. For this group of reformers, however, the increase in permits was yet another indication of corruption in the municipal and provincial administration. Despite the destruction of the red-light district, police protection was again gaining strength. The Service de Tempérance began by investigating taverns, restaurants and 'grills' all over the city, but it became clear from their reports that the establishments at the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine were the most strongly and openly devoted to prostitution (Figure 5.10). In a report titled "Le fléau des "Grills" et des tavernes" [A Plague of Grills and Taverns] that followed preliminary investigations, the researcher used St. Lawrence Boulevard between Craig and Ontario as an example of

³⁴During the World War II, Premier Duplessis had been critical of the excessive granting of liquor licenses, but when he returned to office the number of liquor licenses in Quebec increased from 3,651 to 4002 from 1947 to 1948. He had also promised to close all grills, because they were centres of prostitution, but did not follow through on this promise. When the Lignes de Sacré-Coeur and the Service de Tempérance became critical of the increase in liquor licenses, Duplessis explained that this increase was valid because the population had increased. Centre de recherche en histoire de l'Amérique Française, Fonds de J.-Z. Léon Patenaude, Lignes de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance de diocèse de Montréal, *Correspondence*, June 1953 to Jan. 1954, Box 4.

Address	Name	License	Comments
<i>Ontario Street</i>			
1605	Millaire Tavern	Tavern	
1579	Spector Tavern	Tavern	
<i>de Montigny Street</i>			
1417	Café Val D'Or (1939-46) Au Faison Doré (1947-50) Montmartre (1951-70)	Restaurant and Café	- 300-400 people - burlesque floor shows - 70% of women are prostitutes - suggestive murals - rear door to St. Dominique - open till 4:00am
1415	Tavern Turgeon	Tavern	
<i>St. Catherine Street</i>			
1244	Peter's Restaurant	Restaurant and Café	- male clientele are thieves, pickpockets, gamblers, pimps and dopes - prostitutes of all ages
1230-32	Sierra Grill (1946-50) Canasta Café (1954-71)	Restaurant and Café	- 200 people - women placed at tables or in cabins - prostitutes (16 to 19 years old) - young males (16 to 20 years old)
1224-26	St. Louis Grill (1942-49) Casino Français (1951-69)	Restaurant and Café	- poorly kept - drinking enforced - prostitutes (16 to 19 years old)
1219	Tavern Dufferin	Tavern	
1217	Rialto Café	Restaurant and Café	- homosexuals - prostitutes (16 to 20 years old) - private cabins - betting house
1214	Panhellenion (Peter's Restaurant)	Restaurant	- do not serve food - unemployed, unaccompanied men - prostitution
1203	Main Café (Red Star)	Restaurant and Café	- prostitution - betting house - billiards
1201	Tavern Lahaie	Tavern	- betting house
1152a	Tavern Lucille	Tavern	
<i>Dorchester Street</i>			
1115-19	Chez Roncari	Restaurant and Tavern	- prostitutes (16 to 19 years old) - prostitutes entrance
1106	Capitol Grill	Restaurant and Café	- male and female servers - drinking enforced - prostitutes of all ages - male clientele is very mixed
<i>de la Gauchetière Street</i>			
1025	Tavern Groleau	Tavern	
989	Tavern Broadway	Tavern	
984	Café St. John's	Restaurant and Café	- clientele is drunk - poorly kept - sing-along - prostitutes (16 to 20 years old)
<i>Vitre Street</i>			
900	Tavern Herbs	Tavern	
<i>Craig Street</i>			

Figure 5.10: A Temperance Investigators Observations in the Cafés, Restaurants and Taverns on Lower St. Lawrence, 1946-1953. Source: Centre de recherche en histoire de l'Amérique Française, Fonds de Léon J-Z. Patenaude, Ligues de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapport Spécial du Service Diocésain de tempérance sur l'Observance de la Loi des liqueurs et de la réglementation spéciale du procureur general durant la period des fêtes. du decembre 24 1952 au 6 janvier 1953.*

the adverse effects of the over-concentration of liquor permits on the social environment³⁵. There were twenty-two licensed establishments in this small area: thirteen were taverns, eight were grills, and one was a liquor store. This concentration, the investigator argued, shaped the Lower Main's social character. Since the early 1940s, the district had been frequented by labourers, loggers and dock workers, but also by prostitutes, pimps and 'thieves'³⁶.

Although an enquiry into the provincial police force, the controlling body for liquor licenses, had been conducted in 1944, reformers were increasingly suspicious of police protection and, encouraged by the church, began pressing for another inquiry into the Montreal police force (Brodeur 1984; McKenna and Purcell 1980). The Service de Tempérance conducted detailed reports based on on-site participant observation in establishments that had liquor licenses in 1946. After being stonewalled by the provincial government, they relaunched their campaign in 1952³⁷. The observations made in these reports tell us little about the experience of this social world (Figure 5.10). They are a male reformer's impressions of his own adventures into what he perceived to be the city's nocturnal underworld. True to a reform perspective on sexuality and urban space, they represent middle-class anxieties regarding the development of new sites of sexual behaviour. In part they could be seen as a response to the proliferation of new sites of commercialized sexuality following the closure of the red-light district, and a corresponding integration of prostitution into popular sites of leisure. They are also, however, a response to changing patterns of gender and public entertainment spaces that occurred during the war, a struggle to put the spheres back in order. As Rosen (1982: 39) has argued in relation to prostitution and reform discourses, "it is not the prevalence of

³⁵ Centre de recherche en histoire de l'Amérique Française, Fonds de J.-Z. Léon Patenaude, Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, "Le fléau des "Grills" et des tavernes".

³⁶ Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, "Le fléau des "Grills" et des tavernes".

³⁷ For 1946 see Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, and for the 1950s see Ligues de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapports et résumés sur l'application de la Loi des liqueurs dans les clubs*, 1952-54.

deviance which triggers social reform, but rather what deviance symbolizes". Like the notion of the 'public woman' of the Victorian city, the prostitute in the cabarets of the Lower Main in the 1940s and 1950s became a motif for a new instabilities associated with city life (Swanson 1995).

The investigator generally reported infractions against the license law such as opening after hours, serving people who were already intoxicated, underage drinking, lack of cleanliness and finally the presence and practice of prostitution. Peter's Restaurant, for example, was described as a place frequented by unemployed and unaccompanied men, "...[les] débardeurs, mineurs, gens de l'extérieur, bûcherons, etc...gens sans travail"³⁸. The Capitol had a much more mixed male clientele, but the female clientele was consistent with most others on St. Lawrence:

On trouve à cet endroit un curieux mélange dans la clientèle masculine, une partie est formée d'ouvriers, débardeurs, mineurs et hommes de chantiers qui semble d'être dirigés par des indicateurs intéressés, car tous ces gens semblent avoir de l'argent. L'autre partie est formée de récidivistes, dysomanes, dopés souteneurs, la plupart vivant des fruits de la prostitution des filles fréquentant la place³⁹.

This observation led the investigator to conclude that this bar was entirely devoted to prostitution. The St. Louis and the Sierra Grill were also described as being entirely for this purpose. In some establishments, such as the Café Rialto, the investigator also reported homosexual clienteles and behaviours⁴⁰.

³⁸"...longshoremen, miners, people from elsewhere, lumberjacks, etc...people without jobs"(author's translation). Liges de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapports et résumés sur l'application de la Loi des liqueurs dans les clubs*, 1952-54.

³⁹"At this place we find a curious mix among the male clientele, one portion is made up of labourers, longshoremen, miners and construction workers that seem to be brought here by interested parties, since all of these people seem to have money. The other portion is made up of continual offenders, drug addicts, dopes, pimps, most of whom live off of the fruits of the prostitution of the girls that frequent the place". Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, 1946.

⁴⁰Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, 1946.

These reports provide a clear description of the practice of prostitution in the 'public' spaces of the Lower 'Main', specifically how the street's restaurants and cafés were integrated with the sex trade (Lacasse 1994). While prostitutes of all ages were observed at the Capito! and Peter's Restaurant, in most other establishments, such as the Sierra Grill, St. Louis Restaurant, the Rialto, Chez Roncari and Café St. John, the prostitutes were generally between 16 to 20 years old. In the Café Rialto, for example,

La clientèle est un ramassis de prostituées pour la plupart des canadiennes-françaises de 16 à 20 ans, qui font la rue St-Laurent et la rue Ste-Catherine et qui entrent à cet endroit pour se reposer et essayer leurs chances avec les clients du café⁴¹.

Waiters and other staff in these establishments controlled the transactions between the women and the clients, and also took a portion of the payment. At the Montmartre in 1952, for example, clients paid five dollars to the woman, three dollars for the room, and three dollars to the waiters as a procurement fee⁴². Women would make many transactions in one night, and the investigator witnessed women returning to the cafés and restaurants three and four times in one evening.

The specificity of this milieu for male pleasure and prostitution was reflected in the interior organization of the bars and restaurants. In the Café Rialto and the Sierra Grill, for example, the owners facilitated prostitution by installing booths where male patrons and prostitutes could discreetly meet. At the Rialto there were no seats at the bar, forcing clients to sit at tables or in booths⁴³. In other restaurants, the prostitutes were arranged one per table awaiting the clientele. Many of these spaces were also contentious

⁴¹"The clientele is full of prostitutes most of whom are French-Canadians from 16 to 20, who work on St. Lawrence Street and Ste. Catherine Street and who come into this place to sit down and try their chances with the clients of the café" (author's translation). Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison*, 1946.

⁴²Ligues de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapports et résumés sur l'application de la Loi des liqueurs dans les clubs*, 1952-54.

⁴³Ligues de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapports et résumés sur l'application de la Loi des liqueurs dans les clubs*, 1952-54, Box 4.

because they had doors adjoining rooming-houses and tourist rooms, or had back entrances used specifically by prostitutes and their clients. In the Val D'Or Grill, a reserved entrance at the back led to St. Dominique Street. While most women took their clients to tourist rooms in the area, Café St. John shared the same entrance with the Majestic Tourist Rooms above, and this rooming house was integral to the activities of the club⁴⁴.

That prostitution was a fundamental part of the social world of the Lower Main in this period is undeniable. The reformers view of this world, however, is suspect in terms of the identities of the people in these spaces and their relationship to broader society. First, the investigator constructs all women in these spaces as prostitutes. The Lower Main in the late 1940s was still a world of popular entertainments, and many of the women that the investigator observed could have been either involved in casual prostitution or simply have been participating in the 'sporting life' of the bright lights district. Other cases of mistaken identity could also exist in these observations, shaped as they are by anxieties about the mingling of ordinary men with prostitutes. Many of these bars and cafés were, for example, early public sites of gay male sociability and the strange social mixture among the male clientele observed at the Capitol Grill, for example, might indicate that it was a gay space (Chamberland 1998; Higgins 1998). Finally, the observer constructed these spaces as 'a world apart', a perspective structured by the rigid binaries of 'moral' and 'immoral', 'public' and 'private', that were



Figure 5.11: Lily St-Cyr, Théâtre Gaïete, 1950. Source: Gilmore (1988)

⁴⁴Ligues de Sacré-Coeur, Service de Tempérance du diocèse de Montréal, *Rapports et résumés sur l'application de la Loi des liqueurs dans les clubs*, 1952-54.

so foundational to a middle-class perspective on urban space. His observations, however, reveal that many different members of the labouring poor were present, attesting to the integration of prostitution in the sites of leisure and the everyday lives of the working-classes.

As we have seen, the displacement of red-light activities into the spaces of the Lower Main did change the character of the clientele in the jazz clubs and the restaurants. It also altered the street's entertainment forms. As the city suburbanized and the sexual marketplace became more integral to the local economy, the theatres along la Catherine and la Main were transformed. While high-kicking dancers, chorus lines and the burlesque had long dominated the stage along the Lower Main, exotic dancers began to take over in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gilmore 1988; Hébert 1981). Socio-demographic changes, suburbanisation and the effects of the television on live variety theatre are perhaps at the core of this shift in vocation (Gilmore 1988). As Bourassa and Larrue (1993) argue, "Ce n'est pas évidemment la télévision qui provoqua l'invention du strip-tease, mais c'est elle qui, de façon bien indirect, favorisa son essor sur la 'Main'"⁴⁵ (Bourassa and Larrue 1993: 128). The rise of television decreased the attendance of popular live entertainment throughout the city. Along the Main, decreasing land values and a marginal location relative to the post-war central area in the west meant that an integrated sexual marketplace was an important solution to the problem of audience decline. The strip-tease slowly came to dominate the stage because the Lower Main became an agglomeration economy with a new vocation. It became a site of popular male pleasures signified to the public through the bodies of street and cabaret prostitutes as well as erotic dancers and strippers.

Precursors to the more forthright strip-tease, entertainers like Lily St-Cyr (Figure 5.11) performed 'erotic shows' that were much less explicit. They danced and sang, and

⁴⁵"It was not television that led to the invention of the strip-tease, but it did, in an indirect way, lead to its development along the Main" (author's translation) (Bourassa and Larrue 1993: 128).

entertained their audience in suggestive ways. Although it might be argued that their performances were directed specifically towards the 'male gaze', women attended these shows as part of the heterosocial world of urban night life. They first performed as part of the entertainment in the



Figure 5.12: The Roxy Theatre, 1948. Source: *Standard* 4 Sept. 1948

larger cafés, and slowly

replaced the live jazz acts that were so popular in the 1940s. Lily St-Cyr's first performance in Montreal in 1946, for example, was at the Val D'Or Café. The first theatres in the area to feature 'exotic shows' were popular sites such as the Roxy and the Gayety (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gilmore 1988). The Roxy (Figure 5.12), a lavish supper club in the 1930s and 1940s, shifted exclusively to exotic shows before it was demolished in 1953 for the enlargement of Dorchester Street [Réné Lévesque] (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gubbay 1989). At approximately the same time, the Gayety Theatre, located one block west of the Main on Ste. Catherine Street, included shows by Lili St-Cyr and Gypsy Rose Lee in the early 1950s. These performers had mass appeal and performed for audiences of approximately 1,000 by the early 1950s. St-Cyr's small picture books and short biography could be found on news stands throughout the city. Revered by 'sporting men', dancers like St-Cyr represented freedom and liberation from traditional sexual values.

For reformers this change in the theatres and cafés was further evidence of

protection and a new way to corrupt the morality of Montreal's citizens. These early erotic shows were yet another illustration of changing cultural values and sexual ideologies in the metropolis. Taking suggestive entertainments such as the burlesque and the chorus line to new levels, this was another instance in which the Lower Main represented a challenge to the middle-class separation of women and the public world of commerce and industry. In this case it was the commodification of women's sexuality to create physical intimacy in public that reinforced the border status of the Main. In 1951, the Comité de Moralité Publique demanded that the dancers at the Roxy Theatre be stopped, but in 1952 the police assured them that the choreography used in this establishment had changed⁴⁶. In June of the same year, the Ligue de Sacré-Coeur with the Comité de Moralité Publique complained that St-Cyr's 'Femme fatale' and 'Eve' dances to be performed at the Gayety Theatre were 'immoral'. As part of these dances St-Cyr progressively undressed and went behind a transparent screen that made her appear to be nude. The Sessions Court Judge, however, declared the show legal and both St-Cyr and the Gayety Theatre were acquitted⁴⁷. The transformation of the theatres, from a moral standpoint, was simply more evidence that the ensemble of activities that had constituted the red-light was no longer contained, and that commercial establishments in the area were being incorporated into the sexual marketplace. Building a relationship between these two forms of commerce was common among reformers. An investigator for the Comité de Moralité Publique, for example, argued that the only women in attendance at the Roxy Theatre were prostitutes⁴⁸. In 1950, Pacifique Plante likewise saw the Gayety Theatre as playing an integral role in the prostitution system. Referring to the strip of brothels on Clark Street [St. Charles Borromée] run by the well-known madame Ida Katz, he argued that exotic shows provided a greater clientele for prostitution in the area: "Il n'est rien de plus favourable

⁴⁶Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison. Théâtre Roxy*, 1951-52.

⁴⁷*Montreal Herald* 23 June 1951: 2.

⁴⁸Comité de Moralité Publique, *Enquêtes Maison. Théâtre Roxy*, 1951-52.

au commerce de la prostitution que le voisinage d'un théâtre du genre⁴⁹ (Plante 1950: 49).

SEX, SPACE AND REDEVELOPMENT

The material that these reformers collected in the 1940s was used to press the provincial government to conduct another investigation into the police force and administration of justice in Montreal⁵⁰ (Brodeur 1984). After a series of rejections, the Caron Commission (1953-54) finally took place and served the important political purpose of bringing Jean Drapeau and the Civic Party into power at city hall. The closing of the brothels in 1944 after threats by the army was an important line of inquiry during this commission. If the police could close down the red-light in one day, why did the red-light still exist and who had actually ordered its closure in 1944? Having analyzed this Commission in detail, Brodeur (1984) has argued that it was leaders of the organized crime who decided to close red-light in 1944 because it was their business -- prostitution, gambling, the illegal sale of liquor -- that was most dependant on the army. In order to protect these interests, organized crime leaders ordered the closure of the brothels to reduce the level of visibility and restructure the business of prostitution. As Brodeur (1984: 174) argues, "...la fermeture allégué de ce quartier n'a constitué que la manifestation la plus visible d'une restructuration du commerce de la prostitution à Montréal"⁵¹. The Morality Squad did reduce the scale of the red-light in this era, but the red-light still existed in a less overt configuration.

Montreal's red-light district was finally destroyed not by police surveillance and

⁴⁹"There is nothing more favourable to the business of prostitution than being located near a theatre of this type" (author's translation) (Plante 1950: 49).

⁵⁰On the impetus of Duplessis, there was an inquiry into the provincial police in Montreal, the Cannon Commission (1944), during this period, but the recommendations of this inquiry were never implemented (Brodeur 1984).

⁵¹"The alleged closing of the district was only the most visible manifestation of a restructuring of the prostitution business in Montreal" (author's translation) (Brodeur 1984: 174)

the destruction of the protection racket, but by altering the infrastructure of the district through post-war urban renewal (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Proulx 1997). Changes in the fabric of the post-war city altered the role of many of Montreal's inner-city neighbourhoods. Urban redevelopment facilitated population decline, enabled the reworking of the social fabric of the district, and forced the remains of the

	1956	1961	1971	1981
Population	21,229	14,874	8,290	5,810
% Population Change		-50.8	-44.3	-36.9
Private Occupied Dwellings		3,636	2,635	2,395
Period of Construction				
% pre 1920		66.7		
% pre 1946			62.8	51.0
% 1946-1971				36.5
% Tenant Occupied Units		94.8	96.2	95.4
Persons per Household	4.3	3.2	2.4	1.6
Education				
% < Grade 9		73.0	62.1	37.4
% University Attendance		2.8	5.6	7.0

Figure 5.13: Socio-Demographic Change in the Lower Main District, 1956-1981. Source: *Census of Canada*, 1956, 1961, 1971, 1981.

red-light onto the Main. Between 1954-55 the widening of Dorchester Street in the heart of the red-light district destroyed a significant proportion of the housing⁵². But slum clearance in the 1950s really accelerated the destruction of the infrastructure of the red-light and the depopulation of the area. The first of thirteen designated 'slum' areas under the provincial Dozier plan was in the red-light district. The area bounded by Ontario, Ste. Catherine, St. Dominique and Sanguinet streets, became Habitations Jeanne-Mance, a public housing project built in 1957⁵³. The expropriation of this property and the destruction of other substandard housing in the district led to a rapid depopulation of the

⁵²In the 1940s, under Mayor Camillien Houde, the City began to expropriate land in the St. Lawrence and Cremazie districts to enlarge Dorchester Street between Bleury and Amherst (Linteau 1992b).

⁵³At this time, the future use of the area was under dispute, with Premier Maurice Duplessis calling for slum clearance and public housing and Mayor Jean Drapeau asserting that the district be slated for commercial and industrial development (McKenna and Purcell 1980). In response to the acute housing crisis following the war and under pressure from a coalition of fifty citizens groups, the Provincial government and the executive committee initiated a slum clearance project, the Plan Dozier. This plan designated thirteen 'slum' areas for demolition and the construction of low-income housing projects (Linteau 1992b).

district from 1951 to 1961 when the local population declined from 25,218 to 14,874 (Figure 5.13) (see Choko et al. 1986; Filion 1988; Morin 1985). The number of private occupied dwellings declined by almost 25 percent in the same period. Although the Jeanne-Mance project was built, many of the other lots either became parking lots or were redeveloped as commercial properties⁵⁴. Over the next two decades, this small district would accommodate the following government buildings and projects in an expanding central city: Place des Arts, Complex Guy-Favreau, the Ville-Marie Autoroute, Palais de Congrès, Complex Desjardins, Hydro Quebec, and, further south, the new courthouse (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Linteau 1992b).

Essentially, the redevelopment process meant that the activities of the whole district were displaced to the commercial streets of the area. Chapter 6 examines the changing imagery of the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine streets as it acquires a reputation as the city's vortex of 'vice' and 'immorality'⁵⁵. Even before the destruction of the red-light and urban redevelopment had taken place, a cross-shaped cluster of contentious entertainment sites was forming at this intersection. St. Lawrence from Vitré to Ontario, and Ste. Catherine between Bleury and St. Denis streets became the red-light district in the popular imagination. Less a bold signifier for male sexual freedom among all classes, this portion of the Main emerged from the war years as a site that was associated with poverty, mafia violence and a more threatening form of 'public' womanhood that was now out in the open and part of the social world of the street. Although urban redevelopment was eradicating the contentious neighbourhood surrounding the street, the intensification of prostitution and the protection racket in the cabarets and on the street made the Lower Main an extremely marginal space, the antithesis of the post-war city.

⁵⁴Plans to improve the district and change its image with commercial expansion were announced in 1963, with the building of the new court house and the demolition of the St. Lawrence Market. *Gazette* 22 May 1963.

⁵⁵*Gazette* 20 Nov. 1961.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Montreal's red-light district served as a meter to the morality of the city's population and the legitimacy and honesty of civic leaders and the police force. Contained red-light districts rely on access to residential infrastructure. Many have historically been located in inner- or central-city locations, therefore, the post-war period dramatically transformed the way in which the prostitution system in many cities was managed, organized and produced. As these activities were displaced from the privacy of 'public' houses and into the entertainment sites and tourist rooms of the Lower Main, the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine replaced the red-light in the popular imagination. The Lower Main was always an integral part of the red-light district, but shifts in the commercial structure of the cabarets, the destruction of the physical infrastructure of the red-light district and urban redevelopment intensified the Lower Main's role in the sex trade. The displacement of the residential prostitution system led to a decline in the conditions of work for sex trade workers, and they were subject to new forms of surveillance and control. The masculinization of the prostitution system as the madames lost their role led to new forms of control and vulnerability for sex-trade workers. The entrenchment of this new system in the cabarets and restaurants changed their vocation and in turn led to a masculinization and social polarisation of clients in these spaces. The increased presence of sex-trade workers on the street would also give the Main a new meaning in the post-war city. Not only did the increased presence of public prostitution deter a more diversified clientele from frequenting the area, but the Main itself acquired a reputation for streetwalking, solicitation and suggestive entertainments.

The importance of commercial sex to the economy of the establishments in the 1940s was reflected in the shift in reform discourses. 'Putting out the red-light' (Lévesque 1995) shifted from calling for the destruction of the residential prostitution system to limiting the influence of the clubs and cabarets through liquor licensing. Middle-class anxieties regarding Montreal's reputation as a 'wide open town' in the 1930s and 1940s were often related to an increased level of sociability between men and women in

commercial entertainments, especially during World War II. After the war, the reform discourse shifted from protecting men from venereal disease in the contagious space of the red-light to protecting specifically working-class men from prostitution and alcohol consumption in the clubs of the Lower Main. The increasing visibility of sex-trade workers at the intersection of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine in the 1940s raised reformers' concerns regarding the forms of sociability occurring in the theatres, restaurants and bars and the entertainments of the district. Forced out of residential prostitution, street and cabaret prostitutes emerged as the post World War II version of 'public' womanhood, an identity that was located on the Lower Main.

The displacement of prostitution into the cabarets of the Main initiated a dramatic change in the relationship between this locale and the rest of the Main. Erotic performers, sex trade workers and servers in cabarets were a bold expression of the 'public' nature of commodified sexuality after World War II. As these identities became fundamental to the entertainment spaces and the sidewalks of the Lower Main, the marginality of prostitution paved the way for other forms of sexual marginality to be expressed in this space of difference. While 'difference' in terms of heterosexual norms of respectable behaviour was a constant in this locale, as the post-war city expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, the Lower Main would become a place where other marginal sexual identities for women and men would be expressed. In the next chapter, I examine how a set of 'feminine' representations of identity in the 1960s and 1970s served to code this locale as a site as a transgressive but marginal space of difference on the basis of gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER 6

'THE BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS'

*Every big city must have a Main, whether you call it Pigalle, the Bowery or SoHo – it's still the Main*¹.

By the late 1950s, the post-war metropolis had expanded and a new mixture of marginal activities had developed along the Lower Main. In an illustrated article in *La Patrie* the Lower Main was celebrated as Montreal's 'Place Pigalle', a place of cheap restaurants, cinemas, cabarets, tattoo parlours, gaming houses and fortune tellers². At night, it was a place of cheap amusements, the pleasure space for 'les hommes du samedi soir'³. By day, the street belonged to the local social order, the remnants of the world of organized crime and the people who lived in the tourist rooms and worked in the cabarets. Formerly a celebrated strip of popular entertainments, throughout the post-war period (1947-1965) and even into the 1980s, the Lower Main acquired its most marginal status. It became known as the social world of the most stigmatized populations in the metropolis, a contentious combination of "...prostitutes, transvestites and derelicts", elderly men living in the rooming houses, young punks, pimps, and "...the gay crowd"⁴. The world of male pleasure subsided with the daylight, when the street belonged to the people of the Lower Main, a population that was supposedly trapped in a world of poverty and exploitation. This component of the 'third city' represented a combination of cheap male pleasures, poverty, stark exploitations of women and youths, and violence emanating from organized crime. While many of these forces were not new to the Lower Main, inner-city decline exacerbated its existing reputation, and, coinciding with changes to the bar and theatre clientele and the entertainments, the Lower Main became a place where "...things are not

¹Ralph Cobetto of the Metropolitan Association of Licensed Cafes and Restaurants in, Al Palmer, "The Lower Main -- Is it on the way back?" *Gazette* 26 Jan. 1963: 13.

²"Rue principale," *La Patrie* 20 Sept. 1959.

³"La 'main' s'éveille quand vous vous mettez au lit," *Le petit journal* 23 Dec. 1956; "La rue St-Laurent: 'Plaisirs' et misères..." *Photo journal* 21 Sept. 1957.

⁴James Mennie, "The Main, where two solitudes meet and make noise," *Gazette* 1 June 1983; Jennifer Harper, "The polyglot world of Montreal's 'Main'," *Canadian Geographic* April/May 1980: 12-17.

always what they seem", particularly in terms of gender norms and sexual identity⁵.

In this chapter, I analyze what the space of the Lower Main represented within the shifting geography of the city through the post-war era and into the 1970s, and what its meaning implied for the geography of gender and sexuality in Montreal.



Figure 6.1: The Lower Main at Night, 1963. Source: *Gazette* 26 Jan. 1963.

Accommodating prostitutes, transvestites, working-class

gays and lesbians, and club workers (referred to as 'b-girls'), the Lower Main evolved as the antithesis of the new metropolis, an increasingly contained space of populations and activities that were not included in the image of the moral metropolis. Over the next two decades, the meaning of the district shifted from a night playground to what Proulx (1992) has referred to as "Le boulevard des rêves brisés", 'The Boulevard of Broken Dreams'. Seen by dominant society as a place where the 'sexually marginal' were contained, the Lower Main was a frontier where people displaced from the patriarchal family on the basis of gendered behaviours and/or sexual identities could survive in a social world where certain norms were suspended. Entering the social world of the Lower Main meant assuming marginality in order to find a circumscribed liberation. By inhabiting this boundary zone, lesbians, gays, transvestites, transsexuals, butches and

⁵ Even relatively recently, one journalist emphasized the sexual ambiguity of the traffic along this portion of the street: "Last night, many of these puffy, bloodshot faces peered up from curbs or traded leers with the prostitutes -- male, female or variants thereof -- who provide these two blocks of the street with its gritty reputation". Jack Todd, "On the Lower Main, the side show is always free," *Gazette* 1 Aug. 1987: J1/J2. See also Pieter Sypkes, "The Main," *The Fifth Column* Winter 1982.

'fallen' women found a social space where they could express themselves within prescribed limits, and adopted an outsider position in a social world that was structured by its own independent set of power relations.

Constructing 'The Boulevard of Broken Dreams' could simply be understood as a means to reinforce existing material margins, a tool used to establish the coherence of the centre (Stallybrass and White 1986). Of the many locales of the Main explored in this thesis, the Lower Main in the post-war period most closely resembles the margin-centre dichotomy in the construction of a border zone. Indeed, the discourse of the 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' involved constructing boundaries between bodies that conformed to sexual and gender norms and those that dreamed of and experienced other kinds of corporality. It was a disciplinary discourse exercised over social groups and individuals who transgressed the norms of gender, sexuality and space that were under (re)construction in the metropolis, a playful but sinister method of mocking their dreams of liberation. For this reason, it is necessary to view the 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' as both a material and discursive space that was produced rather than simply the accident of urban restructuring.

It is also important to ask what this locale demonstrates regarding the changing character of the 'third city' and the representation of 'female' identities associated with its border status. Unlike the earlier bright lights district, this locale involved more specific relations of gender, class and language. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the Lower Main in the post-war era was no longer a centre of attraction for people from all over the city. While up the hill above Sherbrooke Montrealers were rediscovering the 'ethnic diversity' of the street, the Main below Ontario became the contained frontier of the most disenfranchised members of Montreal's francophone working-classes. To gain an understanding of the role played by the Lower Main in the process of redefining gender and sexuality, it is necessary to delve deeper into the social and spatial context of Montreal in the 1960s and 1970s. To illustrate what kinds of boundaries were being erected, the types of spaces and people that were placed on Montreal's socio-spatial

margins must be considered. Prostitutes (both male and female), transvestites, 'b-girls', 'butch' lesbians and gay men were social mirrors of a society in the process of redefinition. To illustrate the importance of this portion of the 'third city' in this process, I also draw on the works of Québec novelist and playwright Michel Tremblay. Newspaper discourses regarding the clubs of the Lower Main in the 1960s and 1970s are held in tension with his tales of Québec's cultural and political revolution and practices of resistance in this locale.

BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS: TREMBLAY'S WORLD

La culture d'un pays doit être une mosaïque de toutes les facettes de son peuple et non pas l'unique face de son élite⁶.

Red-light districts and other marginal sites in modern cities have captured the imagination of male artists. A century ago, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pablo Picasso, for example, depicted women in the cabarets and brothels of Paris and Barcelona, with all the fear and fascination of male pleasure seekers (Pollock 1988; Kaplan 1992). The early works of Québec novelist and playwright Michel Tremblay in the 1960s and 1970s, however, draw us into a much more ambiguous social world and space. Tremblay's Lower Main provides us with a portrait of the red-light in decline, a street populated by people fleeing their origins and finding themselves under another all-powerful social order of organized crime. In the plays from his Belles Soeurs Cycle we witness the lives of women who have fallen from working-class respectability, transvestites, country western singers striving for fame, waitresses, strippers who would be dancers, and a 'butch' washroom attendant, all of whom are trying to find a place in the world where they can live their alterity. For Tremblay the Lower Main serves also as a site of resistance, the point from which the exclusive nature of Québécois identity, as it was constructed by the literary elite of the Quiet Revolution, could be questioned.

⁶"The culture of a country should be a mosaic of all the facets of its people and not only the singular face of its elite" (author's translation). Michel Tremblay in, *Le Devoir* 3 July 1971: 11.



Figure 6.2: Cabaret Scene from *Il était une fois dans l'est*, 1974. Source: Promotional Material for *Il était une fois dans l'est*

Tremblay's work overall uses the social worlds of Montreal's East End, the symbolic home of the French-Canadian working classes, to question class, space and language in Montreal. When Tremblay's world was the Main, the issue of national representation was always under question. For Tremblay, East Montreal served as a representation of alienation and marginalisation in the larger Québec society (Godin and Mailhot 1988), but the Lower Main specifically placed gender and sexuality at the centre of his political project⁷. The film *Il était une fois dans l'est* [Once Upon a Time in the East] drew together many of the characters and spaces of his early plays⁸. When it was released in 1974, critical reaction was mixed in part because of its depiction of gender

⁷Other authors from the same period also depict the Main as a world where sexual marginality and poverty intersect. See, Trevenian, *The Main* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Janovich, 1976) and Marie-Claire Blais, *St. Lawrence Blues*. Ralph Manheim (trans) (Ottawa: Éditions du Jour à Montreal, 1974).

⁸André Brassard, *Il était une fois dans l'est* (Montréal: Les Productions Carle-Lamy, 1974).

and sexuality⁹. Many critics dismissed it as 'filmed theatre', but there was an even stronger reaction to the film's characters and settings, especially the scenes and characters from the Lower Main (Figure 6.2). Responding to the construction of the Lower Main as a place of violence, poverty and sexual immorality in the public imagination, Tremblay placed the city's sexual margins at the centre of Québec society. A remarkable blurring between Tremblay's fictional interpretations of this social world and the 'real' Lower Main appears in these critiques -- very little distinction was made between the street and the stage -- and these reactions strongly illustrate the public image of the 'real' Main in the 1970s¹⁰. While literary elites couched their reaction to Tremblay's characters in pity and questioned the utility of depicting the lives of 'the dispossessed', the distaste for Tremblay's world was articulated in the more sensationalist press, particularly for the characters and cabarets of the Lower Main. As the journalist for *Gala des artistes* wrote:

L'Univers de Tremblay,...c'est l'univers des tapettes, des travestis, des grosses torches, des petites filles perdues, de gens dépravés vivant complètement en dehors de la société. L'univers de Tremblay, ça va pas cher la piastre...c'est le monde CHEAP, les clubs CHEAP, le langage CHEAP, les putaines CHEAP...¹¹

This reaction to Tremblay's Main was not entirely unique. From the time of his first play, *Les Belles Soeurs* (1965), his use of joul (the French dialect of working-class Montrealers) on the Québécois stage had created linguistic and class controversy among literary elites. For these reasons, he has been described as an author who is "marginal en

⁹For example see Jack Kapica, "Tremblay's demi-monde staggers on film," *Gazette* 2 March 1974; André Leroux, "Il était une fois dans l'est', un squelette décharné," *Le Devoir* 9 March 1974: 19; Yves Lever, "Quand l'album de famille s'enrichit..." *Révolutions* April 1974: 125-126; Martin Malina, "Film overdoes broken hearts," *Montreal Star* 1 March 1974: A12; Michelle Talbot, "Une journée de douleur," *Dimanche-Matin* 24 Feb. 1974.

¹⁰See "Entre la graisse de rôti et le ragout de boulettes," *Le Soleil* 2 March 1974: 38; "Il était un soir sur la Catherine," *Le Devoir* 1 March 1974; *Le Nouveau Samedi* 28 Feb. 1974; Luc Perrault, "De l'est de Brassard à l'est d'Antonioni," *La Presse* 22 Feb. 1974.

¹¹"Tremblay's world...it's the world of fags, transvestites, old hags, loose girls, degenerates living completely outside of society. Tremblay's world isn't worth anything...its a CHEAP world, CHEAP clubs, CHEAP language, CHEAP whores..." (author's translation). *Gala des artistes* 6 April 1974: 15.

coeur" [marginal at heart], and his characters from the Main are his most marginal because they add a contentious sexuality to issues of class, gender and representation.

As a composite of these plays, *Il était une fois...* perhaps most strongly demonstrates Tremblay's use of the margins to question the centre. It is in the film version that the Lower Main moves to the centre of a national controversy regarding the representation of Québécois society. The film is a day in the life of two interconnected but spatially separate social worlds, the working-class homes of the 'housewives' of the Plateau Mont-Royal and the people of the Lower Main who surround a particular cabaret. While the relationships between these two places are often suggested in Tremblay's work, in the film he and director André Brassard set out specifically to explore their connections¹². The Main is positioned on the moral margins of the francophone working-class families of the Plateau Mont-Royal (Waugh 1980). The Lower Main is where their children dream of stardom, of freedom and liberation, as singers, dancers, waiters, and drag show contestants, but it is also the place to which wayward daughters are assigned, where 'rotten' sons end-up as two-bit hustlers, and where 'queer' children find a place of acceptance within exploitation. By refusing to separate these two places, Tremblay resists separating the oppressions of these feminized subjects (Waugh 1980). Many of the central female characters go back and forth between the two oppressive worlds, but the Lower Main always serves as an elusive escape route for those who want something other than the gender role that they have been assigned¹³. By refusing to draw boundaries between working-class women, gay men and transvestites, Tremblay subverts structures and

¹²Jack Kapica, "Tremblay's 'crazies' resurrected for film," *Gazette* 8 Sept. 1973; Robert Lévesque, "Le plateau du film de Brassard-Tremblay 'Il était une fois dans l'est,'" *Québec-Presse* 5 Aug. 1973: 20; Luc Perreault, "Tremblay et Brassard, 'On est pas des Jeanne d'Arc!'" *La Presse* 2 March 1974; Lawrence Sabbath, "Tremblay films his world," *Montreal Star* 10 Aug. 1973: B6; *Le Devoir* 27 July 1973: 10; Jean-Pierre Tadros, "André Brassard, comment passer du théâtre au cinéma..." *Cinéma-Québec* 3(5) 1974.

¹³In this film ex-bar maid Hélène brings her lesbian lover Bec-de-Lièvre [Harelip] to her mother's home on the Plateau where Bec-de-Lièvre eats supper on the back porch while the family dines inside; Carmen, the cabaret singer, visits her pious sister Sandra only to be rejected as a "...un putain sur la rue Saint-Laurent" [a whore on St. Lawrence street] (Godin and Mailhot 1988) and Pierrette, the aging girlfriend [sic] of Johnny, a hustler on the Main, visits her sister Germain on rue Fabre only to be completely rejected.

discourses that seek to distinguish between feminized subjects on the basis of 'morality' and 'respectability'.

Critics were also troubled by the fact that there were no 'real' men in this Québécois film of the Quiet Revolution¹⁴ (Waugh 1980). Since an integral part of the cultural revolution in Québec was the reconstruction of masculinity (Schwartzwald 1993; Waugh 1980), Tremblay's vision of the people of Québec created a problem for many critics, but especially those for whom the post-colonial restoration of the masculinity of Québécois men was an important project. As both Schwartzwald (1991, 1993) and Waugh (1980) have argued, gender 'inversions' in Québec film and literature created a crisis among cultural elites who saw the reconstruction of a Québécois masculinity as a central project of decolonisation during the Quiet Revolution. Tremblay and Brassard, however, emphasized the shared oppressions of their feminized subjects by removing all the 'real' male characters who were part of the scene in the plays on which the film was based¹⁵. As one critic argued, it is a film about women and "un paquet des hommes manqués" [a bunch of pseudo men]. Bec-de-Lièvre (the 'butch'), transvestites like Hosanna, gay men like Sandra, and the male prostitutes did not represent an image from which to construct Québécois masculinity. Gendered identities and sexualities were uncertain along Tremblay's Main -- even the mafia thug Maurice has an implied relationship with a young male prostitute.

What does the Lower Main represent in Tremblay's world? As Chassy (1993) argues, Tremblay's Lower Main is a frontier, Montreal's ultimate site of urbanity, a place

¹⁴Critical debate regarding Tremblay's representation of 'Québec' was raised again when the film was chosen over Ted Kocheff's interpretation of Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* to represent Canada at the Cannes film festival in the same year. See Claude Daigneault, "Pourquoi le film d'André Brassard représentera-t-il la Canada à Cannes?" *Le Soleil* 30 March 1974; "Le film de Brassard-Tremblay à Cannes, 'Des travestis minables qui touchent par leur solitude'," *Le Jour* 23 April 1974: 13; Martin Knelman "The world of Michel," *Globe and Mail* 3 May 1975: 31; Jay Newquist, "Tremblay wins, Duddy loses in Cannes festival politics," *Gazette* 1 May 1974; "Quand le Québec s'en mêle," *Dimanche-Matin* 26 May 1974.

¹⁵Claude Daigneault, "La faune de Tremblay et Brassard en 35 mm," *Le Soleil* 2 March 1974.

of contradictory signs, myths and disorientation. More importantly, it is the place where the colonisation of the francophone working classes by an English urban elite is hidden behind the bright lights of the entertainment district and the masks of its performers (Chassy 1993). This liminality is echoed in Rocheleau's (1995) analysis of the representation of space and marginality in Tremblay's works that depict the world of the Lower Main in the 1940s and 1950s. The frontier status of the Lower Main specifically represents a relationship between working-class francophones and the Anglo-capitalist city and serves as both a rupture in the surface of the dual city and an oppressive site with its own social order. As Rocheleau (1995) argues, the Lower Main serves as a frontier where those who are willing to assume marginality find a circumscribed liberation, a place to express themselves by adopting foreign masks to hide the brutal power relations that structure their relationship to dominant society. Costuming themselves in dreams of other bodies, lives and societies, the people of the Lower Main assume a position of elsewhere, but this strategy is an illusion. Along the Lower Main there is always another social order defining the boundaries and rules of the space, foiling attempts at freedom.

SEX, CLASS AND SURVEILLANCE

As in many inner-city districts in North America, demographic shifts, changes in cultural consumption and a new wave of moral reform immediately after World War II initiated the increasing marginality of the Lower Main and its entertainment spaces. The more permanent outcome of this process became evident in the 1960s, when redevelopment displaced all red-light activities and confined them to the Lower Main, where police surveillance and the local media shone the moral spot-light on the cabarets and street corners. Organized crime, however, had not been entirely eradicated by urban redevelopment. Municipal authorities turned to surveillance techniques such as the permit refusals and the enforcement of closing hours to eradicate the 'immoral' spaces of the post-war metropolis. During his first term in office (1954 to 1957), Mayor Jean Drapeau initiated a campaign to enforce closing hours to ensure that the Lower Main would lose its tenor. Drapeau also investigated the health standards of the twenty-five hot-dog stands and quick lunches in the district in 1956. Although Sarto Fournier (1957 to 1960)

replaced Drapeau as mayor in 1957, his municipal administration continued its surveillance by investigating the night clubs of the Lower Main to ensure that dancers were conforming to the morality code and to establish whether these clubs were serving minors¹⁶. To gain credibility in the eyes of the public, in 1959 Fournier's administration announced that the Lower Main had been cleaned-up and that "...les personnes honnêtes peuvent s'aventurer le soir sur le boulevard St-Laurent, entre les rues Craig et Ste-Catherine..."¹⁷.

Redevelopment, surveillance and the destruction of residential prostitution had driven many of the more significant players in the underworld to find new ventures in other locations. Reorganisation of the protection racket and increased levels of police surveillance produced violence born out of struggles for control over this dwindling resource. Crime reports of bombings and shootings in the cabarets of the Lower Main made organized crime in this space visible to the public¹⁸. While mafia violence was also occurring in downtown clubs such as Chez Parée and El Morocco, gang wars raged along the street and the Lower Main was constructed as the uncontrollable space of the world

¹⁶Al Palmer, "'Shadow squad' checks night club attractions," *Gazette* 10 Jan. 1958; "Une escouade surveillera la tenue des spectacles et la vente de boissons aux mineurs," *Le Devoir* 11 Jan. 1958.

¹⁷"...honest people can dare to venture to St. Lawrence Boulevard between Craig and Ste. Catherine streets at night...(author's translation). Communiqué de M. J. M. Savignac, Président du comité exécutif de la Ville de Montréal. "Sécurité sur la rue Saint-Laurent", 12 March 1959, Ville de Montréal, Dossiers, Moralité générale. Following hearings regarding the attack on a waiter at the Canasta, Judge Marc-André Blain suggested either cleaning-up the Main altogether or leaving the underworld to destroy itself. Federal Liberal MP for the Saint-Louis riding Harry Blank, however, questioned the security of the Main on the eve of the municipal election and called for a tight clamp down on the granting of operating permits for cabarets in his riding, which had the most licenses in the province of Québec. Leon Levinson, "Why waste police? Angry Judge asks," *Gazette* 15 July 1960; "Le juge Blain suggère de priver le quartier interlope de toute protection de la police," *Le Devoir* 15 July 1960; Leopold Lizotte, "Retirer la police du secteur de la ville régi par la pègre," *La Presse* 15 July 1960; "Main' cafés told to curb trouble," *Montreal Star* 20 Oct. 1960; "Nettoyer la jungle montréalaise des indésirables qui l'habitent" *Montréal-Matin* 15 July 1960; Al Palmer, "Police raiding parties find all 'Main' quiet," *Gazette* 11 July 1960.

¹⁸From 1960 to 1990, 50 small-time pimps and crooks were killed in the clubs of the Lower Main. This was particularly intense in the 1960s, when the social order was undergoing transformation (Proulx 1997: 77).

of organized crime in the local press¹⁹. For example, when a waiter was assaulted in the Canasta Cabaret in July 1960, journalists began referring to the Lower Main as Montreal's 'jungle', where people lived under a separate set of laws defined by the world of organized crime²⁰. The space was also given a frontier inscription two months later when, following "une dispute à coups de .45" [a quarrel with a .45] in a mafia clash in Café Métro, one journalist described this era as "l'heure du 'Far West'" [the hour of the Far West]. In this struggle, a waiter was almost shot, adding further to the frontier image:

Encore une fois la rue St-Laurent, de réputation fort connue, a été témoin d'une dispute à coups de feu dans un des établissements qu'elle abrite... Et comme d'habitude les témoins, car il y en a toujours, n'ont rien vu et rien entendu²¹.

A 'frontier' or a 'jungle', the Lower Main was a lawless site with its own social order. As always, it is a space of 'danger' for men in terms of prostitution, but clashes over control of the street also made the threat of violence very tangible. In 1963 the area was described by Pierre Léger of *La Patrie* as the "Couloir de la mort"²² [Corridor of death]. The Casino Français, Casa Loma, the Main Café, the Métro, the Rodéo, The Rialto, the Grand National, the Lahaie Taverne and the Canasta Café were all clubs associated with the violent struggles of the remaining small-time mafia thugs.

Violence was a possibility in the spaces of the Lower Main, but the city had other

¹⁹Jean David, "Un journaliste voit la pègre à l'oeuvre," *La Presse* 4 Nov. 1960; "Le raid au Chez Parée: l'enquête reste très difficile," *La Presse* 5 Nov. 1960; "Après le Chez Parée L'El Morocco et le Casa Loma devaient y passer," *La Presse* 23 Nov. 1960.

²⁰Robert Gilliece, "Bail refused in night club assault," *Gazette* 9 July 1960; "Nettoyer la jungle montréalaise des indésirables qui l'habitent," *Montréal-Matin* 15 July 1960.

²¹"Once again St. Lawrence Street, a place with a well known reputation, witnessed a shooting clash in an establishment that shelters it [the mafia]...And as usual, the witnesses, and there are always some, heard and saw nothing..." (author's translation). "La 'Main' à l'heure du 'Far West. Une dispute à coups de .45 au Café Métro," *La Presse* 1 Aug. 1960.

²²Al Palmer, "The Lower Main -- Is it on the way back?" *Gazette* 26 Jan. 1963: 13.

plans for the area and mapping the street as a space of danger did a great deal to deter people from frequenting the clubs and to legitimize claims that a clean-up was necessary. Following the violence of the late 1950s, the protection racket had become synonymous with the Lower Main. As an indication, the juvenile court, alarmed by the number of young people committing crimes on this street, requested that the mayor make the Main a prohibited zone for children under sixteen²³. Reporters told the public that while the Lower Main had always been a 'tough' district, it had never been as tough as at present. Now

the 'blackest' district in the city, 'fun-seeking suburbanites' had been deterred from frequenting the street's cabarets and restaurants²⁴. Constructing the Lower Main as a space of danger also legitimized calls for moral reform, and for politicians like Drapeau it was also a handy method of gaining public support. When Drapeau was re-elected in 1960, he focused on the Lower Main, increasing the number of police patrolling the area in November 1961. A month later, he also created the Social Security Squad, charged with



Figure 6.3: The Canasta Café in the 1960s. Source: *Gazette* 4 Feb. 1995: B6.

²³"La 'Main', zone interdite aux moins de 16 ans?" *La Presse* 16 Aug. 1961.

²⁴Al Palmer, "Focal Point -- The Lower Main," *Gazette* 26 Nov. 1960; "Le 'point de mire'...la 'Main'," *Dimanche-Matin* 27 Nov. 1960.

eliminating the protection racket²⁵. By January 1963, the police declared that the Main was now quiet and the protection racket had been destroyed²⁶.

The most effective means of controlling the night world of the Lower Main, was to refuse operating and liquor permits to club operators, a practice which ultimately destroyed the entertainment budgets of club owners and permanently changed the character of the street. A few months before Drapeau's campaign for re-election in October 1962, the Québec Liquor Board began refusing permits to night club operators on the Main²⁷. In 1963, the Executive Committee advised nine establishments that their operating permits would not be renewed, five of which were located along the Lower Main: the Casino français, the Capitol Café, the Canasta Café (Figure 6.3), the Rialto Café, Taverne Montréal and the United Fruit Store²⁸. The reasons for the attack on the 'Main', Police Chief Robert explained was "...le site, le caractère anti-social des établissements, et les facteurs criminogènes qui en découlent"²⁹. With Expo 67 approaching, Drapeau began to prepare the city for the eyes of the world and forty-two establishments were advised that their operating permits would not be renewed, twenty of which were located in and around the Lower Main³⁰. Many of these clubs went through

²⁵The twenty night clubs and twelve taverns in the area were important reservoirs to draw in recruits for the world of organized crime and prostitution. André Béliveau, "Les policiers de Montréal ont leurs problèmes!" *Le Petit Journal* 10 Dec. 1961; Roger Champoux, "Un nettoyage et de grand style," *La Presse* 16 Nov. 1961; "Director promises police clamp-down on turbulent 'Main'," *Montreal Star* 15 Nov. 1961; Pax Plante with David MacDonald, "The Shame of My City," *Star Weekly* 24 June 1961: 2-6; 1 July 1961: 6-11; 8 July 1961: 10-13; 15 July 1961: 14-17; and 22 July 1961: 15-17.

²⁶"Tough policing has made a milder street," *Gazette* 26 Jan. 1963.

²⁷"The Main 'clean-up' produces results," *Montreal Star* 5 July 1962.

²⁸"Nettoyage sur la 'Main'," *Montreal-Matin* 11 May 1963.

²⁹"...the site, the anti-social character of the establishments, and the criminal elements that stem from it..." (author's translation). "La 'Main' disparaître maintenant ou jamais," *La Patrie* 23 May 1963.

³⁰Some of these establishments, such as the Rodéo, Arlequin Aux Deux Masques and the Café St. John also had their alcohol permits revoked. "Le Rodéo est maintenant fermé; police à l'attaque," *Montreal-Matin* 20 June 1963; Nicole Paquette, "Une larme pour le Lodéo," *La Presse* 3 Aug. 1986; "Le café Rialto riposte et poursuit la ville..." *La Presse* 1 June 1963; "Protestation (légale) d'un propriétaire de cabaret," *Dimanche-*

an extended appeals process that kept them under police control until Expo 67. Through these proceedings it became clear that it was not only the violence and the criminal activities that were under attack, but also the morality of the clientele. As the Director of Police, Adrien Robert stated during the appeal procedures: "Je dois dire à votre Seigneurie,...que ce secteur du bas de la rue St-Laurent est un endroit où la moralité constitue un problème constant et que les enquêtes ont porté sur tous les clubs de cet arrondissement"³¹.

By 1966, five years after the offensive on the Lower Main had begun, the police reported that by night the street was still very dangerous despite their efforts³². Cabaret owners, on the other hand, argued that the Lower Main was no longer dangerous, and if Montrealers were afraid to frequent their clubs, it was because of the journalists, who had sensationalized the violence of the space, particularly when they had published photographs of mafia killings³³. As *Le Cabaret* had warned "... Aujourd'hui les mauvais garçons et les filles de vie sont toujours sur la 'Main'"³⁴. As a final offensive before Expo, municipal authorities adopted three more surveillance techniques to protect the city's

matin 2 June 1963. The owner of Café Rialto at 1217 St-Laurent was refused three municipal permits for a restaurant, dance floor and the sale of alcohol. "Le Café Rialto riposte et poursuit la ville..." *La Presse* 1 June 1963; "Trois permis sont refusés au Rialto." *Montréal-matin* 3 July 1968. The Café St-John, also had its alcohol permit revoked because the lawyer for the City of Montreal demonstrated that there had been 108 infractions committed in and around this club in the early 1960s. The municipal services director for the City of Montreal reported that there had recently been "activities louches" [sleazy activities] committed by people who frequent this club. "Le chef Adrien Robert témoigne; bref de mandamus du café 'St. John' contre la ville pour garder son permis," *Dimanche-matin* 11 Oct. 1964.

³¹"I must state, Your Honour, ...that this section at the lower end of St. Lawrence Street is an area where morality constitutes a constant problem and that investigations have been made of all the clubs in this district" (author's translation). "Le chef Adrien Robert témoigne; bref de mandamus du café 'St. John' contre la ville pour garder son permis," *Dimanche-matin* 11 Oct. 1964.

³²"L'histoire de la 'Main': les policiers s'y promènent quatre par quatre la nuit mais ce ne fût pas toujours ainsi," *Le Cabaret* 1 Oct. 1966.

³³"La 'Main' refuse de mourir et soupire après l'Expo," *La Patrie* 20 March 1966.

³⁴"Today, the bad guys and the prostitutes are still on the Main" (author's translation). "La 'Main' refuse de mourir et soupire après l'Expo," *La Patrie* 20 March 1966.

image in the eyes of the world and to protect tourists from the spaces of the Lower Main. First, in 1966 the police began raiding specific clubs and arresting all found-ins. Titled "visites de vérification", this practice began to deter a middle-class clientele from frequenting specific clubs. The police began with clubs along the Lower Main, such as the Casbah, the Casa Loma, The Grand National, Le Plateau, the Café St. John, the Rodéo and Pal's, which Police Chief Gilbert described as "...cheap night clubs catering to cheap people doing cheap things"³⁵. These were primarily clubs frequented by gay men and prostitutes, and which featured 'go-go dancers' and strip-tease shows. Many of them were still going through the appeals process in the spring of 1967 because they had additional 'problems of morality'. Although they eventually received their permits in time for the World Exposition, the District Attorney requested that taxi drivers be instructed not to bring tourists to establishments such as the Café St. John, l'Arlequin aux deux masques, the Casbah and the Casa Loma. Finally, the Executive Committee created By-law 3416, making it illegal for club employees to drink, dance or sit with customers³⁶. These measures did not directly target organized crime and violence, but rather the interface between the workers and clientele of clubs. By-law 3416 was an attempt to protect male tourists from deception by 'dangerous women' and gay men.

DANGEROUS WOMEN: 'B-GIRLS', GO-GO DANCERS AND 'LES FILLES DE JOIE'

By 1966, the local entertainment press stressed the danger of the Lower Main, and specifically warned their female readers of the violence that could be encountered in the district. As *Le Cabaret* argued in 1966: "Il y a encore des bagarres et des règlements de compte, donc, mesdames, ne vous rendez pas seules sur la 'Main'"³⁷. There were many

³⁵Claude Asselin, "Gilbert s'explique," *Montreal-Matin* 16 Aug. 1966; Tim Burke, "Police launch night club war," *Montreal Star* 26 July 1966.

³⁶By-law 3416 was created only a few months before Expo 67 (March 9, 1967). During Expo the municipal court used this by-law to close down the Bérêt Bleu at 173 Ste-Catherine East, a club that was popular among gay men and prostitutes (Higgins 1998). Michel Auger, "La police ferme les cabarets 'Chez Parez' et le Bérêt Bleu," *La Presse* 24 Dec. 1970: A3.

³⁷"There are still scuffles and accounts being settled so, ladies, don't go to the Main alone"(author's translation). "La 'Main' refuse de mourir et soupire après l'Expo," *La Patrie* 20 March 1966.

other factors, however, that altered this district as a site of 'respectable' heterosexual sociability. The enforcement of closing hours, high legal costs for permit renewals and the loss of a more diversified clientele had served to limit the budget for entertainment in cabarets³⁸. Live musical entertainment was slowly replaced by rock and country and western records in cabarets all over the city, but along the Lower Main the solution to decrease entertainment budgets was the strip-tease, which went from being part of a varied evening's entertainment to the central attraction (Bourassa and Larrue 1993; Gilmore



Figure 6.4: St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine, 1960
Source: *Dimanche-matin* 10 July, 1960

1988). In this era, strippers could only be partially nude. Performers at the Casino français, Pal's Café and the Main Café, for example, usually wore a full bathing costume or a brassiere and culottes³⁹. Due to legislation, the performers movements were limited, and the exotic dance performances of the 1950s gave way to more explicit strip-tease acts that involved less and less choreography. Because performers were prohibited from moving their bodies in a suggestive way, their routines were more oriented towards explicit poses⁴⁰.

In the spring before Expo, municipal authorities investigated clubs with topless

³⁸Al Palmer, "The Lower Main -- Is it on the way back?" *Gazette* 26 Jan. 1963: 13.

³⁹Fonds de Comité de Moralité Publique, Enquêtes maison (1946-1958), *Report*, Service de la Police, 5 Feb. 1958.

⁴⁰"Pour une législation sur le strip-tease," *Le cabaret* May 1966.

dancers and tried to persuade cabaret owners to change their entertainment format on the basis that heterosexual 'couples' were a more stable clientele and that all-male audiences caused problems of morality. As a consequence, an offensive was launched against topless 'go-go' dancers in clubs frequented by the middle classes⁴¹. As the strip-tease became more explicit, there were fewer and fewer women among the clientele of the cabarets, and there was an increasing gap between the morality of the women who frequented or worked in these spaces, and gender norms of mainstream society⁴².

Regulation of these spaces by municipal authorities, therefore, contributed to the construction of boundaries between women. Along the Lower Main, strippers and 'go-go' dancers were the most visible of the various groups of women who were placed on the margins of mainstream society because of their association with this space and the practice of their everyday lives. The street space of the Lower Main, moreover, was still constructed as the most distressing and visible site of female prostitution⁴³. *Dimanche-Matin* published a photograph of St. Lawrence Street looking south from Ste. Catherine and the caption read "La rue St-Laurent, défendue aussi aux raccoleuses?" [St. Lawrence Street, also off limits

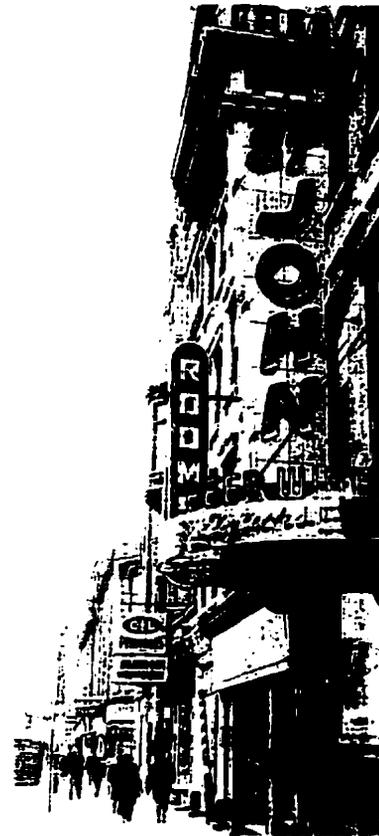


Figure 6.5: The Café St. John, ca. 1960. Source: Proulx (1997).

⁴¹"Il n'y aura pas de seins nus à Montréal, durant l'Expo..." *Dimanche-Matin* 2 April 1967; "Pendant qu'on traque les 'topless', les 'grosses légumes' font des orgies," *Le Monde du Spectacle* 10-16 April 1967.

⁴²In the early 1960s, letters to the editor and newspaper articles reveal that women in mainstream society objected to the changes made to the cabarets, particularly the rise of the striptease and the links between female bar workers and dancers, and prostitution. "Ce que je pense de nos cabarets," *Le magazine MacLean* Nov. 1961: 14, 51-52.

⁴³"Les call-girls" *La Parie* 29 July - 4 Aug. 1965; *Dimanche-Matin* 10 July 1960.

to streetwalkers?]⁴⁴ (Figure 6.4). Although call-girl networks were developing as a means to subvert police surveillance (Lacasse 1994), many sex-trade workers were still working on the streets and in the cabarets. In the hierarchy of prostitution in Montreal in the 1960s, the Lower Main lay somewhere between the more hidden and elite market in the west and the blatant street prostitution of the east (Lacasse 1994; Limoges 1964). Clubs such as the Café St. John (Figure 6.5), the Canasta and the Rialto were still important sites of prostitution⁴⁵. Dancers and club staff in the cabarets were often connected to prostitution, and as Expo approached, the newspapers turned the spot light to clubs along the Lower Main where tourists might fall victim to these 'dangerous women'.

While the women of the Lower Main were constructed as marginal in the popular imagination, there was a blurring of the boundaries between their different occupations. Prostitution in cabarets and night clubs all over Montreal was the central focus of By-Law 3614. In its early stages Police Director Gilbert tried to convince city council that the by-law should apply only to female employees of establishments where liquor is sold, and to prevent them from sharing a table with clients. The police argued that they had received many complaints from male tourists who had been handed huge bills at the end of an evening. This led them to raid the following clubs, all of which were located near the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine: Café St. John, Rodéo, le Cabaret, Pal's and the Casbah⁴⁶. With the prospect of many tourists present in the city for Expo, the police declared a "war on sharpies" and 'b-girls', dancers and female club employees who earned a commission from the bar tabs of the clients that they entertained⁴⁷.

As many historians have shown, women who work in bars have always been

⁴⁴*Dimanche-Matin* 10 July 1960.

⁴⁵"La 'Main' refuse de mourir et soupire après l'Expo," *La Patrie* 20 March 1966.

⁴⁶Claude Asselin, "Gilbert s'explique," *Montreal-Matin* 16 Aug. 1966.

⁴⁷Tim Burke, "Police launch night club war," *Montreal Star* 26 July 1966.

subject to the questioning of their respectability because of the gender defined tasks that they perform and the spaces where they work (Bailey 1990; Kirkby 1991). Cabaret dancers and waitresses in the night clubs of the Lower Main had a very certain relationship to sex-trade work. The rapport between clients and performers was more difficult to control in this district than uptown, because the performers on the Main were not permitted to be members of the union. The first women to be arrested under the new by-law worked at Pal's Café located on Ste. Catherine, a few doors east of St. Lawrence⁴⁸. By-law 3614, and the newspaper coverage of this issue, built a particular construction of gender relations and sexuality in these spaces. Female bar employees were both pawns of the club owners and devious and malicious women. Clients, especially those visiting the big city from rural Québec, were 'poissons', or dupes, who needed police protection from Montreal's urbane women who roped them into paying bills "as long as the bar"⁴⁹. They were described as 'appâts dangereux' [dangerous lures], 'habiles créatures' [skillful creatures] who threatened tourism. Just as the corner of St. Lawrence and Ste. Catherine signified the antithesis of respectable 'womanhood', the women associated with these bars and cafés served as representations of a transgressive and marginal performance of their gender (Kendrick 1987; McDonough 1993).

When the by-law actually came before council, however, it was suggested that it be extended to apply to all club employees⁵⁰. This was primarily because in bars where the shows were organized for 'the third sex', "...les danseuses qui sont en réalité des

⁴⁸*Allô Police* 26 March 1967.

⁴⁹Jean-Claude Trait, "On se passera des billets doux mais il y aura moins de 'poissons' qui paieront un coup," *Le Petit Journal* 19 Feb. 1967.

⁵⁰Florian Bernard, "Montréal adopte des règlements sévères contre la prostitution dans les cabarets," *La Presse* 10 March 1967; "New by-law cracks down on bar girl mingling," *Montreal Star* 10 March 1967; "Règlements sévères visant à protéger les touristes contre certains 'appâts dangereux'," *Journal de Montréal* 23 March 1967.

hommes déguisés en femmes viennent racoler les clients"⁵¹. Displacement and deception in a world of misleading signs for men is central to this discourse on the modern metropolis. The bars, many of which had already been targeted by permit refusals and surveillance, added an even greater element of deception to the image of the social world of the Lower Main. Bars such as the Rialto, the Casbah and Café St. John were sites of a flourishing francophone transvestite culture that served a mixed clientele that was dominated by gay men, and included lesbians.

THE WORLD OF THE 'THIRD SEX'

During the Expo clean-up campaign certain spaces along the Lower Main were not only contentious because of the threat that prostitution posed to tourists. They were threatening because of the gender ambiguity of the sex-trade workers, dancers and performers. Through the appeals of the club owners, it became clear that the Expo clean-up was directed specifically at the social world surrounding the transvestite shows. Crime reports from the early 1960s indicate that many taverns featured transvestite performances and that transvestites were paid to dance with the club's clientele⁵². These were the clubs which had the greatest difficulty getting their licenses renewed during the Expo clean-up. While numerous convictions for assault, attempted murder, gross indecency, prostitution and serving minors had occurred in each of these clubs, their clientele was composed primarily of gay men, and most featured transvestite shows as their main form of entertainment⁵³. The management of the Arlequin Aux Deux Masques, for example, went

⁵¹"...dancers who are in reality men disguised as women come and solicit the clients..." (author's translation). Florian Bernard, "Montréal adopte des règlements sévères contre la prostitution dans les cabarets," *La Presse* 10 March 1967.

⁵²"Danseuse arrêtée en plein spectacle; le juge devra-t-il l'appeler mademoiselle ou monsieur?" *Le nouveau journal* 26 March 1962; Bernard Morrier, "La Casbah donne du fil à retordre aux policiers," *La Presse* 15 April 1962; Claude Poirier et Bernard Brisset des Nos, "Un cabaretier qui tremble devant la pègre de Montréal," *Montréal-matin* 3 April 1967; "Quatre homosexuels, arrêtés au Café Arlequin, sont condamnés," *Le nouveau journal* 20 March 1962.

⁵³Claude Poirier et Bernard Brisset des Nos, "Un cabaretier qui tremble devant la pègre de Montréal," *Montréal-matin* 3 April 1967; Bernard Morrier, "La Casbah donne du fil à retordre aux policiers," *La Presse* 15 April 1967; John Yorston, "Club charges discrimination," *Montreal Star* 22 April 1967.

before the court in April 1967 for a variety of infractions, but the provincial liquor squad built their case against the proprietors by emphasizing that "...the club's clientele seemed to be composed largely of homosexuals"⁵⁴. The Café Casbah went through a similar process. The owner argued that transvestite performers were much appreciated by his clientele, but that he was willing to abandon this type of show if it would help police prevent organized crime and violence. When the owner applied for a renewal in 1967, he was successful, but the District Attorney stipulated that taxis be instructed not to take tourists to this club because it was a "cheap and sleazy bar" that featured transvestite shows⁵⁵.

By the mid-1970s transvestite shows were a predominant element of the entertainment world of the Lower Main because they offered a solution to the legal limits governing strip-tease acts with regard to nudity and suggestive body movements. The clubs of Lower Main were specifically the home of a francophone transvestite culture (Higgins 1998). The Café St. John changed its name to the Saguenay in the 1970s (Figure 6.6), and became a club that exclusively featured transvestite acts. It was here that well known local performers such as Mimi de Paris and Belinda Lee drew their audiences (Figure 6.7). The Saguenay was exclusively oriented towards this entertainment, but the Rialto and the Lodéo also featured transvestite entertainers. For those who remembered the grand era of the 'open city' (Chapter 5), when the Lower Main was so central to heterosexual sociability, the rise of a distinctive world of francophone transvestite culture signalled the 'death' of the Main⁵⁶. As one local booking agent told the press in 1974, "...il y a peu d'animation sur la Main, entre Vitré et Sainte-Catherine. Il reste, somme toute,

⁵⁴John Yorston, "Club charges discrimination," *Montreal Star* 22 April 1967.

⁵⁵Claude Poirier et Bernard Brisset des Nos, "Un cabaretier qui tremble devant la pègre de Montréal," *Montréal-matin* 3 April 1967; Bernard Morrier, "La Casbah donne du fil à retordre aux policiers," *La Presse* 15 April 1967.

⁵⁶Christiane Berthiaume, "La 'Main' est bien morte," *La Presse* 13 July 1974; Christiane Berthiaume, "Seule attraction de la Main: les travestis," *La Presse* 18 July 1974.

une seule attraction: les travestis"⁵⁷.

While these performers were perhaps the most visible representation of gender ambiguity, by the mid-1960s the street was already known as 'the world of the third sex', a term commonly used to describe gays and lesbians as gender 'inverts' in medical discourses⁵⁸. This aspect took centre stage in the popular and sensationalist press. In 1969, for example, the *Nouvelles et polices judiciaires* announced that the red-light was no longer "...the preferred headquarters of the underworld", but rather "...the

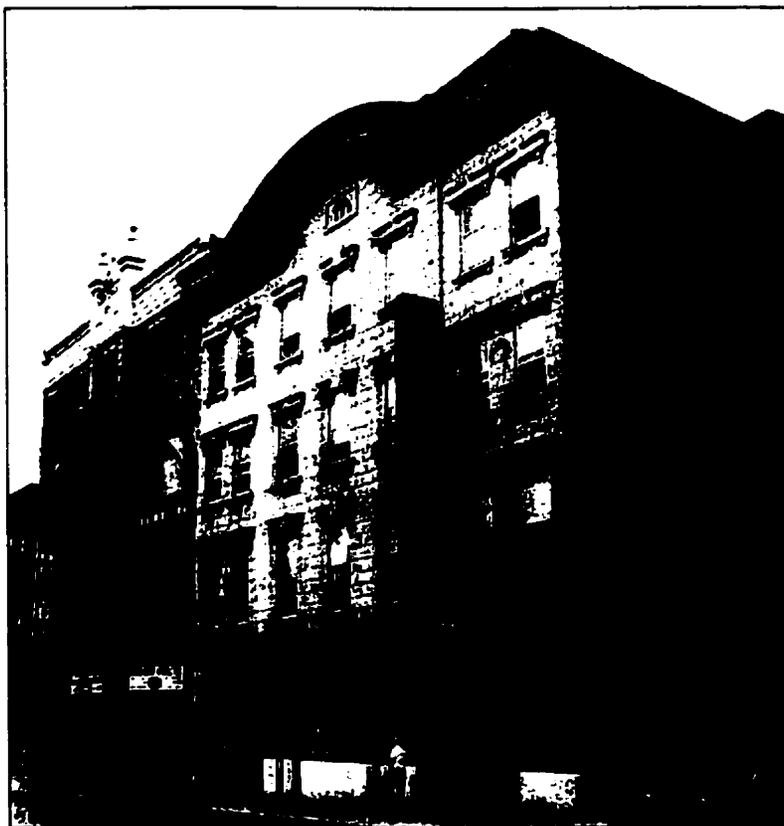


Figure 6.6: The Saguenay, 1975. Source: Communauté Urbaine de Montréal - Planification, in Bourassa and Larrue (1993).

preferred hang-out of lesbians and homosexuals [who] are congregating in the rooming houses of St-Lawrence Boulevard"⁵⁹. Although the clubs of the Lower Main were never the exclusive domain of any particular marginal social group as they were shared by heterosexual couples, single men, prostitutes, alcoholics, small-time criminals, gay men,

⁵⁷"...there is little excitement along the Main between Vitre and Ste-Catherine. There remains only one attraction in all: the transvestites" (author's translation). Christiane Berthiaume, "Seule attraction de la Main: les travestis," *La Presse* 18 July 1974.

⁵⁸For a discussion of the medical construction of gays and lesbians as 'inverts' see Chauncey (1994).

⁵⁹*Nouvelles et polices judiciaires* 1969 15(7): 6 in. Higgins and Chamberland (1992): 427.

lesbians and transvestites, the area was the centre of an emerging working-class, francophone gay and lesbian bar culture, a district where altered gender roles and performances were more acceptable than in the uptown bars and cafés on Stanley and Peel streets (Chamberland 1993; Higgins 1998). In these spaces, prostitutes, gay men, lesbians, strippers, dancers, and bar workers, shared the same social space in the city's socio-sexual hierarchy (Chamberland 1993). Diverse forms of marginal 'womanhood' informed the construction of the Lower Main as a place of danger and immorality. Leaving behind their family homes in the inner city and small cities, the Lower Main was a place where working-class gay men, lesbians, or 'fallen women' could find a place in the numerous social networks of the clubs and rooming houses, including those of prostitution and organized crime⁶⁰.

Like the prostitutes and 'b-girls', gays and lesbians were constructed as a threatening social element of the cabarets. Homosexual panic that developed in Canada leading up to the Omnibus Bill (1969), which decriminalized 'private' homosexual acts in Canada (Kinsman 1987; McLeod 1996), coincided with the redevelopment and surveillance of the Lower Main⁶¹. In 1964 the sensationalist press warned that "Montréal aux prises avec un problème sérieux celui du troisième sexe" and the Lower Main was the

⁶⁰Chamberland's (1993, 1998) interviews with lesbians who were part of this social world, however, reveal that these women were part of an interdependent world of marginality that centred around prostitution and cabaret spaces controlled by organized crime. Chamberland (1993, 1998) found that some lesbians became 'butch' protectors, pimps or were themselves prostitutes and that prostitutes often had lesbian relationships and/or frequented the gay and lesbian bar spaces to escape the police and to avoid clients.

⁶¹In April 1965, the Captain of the Montreal morality squad claimed that he had arrested 150 homosexuals in Montreal over the past year. Sidney Katz, "Les 'homos' au Canada, ils sont plus d'un million...", *Magazine MacLean* 7 April 1964: 32, 60-65. The municipal court judge Pascal Lachapelle also drew public attention to the increasing numbers of men being convicted for soliciting, obscene displays and "acting in a manner to shock citizens". Convictions for crimes related to homosexuality rose from 25 in 1960 to 166 in 1964. Jean Côté, "L'homosexualité: les policiers de Montréal face à un problème grandissant," *Le nouveau Samedi*. 20-26 March 1965: 1, 14-17; Norm Williams, "Says homosexuals on the increase here: Judge's observation," *Montreal Star* 6 Feb. 1965: 59. In 1968, *Le petit journal* reported that the Montreal police had accumulated files on 12,000 known or suspected homosexuals. "12,000 homos!" *Le petit journal* 1 Sept. 1968: 12. Sensationalist newspapers also attempted to alert the public to the rising number of lesbians in Québec and estimated that there were 90,000 in Montreal. "Le monde interdit des lesbiennes," *Zéro* Summer 1964.

first visible centre of this contentious social change⁶². As Higgins and Chamberland (1992) have shown, the sensationalist press such as *Ici Montréal* depicted the 'butches' that frequented the Café St. John as "male sexual delinquents" who aggressively seduced innocent women and defended their territory⁶³. The cabarets and taverns, however, were not the only spaces that were constructed as a 'moral problem' with regards to homosexuality.

The Lower Main overall was depicted as the 'world of the third sex', a vortex for gays and lesbians, and served as evidence of this mounting 'problem':

Point n'est besoin d'être sociologue pour constater que le nombre d'homosexuels, pour cela il n'y a qu'à aller faire une promenade sur la rue Saint-Laurent si possible vers les quatre ou cinq heures, augmente de semaine en semaine, or pour chaque petit monsieur que vous croisez il y a trois lesbiennes, c'est en effet la proportion que donnent toutes les enquêtes faites sur ce sujet⁶⁴.

Because the sensationalist press generally reported crimes, they painted a picture of the Lower Main in the form of 'indecent acts' committed by gay men in the taverns, movie theatres, and rooming houses. Theatres of the former bright lights district, such as the Midway and the Crystal, were increasingly under suspicion, not for what was playing on the screen, but for what occurred in the space⁶⁵. Condemning a man found committing

⁶²"Montreal is battling a serious problem, that of the third sex" (author's translation). "Montréal aux prises avec un problème sérieux celui de troisième sexe." *Zéro* Spring 1964.

⁶³*Ici Montréal* periodically depicted Ramona of Café St-John on the Main as a territorial lesbian who would take on anyone who would invade her turf. Supposedly, "...she has more scars than a veteran of the foreign legion" (Higgins and Chamberland 1992: 427).

⁶⁴"It's not necessary to be a sociologist to notice that the number of homosexuals, for that one only needs to walk along St. Lawrence Street if possible at around four or five in the morning, increases from week to week, and for each little guy with whom you cross paths there are three lesbians, which is actually the proportion found in all inquiries made into the subject" (author's translation). "Le monde interdit des lesbiennes," *Zéro* Summer 1964: 18-20.

⁶⁵In the 1950s the Midway (1235 St-Laurent) and the Crystal (1223 St-Laurent) were second-run theatres that showed kung-fu, horror and Tarzan movies. In the 1960s they became the cruising spaces of gay men. In the early 1970s, the Midway was transformed into Cinema Eve, a heterosexual porn theatre, in order to

'acts' with the person sitting beside him in the Midway Cinema in 1962, Judge Lachapelle stated: "Selon mon expérience de magistrat, il semble qu'au cinéma Midway, ce n'est pas sur l'écran qu'est l'attraction, mais dans la salle"⁶⁶. Through these reports, a relationship between the spaces of the Lower Main and homosexual acts developed as a discourse that coded this space as the domain of the 'third sex'. During another arrest in a theatre, for example, the press described the defendant as "...un 'régulier' d'une taverne sise tout près et qui a la réputation d'être le lieu de rendez-vous des 'tapettes' de la Main"⁶⁷.

The construction of the Lower Main as the 'world of the third sex' was also related to the discovery of male prostitution rings, notably two major prostitution rings in the rooming houses and restaurants of the street in the 1960s. In 1964 an article appeared in *Zéro* regarding male prostitution that sensationalized the problem of the 'third sex' on St. Lawrence, described it as part of the landscape of this street, and as familiar as the french fries merchants:

On les retrouve du côté de la rue Saint-Laurent. Ils ont cheveux teints, les gestes larges, le rire aigu et agaçant, la démarche féline. Ils vont par petits groupes, jacassant fort, interpellant les automobilistes, souriant aux passants, souvent moqueurs, ceux ne sont pas des filles, ceux ne sont pas des garçons⁶⁸.

stop gay male cruising and because, owners argued, heterosexual porn films attracted a larger clientele. In an interview with *La Presse*, the former manager of the Midway described how gay men went back and forth between the Midway and the Crystal in search of public sex in the 1960s. Christiane Berthiaume, "Albert Gagnon raconte l'époque joyeuse de la rue Saint-Laurent," *La Presse* 15 July 1974.

⁶⁶"In my experience as Magistrate, it seems that at the Midway Cinema, its not what's on the screen that is the attraction but what's happening in the theatre" (author's translation). "Quatre homosexuels, arrêtés au Café Arlequin, sont condamnés," *Le nouveau journal* 20 March 1962.

⁶⁷"...a regular at a tavern located very close by which has a reputation for being a meeting place for the fags of the Main" (author's translation). "Le pénitencier 's'enrichit' d'une autre tapette bien connue: [...]," *Ici Montréal* 23 March 1963: 13.

⁶⁸"They can be found around St. Lawrence Street. They have dyed hair, exaggerated gestures, irritating high-pitched laughs, and feline walk. They travel in small groups, chattering loudly, calling out to passing cars, smiling at passers-by, often mocking, these are not girls, these are not guys" (author's translation). "Montréal aux prises avec un problème sérieux celui de troisième sexe," *Zéro* Spring 1964.

In 1968, another ring was found in a rooming house on the second and third floors of 1433-45 St-Laurent in which 54 people were arrested, many them young men between fourteen and seventeen years of age⁶⁹.

These discoveries led to investigations of 'homosexuality' and male prostitution by the sensationalist press, which rarely distinguished between the two. Typically, these articles asserted that prostitution on the Lower Main by 1968 was becoming almost exclusively male:

La place qu'elles [female prostitutes] occupaient sur cette partie de la rue Saint-Laurent comprise entre les rues Sherbrooke et Craig appelée familièrement la Main, est maintenant occupée presque exclusivement par des prostitués mâles homosexuels⁷⁰.

They also stressed the predominance of young, rural French-Canadians among these "'filles de joie' de nouveau genre"⁷¹:

[Il y a] ce qui dirait que les petits monsieurs qui hantent la rue Saint-Laurent sont d'origine anglo-saxonne. Ceux sont, hélas, toutes Canadiens français qui viennent en grande majorité de nos comptés ruraux⁷².

The concentration of former red-light activities in the blocks between Ste.

⁶⁹The depiction of this prostitution ring implicated not only the rooming house and street spaces, but also the restaurants, where groups of young men apparently congregated awaiting their clientele and where pimps often worked as cashiers or waiters. "Les dessous du plus vaste réseau d'homosexuels jamais mis à jour dans la métropole," *Le nouveau samedi* 16 November 1968: 2-5.

⁷⁰"The place that they [female prostitutes] used to occupy on this portion of St. Lawrence Street that lies between Sherbrooke and Craig Streets, familiarly called the Main, is now occupied almost exclusively by male homosexual prostitutes" (author's translation). "L'Homosexualité," *Sept-Jours* 14 Dec. 1968: 17-19.

⁷¹"L'Homosexualité," *Sept-Jours* 14 Dec. 1968: 17-19.

⁷²"There are those that would say that these little guys that haunt St. Lawrence Street are of Anglo-Saxon origin. They are, unfortunately, all French Canadians who come from our rural areas" (author's translation). "L'Homosexualité," *Sept-Jours* 14 Dec. 1968: 17-19.

Catherine and de la Gauchetière and the transformation of the clubs and social world of this district was slowly creating a shift in the popular discourse regarding the Main. From the bold and threatening world of the 1950s, the Lower Main slowly became a benign space of sexual marginality and poverty. It developed as a representation of unachieved liberation, the only possible world for young people trying to escape their place of origin, and leaving behind what was for them the oppressive social order of the family. While an unrealized desire for fame on the part of transvestite performers and second-rate female chorus line members, and of liberation of gays and lesbians was part of the construction of the Lower Main as a place of 'broken dreams', this discourse was also strongly linked to the role it played in the corruption of the province's youth:

La rue Saint-Laurent conserve toujours son attrait mystique, elle enflamme les imaginations des jeunes, comme un port lointain. Il faut dire qu'on peut vivre avec peu dans ce quadrilatère qui s'élève autour du Monument National. Les amitiés se lient très vite, on s'aide, on s'épaule. Les anciens hébergent les nouveaux arrivés, les introduisent dans ces cercles fermés où naissent les grands amours.⁷³

Essentially, this was an anti-urban discourse in which the Lower Main, a representation of the 'open city' of the past, was positioned as a place that corrupted rural and urban youths. Those with low social status or skills who sought independence would eventually find themselves at the end of the line on the Lower Main, in a world of vice, corruption and exploitation. The notion of 'the dream', involves a particular set of gender relations, where all people, male and female, who attempt to flee the patriarchal power relations of the family and traditional culture, end up struggling for survival within another patriarchal social order, meaning the sex-trade and organized crime. The Lower Main was no longer just a place to which wayward daughters were drawn, it was also infecting and stealing

⁷³"St. Lawrence Street always retains its mystical attraction, it kindles the imagination of the young like a far-off port. It is true that one can live with very little in this quadrilateral surrounding the Monument National. The friendships happen very quickly, helping each other, supporting each other. The old shelter the new arrivals, introduce them into these circles where great romances are born" (author's translation) "L'Homosexualité," *Sept-Jours* 14 Dec. 1968: 17-19.

the sons of Québec. Feminized men and unruly and discarded women became representations of the antithesis of the liberated Québécois and the post-war city, reminders that asymmetrical power relations of gender and sexuality are ever present.



Figure 6.7: "The Choir of Whores" at the corner of La Main and La Catherine in a Radio-Québec Production of *Sainte-Carmen de la Main*, 1980. Source: *La Presse* 5 April 1980: B9.

MORE BROKEN DREAMS?

With the presentation of *Sainte-Carmen de la Main* in 1976, the only one of his plays to focus specifically and explicitly on the people and spaces of the Lower Main of the 1960s and 1970s, Tremblay made a major departure in style and political content (Godin and Mailhot 1988). As Tremblay's "Opera de quatre-sous de la Main" [Four Penny opera of the Main], *Sainte-Carmen* represents the culmination and termination of Tremblay's engagement with the Lower Main as a space of representation as well as an aggressive political statement. The story turns around a single event, the day of Carmen's return to the Main after a six month stint in Nashville to perfect her yodelling skills. Not only is her return greatly anticipated, it represents liberation for the people of the Main. The play opens with the "Choir of the whores of the Main" (Figure 6.7), a chorus of six male and six female prostitutes, describing how the sun came up "like a red fist" over la Catherine earlier that day. Standing in the cold on the corner of the Main and Ste-Catherine after the cabarets had closed, they watch the sun rise over la Catherine in celebration of Carmen's return. "Today la Catherine got a facelift and the Main has been washed.

Carmen is back!" (Tremblay [1976] 1981: 12). Dressed in greying female clothing and grey wigs, the choir represents 'the people of the Main' who have been 'waiting too long' for a better life⁷⁴.

Carmen arrives dressed in a saintly white cowgirl outfit and armed with her country western favourites that she has translated and transformed for the people of the Main. She has decided to "sing about the Main for the Main", rather than singing about the plains of Colorado and the cowboys of Tennessee. That evening, when Carmen sings at the Rodéo, her music gives them the courage to stand up and revolt⁷⁵. Bec-de-Lièvre, the butch dressing room attendant, who represents the reticence of the humble and the weak⁷⁶, has the following response to her performance:

Carmen talked about me! In her songs, Carmen said things that come from my life! She told the story of me and Hélène...and she said it wasn't ugly. She even said it was beautiful! Carmen sang about how my life is beautiful and that me, Harelip....How did she say it?...That I am a love song asleep in a tavern! And Carmen said that I could wake up someday! That if I'd wake up, then the Main would hear from me! Carmen said that deep down inside, I'm strong!⁷⁷

The members of the choir see their stories in her songs and interpret her message as a wake-up call urging them to find the strength to leave the taverns of the Main behind them. As one critic wrote: "Dans cette chanson les prostituées se reconnaissent et se trouvaient belles; les homos et les robineux se reconnaissent et se trouvaient beaux...Les

⁷⁴Adrien Gruslin, "Sainte Carmen de la Main: priez pour elle," *Le Devoir* 22 July 1976.

⁷⁵Raymond Bergeron, "Un chérubin sous une avalanche de femmes," *Perspectives*. 26 April 1975.

⁷⁶Martine Corriveau, "La fin du cycle de Carmen, une curieuse déception," *Le Soleil* 22 July 1976; Adrien Gruslin, "Sainte Carmen de la Main: priez pour elle," *Le Devoir* 22 July 1976.

⁷⁷Michel Tremblay, *Sainte-Carmen of the Main*, trans. John Van Burek (Vancouver: Talonbooks, [1976] 1981) 43.

bas-fonds n'avaient plus honte d'eux mêmes"⁷⁸.

Carmen is, however, a naive liberator, who stands up for what she believes in without considering the effect of her actions or the consequences that might be generated by her opposition. As in most tragedies, Carmen is not without her enemies. Maurice La Piastre, the owner of the Rodéo and current 'King of the Main', is disturbed by Carmen's lyrics because they have the power to alter the power dynamics in a world that he controls (Usmiani 1982). Toothpick, Maurice's hit-man, also has a personal score to settle with Carmen. Toothpick murders Carmen in the shower with two shots of a 12 calibre gun, ending any hope of liberation for the people of the Main. Carmen moves from socialist saviour to martyr, and the social order of dependence and desperation is restored:

Carmen est passée, comme un rayon de soleil, et la nuit est retombée sur la Main. Chacun devant sa 50, chacun avec ses problèmes matériels, chacun avec ses frustrations, ses complexes, ses soucis et ses rares plaisirs échangés contre des piasses⁷⁹.

Toothpick and Maurice pin the murder on Bec-de-Lièvre, explaining that she was sexually frustrated because Carmen had continually rejected her sexual advances. This story serves to discredit Carmen and humiliate and destroy Bec-de-Lièvre, who, once again, is powerless and returns to her post as the ladies' room attendant at the Rodéo.

While the critics recognized the political importance of *Sainte-Carmen* for the Québécois people⁸⁰, it was poorly received and only ran for three nights in July of 1976⁸¹.

⁷⁸"In this song the prostitutes see themselves and find themselves beautiful; the homos and the drunks see themselves and find themselves handsome,...the bottom of society is no longer ashamed of themselves" (author's translation). Jean O'Neil, "Sainte Carmen de la Main, priez pour nous!" *La Presse* 24 July 1976.

⁷⁹"Carmen is gone, like a ray of sunshine, and night has fallen again on the Main. Each person is behind a bottle of 50 [beer], each with their own material problems, each with their own frustrations, complexes, worries and rare pleasures exchanged for small change" (author's translation). Jean-Claude Trait, "La 'Ste Carmen' de Michel Tremblay. Un séditionnel appel à l'anarchie." *Le Jour* 22 July 1976.

⁸⁰Jean O'Neil, "Sainte Carmen de la Main, priez pour nous!" *La Presse* 24 July 1976.

Carmen, as the 'Jeanne d'Arc of the Main', is Tremblay's reply to nationalist critics that were calling for a more reassuring image of the Québécois people from his work. In Carmen he demonstrates that "...le rôle de l'artiste n'est plus de se prostituer, de se déguiser et d'endormir les consciences, mais bien de fouetter les publics et d'arriver sur scène, vêtu de ses seules convictions..."⁸². Seeing this more universal message of Tremblay's work, critics argued that the social world in which the story was situated and the characters could easily be replaced by others⁸³. The sexual marginality of the Lower Main made the rejection of the particularity of 'place' an attractive option for critics. In fact, as Usmiani (1982) has argued, critics were indignant regarding the implication that the people of the Lower Main might be a representation of Québec society. The search for masculine heroes was once again negated by Tremblay's focus on women, transvestites, and a butch, the people who were to be saved from the two male characters, small-time lords of the local social order⁸⁴. Critic Jean O'Neil admitted to identifying with poor men of East Montreal in Tremblay's other plays, but not with the characters of either gender who embodied a more ambiguous or marginal sexual identity, and who inhabited the Lower Main:

...quand Michel Tremblay me parle de la Main. Je vois défiler les putains, les homos, les travestis, les robineux et, sans les mépriser le moins du monde, je ne vois pas autre chose que des putains,

⁸¹The play premiered in Salle Maisonneuve at Place des Arts in July 1976 but was cancelled after three nights following bad reviews. Feeling betrayed and believing in the message of the play, the cast performed *Sainte-Carmen* for free for six nights in October 1976 in a small theatre with 150 seats, le Théâtre de la Main, on St-Lawrence street at de Maisonneuve. Martine Corriveau, "La résurrection de Sainte Carmen de la Main?" *Le Soleil* 25 Sept. 1976; "Sainte Carmen de la Main' présentée en lectures publiques," *Le Devoir* 28 Sept. 1976: 13.

⁸²"...the role of artists is no longer to prostitute themselves, to disguise oneself, and dull the minds of the spectators, but to stir up the public and present a piece full of one's personal convictions..." (author's translation). Michel Tremblay in Michèle Talbot, "Pas de miracle pour l'apparition de Sainte Carmen," *Dimanche-matin* 25 July 1976.

⁸³Martine Corriveau, "La fin du cycle de Carmen, une curieuse déception," *Le Soleil* 22 July 1976.

⁸⁴For a feminist critique of *Ste. Carmen of the Main* see Noël (1980: 42), who argues that Tremblay actually missed the opportunity to let Carmen speak by neglecting to write the controversial lyrics that led to her assassination.

des homos, des travestis et des robineux. Je n'arrive jamais à me reconnaître là-dedans, même si j'en suis.⁸⁵

Tremblay chose to bring *Sainte-Carmen* to the Main for reasons that make the particularities of the site central to his political message. First, in line with the assertion that the role of the artist is to make people uncomfortable, to disturb their sense of themselves, and under pressure to be the cultural representative of the Québécois people, Tremblay refused to cleanse his vision. He argued that as an artist he could say much more speaking from a context that he knew rather than attempting to speak for an entire people. In terms of his characters, he refused to turn them into 'acceptable' national heroes because that would have meant the social and sexual colonisation of himself. Finally, he questioned the rejection of marginal Québécois as a route to self-acceptance. As he stated in 1971, "C'est pour ça que j'veux faire un opéra qui s'déroule sur la Main, parce que la Main, finalement, c'est nous autres"⁸⁶.

CONCLUSION

Building a discourse of 'broken dreams' around the Lower Main in the 1970s had a specific function in the expanding post-war metropolis. First, it was through this imagined geography that boundaries between 'respectable' and 'immoral' women were redrawn. As modernist theorists such as Berman (1982) and Davis (1993) have argued, one of the most powerful new forms of segregation in the American post-war city was the privatisation of central city space and the relegation of "undesirables" to contained areas that lie just outside the boundaries of the downtown core. These disaffected commercial districts were not only truncated by redevelopment schemes that served the development of the downtown core and transportation infrastructure (Berman 1982), but as post-war

⁸⁵ "...when Michel Tremblay speaks to me about the Main. I see a parade of whores, homos, transvestites, drunks and, without looking down upon the lowest, I don't see anything else but whores, homos, transvestites and drunks. I never recognize myself in them, even if I am one" (author's translation). Jean O'Neil, "Sainte Carmen de la Main, priez pour nous!" *La Presse* 24 July 1976.

⁸⁶ "That's why I want to do an opera that unravels on the Main, because, in the end, the Main is us" (author's translation). Michel Bélair, "Michel Tremblay en Europe..." *Le Devoir* 3 July 1971: 11.

redevelopment progressed, suburbanization stripped some inner cities of the working-class families that had the means to leave them behind. As a Canadian city, Montreal does not necessarily conform to this American model -- many inner-city areas maintained their populations and standard of living during this period. As we saw in Chapter 5, however, urban restructuring did have a dramatic effect on the neighbourhoods surrounding the Lower Main. As the distance between new sites of middle-class reproduction and the declining inner-city areas like the Lower Main increased, the 'public women' of the area once again represented the dangers of the metropolis. While this process resembled the reconstruction of gender geographies that occurred during earlier periods of large scale suburbanisation, by the 1960s 'sexual panic' was intensified by the sexual ambiguity of the Lower Main. This mixed social world was now a site of working-class, francophone sociability making it an even stronger counter to the Americanized landscape of suburbia.

The process of constructing this space of containment stemmed from media discourse, particularly crime reporting in the sensationalist press. If urban redevelopment created containment, police surveillance served as a means to reinforce this segregation. Clean-up campaigns and increased security in the area were used to legitimize municipal authorities in the eyes of the public and, when reported in the local media, reinforced the marginal character of the social world and spaces of the Lower Main. As the leaders of organized crime struggled for control over a dwindling resource, their violent clashes depicted in the media gave this section of the border zone an image of a frontier, a world with its own power structure that lay outside of society. While the threat of physical violence was a dominant image, it remained on the surface, and underneath was the more tangible and everyday threat of sexual danger and gender ambiguity. From media reports of police attempts to control organized crime, prostitution and 'indecentcy' emerged as a disciplinary discourse for those who dared to seek freedom from the norms of dominant society and enter a world with its own rules and brutal sense of justice. In a time when the interlocking institutions of the family, sexuality and gender were undergoing dramatic restructuring, the Lower Main became a 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams', a dead-end, an outpost where dreams of liberation were always deferred to practical concerns of survival.

The presence of sex trade, transvestites, and gays and lesbians played a very significant role in defining this section of the Main as a marginal space on the basis of transgressions of gender and sexuality. The possible alignment between the 'third city' and the 'third sex' in this locale is difficult to ignore. It raises many questions about the role of border zones and their representation as sites of copresence, multiplicity and the transgression. While the performance and experience of male and female sexualities that were less accepted elsewhere was possible along the Lower Main in the 1960s and 1970s, this was not a site of liberation from broader power relations of gender, class, language and sexuality. Tremblay's depictions of this locale point to this struggle between liberation and oppression, is a tension that is integral to his own practices of resistance. The creation of distinctive sites of sociability and cultural expression do point to practices of resistance and it could be argued that the 'b-girls', transvestite performers, and the clientele of the district were communicating their transgression of heteropatriarchal gender norms. The border status of the Lower Main did little, however, to disrupt gender relations. The market place continued to dictate unequal relations that shaped the lives of the street's 'feminized subjects' of both genders. The frontier character of the district created by organized crime, surveillance and urban redevelopment reinstated broader societal gender relations in perhaps more brutal forms. Although located along the border, the 'Boulevard of Broken Dreams' was but a container for difference with hard boundaries.

This is not to suggest the Lower Main was not a place where people who experienced extreme marginality elsewhere did not find a place where they could live their alterity. This was an fundamental aspect of the Lower Main and the expression of these different forms of gender and sexuality further coded the Main as a space of difference. Other locales of the Main have had much more fluid boundaries. During the same decade above Sherbrooke Street, another locale was being defined in the long established immigrant shopping enclave. Counter-cultural and student groups were discovering the residential areas of the Plateau Mont-Royal and the Main was becoming an incubator for artistic production. By the 1980s, the garment lofts were increasing



inhabited by artists or served as studios and art galleries. Within these counter-cultural movements, new identities were being expressed and norms of gender and sexuality were being contested by these groups. As we will see, early feminist, homophile and lesbian groups were creating institutions in the area. The imprint of these groups remains part of the current landscape. We turn now to explore one of the many forms of gender and difference to be expressed in this locale.

CHAPTER 7

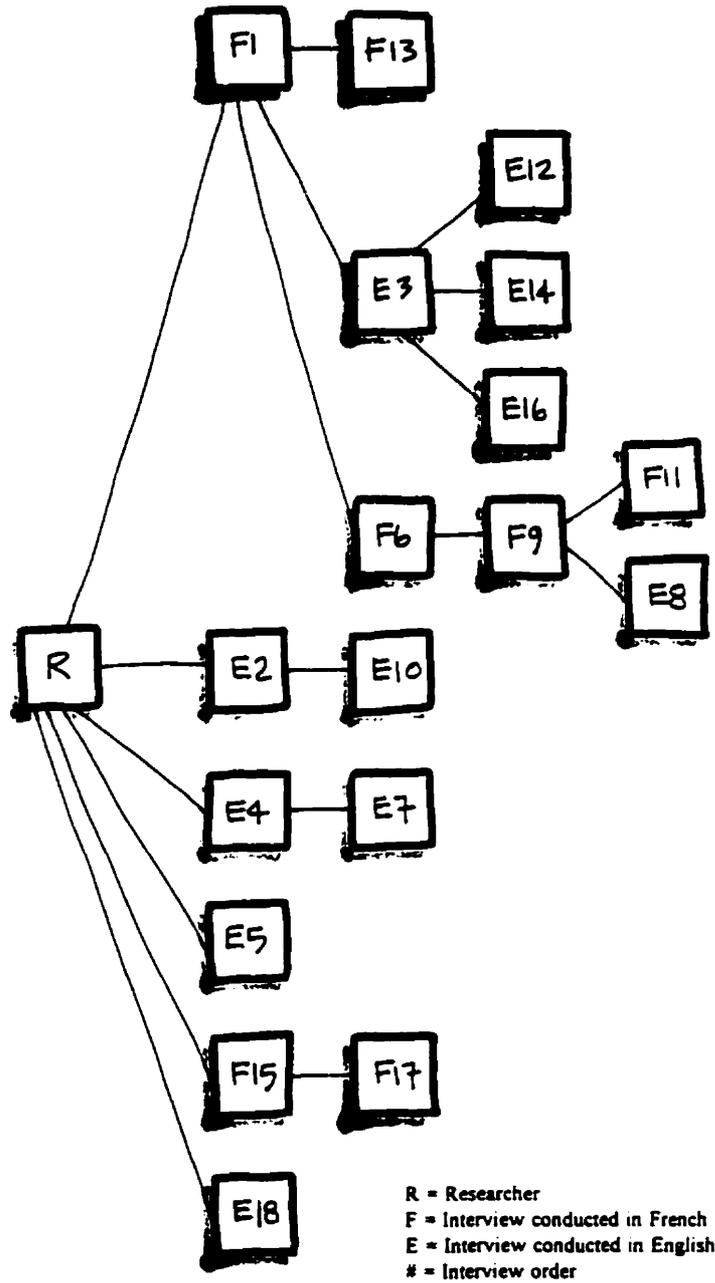
LESBIAN DESIRE AT THE JUNCTURE

When I first moved to Montreal in 1991, I knew the Main as a literary site: it was the world of Mordecai Richler's young Duddy Kravitz coming of age on the Main at the end of World War II and a 'disreputable' and resistant site in Michel Tremblay's dramas of francophone proletariat survival on the margins of the Anglo-capitalist city in the 1950s and 1960s. Like many young anglophone Canadians who adopt Montreal as their home, I soon found my place in the city along this juncture between east and west. Living near this street was how I became acquainted with my adopted city. Daily journeys to the University took me along much of the Main; returning home, grocery shopping in the small shops presented endless possibilities. On weekends, the bars and cafés were theatres of an urbanity that was unknown to even a central-city Vancouverite like myself. In retrospect, it was the 'ethnic' flavour, the romance of an industrial district in decline, the traffic of languages, and the seemingly incomprehensible qualities of the street's cultural codes that captured my imagination. It represented an arrival in Central Canada, where language, national identity, deindustrialization and the history of immigration seemed to be writ large. As a young lesbian, it was also the combination of a constant mobility, the familiarity with its people and spaces, and the fleeting glances made it a site of desire, community, identity and a lesbian sexuality. This space was a magnet where, while sitting in a café, shopping or simply wandering the street, I would be in contact with a locale that teemed with possibilities, even for a lesbian. As I have come to know many of the women who had been once simply attractive personae, I have become less a flâneur and more a participant in an urban public culture that is central to my daily life.

In this chapter, we conclude our examination of the Main by turning to the lesbian subject. I have argued throughout this thesis that the Main is a border zone, where the reorganization of hierarchies of ethnicity, class and sexuality is a central social dynamic of the street. To follow Probyn (1994), the street is a site of conjunction between a variety of desires and ways of being where hierarchies of belonging and difference are

constantly undermined through everyday social interactions. Because street spaces highlight the mobility and multiplicity of bodies, desires and identities, they often serve as important placemaking sites for less visible figures in the urban landscape. These characteristics have led lesbian and feminist authors to describe the Main as a rupture in the space of the masculine city and to inscribe it with possibility as a site from which to rework the gender (Scott 1989, 1993; Probyn 1994). This inscription, although connected to the broader implications of the space as multi-ethnic, cosmopolitan and marginal, arises in part from the material location of politicized lesbians within the city. Images of Gail Scott seated in "the blue café" [Café Méliès] on the Main writing *Spaces Like Stairs* and *Main Brides* are grounded in her circulation along a street that lies within her daily neighbourhood experience. The symbolic use of voyages along the Main in the work of Brossard and Probyn are drawn from their everyday circulation patterns in the city that operate on the levels of memory, imagination and lived experiences.

This chapter brings my own identity into the interpretive framework of this project. More than an exercise in identifying the position from which I speak and write, this chapter is a final explanation of my choice of the Main as a site from which to reimagine the city and my own desire to understand the stories, bodies and material relations that have made the present-day Main. At first glance an examination of a street space through lesbian eyes might seem paradoxical. Lesbians are a subculture that have long struggled for safety and visibility in urban public space. Even more perplexing might be the use of these subjects to examine the Main, where they constitute a singular subculture among many, and one of the less obviously visible groups that is part of the larger spectacle. Turning to the present in this chapter is an entry point into the realm of experience and interpretation, a means by which to highlight more clearly the cleavages between representation and experience of the Main along gender lines. The semi-directed interviews that I conducted in 1996 and 1997 with eighteen lesbians who live in the surrounding area (Plateau Mont-Royal and Mile-End) attest to the important symbolic and material role that this street plays in their everyday lives. Using a snowball sampling method that I initially drew on my own personal contacts (Figure 7.1), I interviewed a



Note: The language of the interview does not represent the mother tongue of the subject. The mother tongues of E3 and E18 are French and the mother tongue of F11 is Spanish.

Figure 7.1: Interview Network, Lesbians living in Plateau Mount-Royal and Mile-End, 1996-1997.

highly integrated network of what I call 'downtown dykes' (anglophone, francophone and allophone¹ women between twenty five and forty years of age who openly identify as lesbian or bisexual and actively participate in lesbian or queer community life) regarding their uses and perceptions of the Main². The sample population had very particular characteristics, which distinguish them from other lesbians in Montreal: they are primarily students, artists, or in the early stages of professional careers, most are well educated, all are tenants and live either alone, with roommates or with a lover, and none had children. In terms of occupations and education, there are exceptions to this general description which attests to the cross-class character of lesbian social networks, especially in this neighbourhood. For all but one, who worked in the gay and lesbian bookstore on the Main, this street is a site of leisure, household reproduction and consumption. The significance of the Main in their everyday lives illustrates the importance of spaces of difference in the articulation of identities of alterity, particularly those which subvert hegemonic arrangements of sex and gender.

STREETS OF DESIRE

In recent years, urban theorists have revisited the city streets to investigate public culture (Sennett 1990; Zukin 1995). Feminists and queer theorists, in particular, reacting to utopias of essentialist and private communities, have adopted this line of inquiry (Knopp

¹Although half of each of these interview participants could be described as anglophone and the other half as francophone, division of the two groups is questionable. Of the interviews that were conducted in English, some were with allophones, women whose mother tongue was French, or women that were first or second generation Canadians. The French language sample was more homogeneous as only one participant was an allophone, one had immigrated from France, and one was a first generation Canadian with French as a mother tongue.

²The interviews were open-ended, but four major lines of questioning were followed: 1) the importance of the Main in their daily lives (Is "the Main" important to you? When do you go to there? What do you do there?), 2) the characteristics of the street that they find attractive (What do you like about this space? How is it unique in Montreal? Which communities are part of this street? Are you seen as a lesbian in this space? Is that comfortable for you?), 3) their perceptions of the social groups that occupy the Main and the place of lesbians (Are lesbians part of this space? Do you identify other lesbians while walking along the street? How would you characterize the lesbians that you see?), and 4) the relative importance of this street within Montreal for lesbians (Do you perceive this street as a lesbian space? A "Queer space"? Is this street more important to Montreal lesbians than other streets? How is it different from other "queer" streets?)

1995; Golding 1993; Probyn 1994; Wilson 1991, 1995; Young 1990a, 1990b). Geographies of queer culture and gay men have long identified the streets as important places of subversion, whether through public sex, cruising or the carnivalesque occupation of the streets during demonstrations and pride parades (Davis 1995; Namaste 1992; Grube 1997). Some writings on lesbian desire and urban space have also taken this turn, suggesting that the lesbian *flâneur* is possible (Munt 1995) and that streets are important sites for the subversion of heterosexual hegemony (Valentine 1996). As Munt (1995: 125) writes:

Lesbian identity is constructed in the temporal and linguistic mobilisation of space, and as we move *through* space we imprint utopian and dystopian moments upon urban life. Our bodies are vital signs of this temporality and intersubjective location. In an instant, a freeze-frame, a lesbian is occupying space as it occupies her.

While lesbians have participated in many strategies to 'queer the public sphere', the ways in which they use streets in everyday contexts to construct their identities and communities is a topic that has received only scant attention (Bouthillette 1997; Valentine 1996). As women, lesbians have had an especially ambiguous relationship to urban public space, because their geographies and landscape seem to be less visible. As Chamberland (1993: 233) has argued "As in society generally, lesbian culture is only faintly visible in the urban environment, which at times makes locating it difficult".

Beginning with studies of gay and lesbian neighbourhoods, researchers initially observed that because women have more limited access to capital, lesbians and gay men produce different spatial patterns in the city (Adler and Brenner 1992; Castells 1983; Lauria and Knopp 1985). More recent studies have identified other factors that affect lesbian spatial concentration. First, lesbian neighbourhoods are less perceptible to outsiders and more often based on social networks and proximity than on territory (Peake 1993; Rothenberg 1995). Secondly, lesbians tend to concentrate in areas with an abundance of affordable housing and in neighbourhoods that are strongly identified with

counter-cultural politics, and it is argued, fit women's needs and values (Bouthillette 1997; Rothenberg 1995). These studies also reveal that an important 'placemaking' practice for lesbians is the appropriation of lesbian friendly spaces (Bouthillette 1997; Rothenburg 1995). Unlike gay men, whose neighbourhoods often develop around gay male commercial entertainments (Bouthillette 1997), lesbians are more likely to live in neighbourhoods in the early stages of gentrification, where housing costs are low, where the population is transient and less defined by nuclear family reproduction, and instead are identified as 'counter-cultural' or 'subcultural' households.

Aside from lesbian bars and 'queer' enclaves (where lesbians are relatively invisible), lesbians tend to socialize in 'possible' public spaces such as along counter-cultural streets and in commercial spaces that are close to their own network-based communities and homes. 'Public space' and 'lesbian desire', however, have a paradoxical relationship. On the surface, the private nature of lesbian sexuality in heterosexist society makes street spaces sites of colonisation by the dominant norms of heterosexual society (Munt 1995; Valentine 1996). At the same time, the accessibility and publicity of street spaces also make them sites of possibility for social interaction, subversion, and the expression of desire (Munt 1995; Valentine 1996). Munt (1995), for example, rewrites the city using images of a mobile lesbian flâneur moving through the streets. As her butch drag flâneurs occupy anonymous and chaotic city streets, they disrupt binary relationships between the genders and the dominant heterosexual codes of desire that reside in urban public space. Valentine (1996) argues further that the lesbian occupation of the streets reveals the fragility of the heterosexual definitions of space because they disrupt a coherent relationship between anatomical sex, sexuality and gender identity. Streets also play an important role as sites of social interaction between lesbians. Social interaction can revolve around accessible public and semi-public spaces such as neighbourhood streets and cafés (Bouthillette 1997; Munt 1995; Rothenberg 1995).

By breaking down the boundaries between the 'marginal' and the 'hegemonic', the public and private, the heterosexual and homosexual, the Main provides possibilities for

less visible subjects to participate in urban public cultures. As I will show, for the lesbians who live near the Main, the street serves as an accessible space where they participate in a broader urban public culture, build a communal identity through social interaction with each other, and locate their identities and desires. Their imagined geographies of the Main demonstrate the importance of such locations in their strategies to claim space outside of the small number of circumscribed lesbian sites. This communality, however, cannot be divorced from the productive force of desire without reinforcing old dichotomies between lesbians, gay men, sex and space: "Spaces of lesbian communality are often highly eroticized, even if the women do not have sex on site; and even the densest localities of male public sex involve considerable cooperation and communal culture" (Ingram *et al.* 1998: 10). Narratives of longing and desire are mapped onto the Main as these women describe how they move through and occupy space with and in search of other women. These narratives of 'desire' could simply be read as subversive tales of sexing space "...through the relational movements of one lesbian body to another" (Probyn 1995: 81 in Valentine 1996: 150), a simple search for a site "...where the cue for the other woman's desire is found" (Brossard 1988: 58). They also reveal the paradox of longing to produce space for social interaction, but to do so without creating 'lesbian territory', and without erasing other aspects of their identities. In short, they reveal a refusal of marginality and singularity, and a desire to move through the city streets as subjects with multiple identities.

THE MAIN: A 'QUEER' BRICOLAGE

In the imagined and lived geography of contemporary Montreal, my research shows that lesbian commercial activities are more strongly associated with spaces other than the Main. After the forcible displacement of gay and lesbian bars from the central city in the late 1970s, a new gay male commercial enclave developed along Ste. Catherine Street East between Anherst and Papineau streets (Remiggi 1998). A few blocks to the east of the Main, St. Denis Street became the new centre of lesbian night-life and feminist activism in the early 1980s. The section of St. Denis Street between Sherbrooke and Mont-Royal has housed most of the city's lesbian bars, feminist bookstores and lesbian-

owned businesses since the mid-1980s (Bourque 1998). This initial claiming of space continues to attract a lesbian clientele to the area, who shop, circulate and frequent restaurants, and who continue to support the street's women-only spaces. At the time of my interviews (1996-97), St. Denis Street housed the only two women-only bars in the city (*L'Exit II* and *O'Side*). The ensemble had been eroding since the early 1990s due to escalating land values and competition from the gay male enclave to the south, Montreal's Gay Village, now touted as a 'queer' enclave. While this district has a residential, commercial and communal function for gay men, my interviews show that for lesbians it is primarily a night-life space, where they socialize and consume as part of a broad-based 'queer' clientele in spaces that are primarily defined and oriented towards a commodified gay male culture.

While St. Denis Street and the Gay Village are today primary sites of lesbian and 'queer' territory, the Main lies at the centre of the more diversified Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood where politicized lesbians have been creating and appropriating public and semi-public spaces since the 1970s. This neighbourhood has provided space to construct lesbian communities, beginning with the use of feminist meeting spaces followed by the development of a large network of lesbian commercial and co-operative venues. As Bourque (1998) demonstrates, between 1973 and 1995, at least four bookstores, nine community centres and thirty bars, restaurants and cafés were created for or by Montreal lesbians, the majority of which were located on the Plateau Mont-Royal. Attracted by the bars, bookstores, cafés, restaurants and community spaces created by these women, many Montreal lesbians joined counter-cultural groups and non-family households in making the affordable housing of the Plateau Mont-Royal their homes, at least in the early stages of their life cycles. Lesbians have found the area attractive for many reasons, such as the concentration of non-traditional family households, the concentration of other bohemian and counter-cultural groups, the development of their social networks in the area, as well as practical concerns of centrality and affordability. The district has also been a primary source of student accommodation as it lies between three university campuses, McGill University and Concordia University to the West, and L'Université de Québec à Montréal

to the Southeast. Within the district, the Main has been an important site of leisure and consumption for these moderate households, appreciated as much for the bargains of its clothing factory outlets, bulk food stores, cheap taverns and restaurants, as for the 'old world', European character of its speciality shops, fish markets and cafés³ (Figures 7.2 and 7.3).

The Main was at the centre of the initial development of lesbian visibility, social interaction and the expansion of gay lesbian and feminist activism in the 1970s. During this decade, Montreal lesbians participated in founding homophile groups

such as Front de libération homosexuelle (1971-72) and Gay McGill (1972-75) (McLeod 1997), while some lesbian feminists began to create meeting places for lesbians within the emergent feminist spaces of the Plateau Mont-Royal (Chamberland 1995). Amidst the 'ethnic' shops, communal organisations of new immigrant groups and factories along the Main, francophone and anglophone lesbian feminists created gathering places for lesbians to make themselves more visible and build social networks and community (Chamberland 1995; Hildebran 1998; Lamoureux 1998). Between September 1973 to March 1974 A



Figures 7.2 and 7.3: Schwartz's Delicatessen and Boulangerie St. Laurent, 1999.

³The local press is filled with walking tours and descriptions of shopping and dining on the Main in the 1970s and early 1980s. For a selective overview see: François Dompierre, "Une épicerie nommée rue Saint-Laurent," *L'Actualité* July 1980: 8; Jennifer Harper, "The polyglot world of Montreal's 'Main'," *Canadian Geographic* April/May 1980: 12-17; "Ils font cuire les poissons avec la tête," *La Presse* 16 July 1974; Evelyn Michaels, "The Main: ethnic charm, sensual delights," *Montreal Star* 29 Aug. 1975; Luana Parker, "Nations united on St. Laurent Street," *Gazette* 22 July 1972; Ross Rogers, "All the news up and down the Main," *Montreal Calendar Magazine* January 1985; Renée Rowan, "Rue Saint-Laurent," *Le Devoir*, 2 June 1980.

Woman's Place (3764 St-Lawrence) housed Montreal Gay Women's consciousness raising groups and Thursday night social evenings⁴. Here, Montreal Gay Women hosted the Second National Canadian Lesbian Conference⁵ in January 1974 that was attended by 100 to 200 women from Central Canada and the North Eastern United States (Chamberland 1995; McLeod 1997). Other communal spaces around the intersection of the Main and Prince Arthur Street were central to lesbian and feminist organizing throughout the 1970s such as *Women's Information and Referral Centre*⁶ (3595 St. Urbain), the *Gay Women's Centre* (3664 Ste. Famille), the *Powerhouse Gallery* (3738 Ste. Dominique), and the café *Entre Femmes* (58 Pine East)⁷. Finally, in 1977, a group of francophone feminists opened *Coop Femmes* on the third floor of a former clothing atelier at 3617 St. Lawrence (Hildebran 1998; Lamoureux 1998). Although this was explicitly a feminist group, the women held dances, weekly discussion groups, concerts and other cultural exhibitions (Hildebran 1998). Like these other groups, *Coop Femmes* was short-lived but was an important space for cultural development among francophone lesbians because it was a visible meeting space within the francophone feminist movement, rendering lesbians more visible in the feminist movement and creating a space around which to build a 'community' (Lamoureux 1998).

By the 1980s, the geography of Montreal lesbian feminist organizing had changed and the Main was eclipsed by St. Denis as a space of formal community development.

⁴For a detailed description of the activities in this space see Hildebran (1998) and "Some of the whys; some of the ways," *Long Time Coming* October/November 1973: 3-6.

⁵For reviews of the 1974 conference by lesbians see "Conference," *Long Time Coming* February 1974: 2-8; Lorna "Dykes unite," *Other Woman* February 1974: 6. For mainstream coverage of the conference see Betty Shapiro "Lesbian conference: a 'step out into the open'," *Gazette* 24 Jan. 1974: 22; Germain Tardif, "Les lesbiennes se disent à l'avant-garde du mouvement d'émancipation de la femme," *La Presse* 23 Jan. 1974: E8.

⁶The Women's Information and Referral Centre was located at this time in the second location of the Montreal Settlement House (Hildebran 1998).

⁷Hildebran (1998) provides a map and a detailed analysis of the fragmentation and relocation patterns of organisations related to Montreal Gay Women between 1973 and 1976.

The Main remained nevertheless an important neighbourhood shopping street for lesbians, who have been continually attracted to the neighbourhood as residents. For those who live in close proximity to the street, daily life is intimately entwined with the Main through activities such as shopping and frequenting cafés. For others living to the



Figure 7.4: *L'Androgyne* Bookstore, 1999.

east or elsewhere in the city, it is a space to explore and meet, albeit less frequently. As such, it is an everyday space where predominantly anglophone and bilingual lesbians comfortably circulate and share social space with a variety of other subcultures. By shopping, frequenting lesbian-friendly cafés and bars, promenading and interacting, lesbian residents of Plateau Mont-Royal make use of the Main to rework the gender and sexual boundaries of belonging in broader society.

The 1990s have again brought some of the city's most important 'queer' institutions to the street and various cafés, bookstores and restaurants are important social spaces in the everyday lives of the women who live in the area. Along the street, the women in my sample identified key anchor points that represent the queer character of the area and specific cafés, bars and restaurants that are seen as 'lesbian friendly' spaces (Bouthillette 1998; Rothenberg 1995). *L'Androgyne*⁸ (3636 St. Lawrence), the city's gay, lesbian and feminist bookstore is located in the block above Prince Arthur Street and it serves as a central community node in the area as well as a visible site of queer sexuality in a socially diverse area of the city (Figure 7.4). To the north of Duluth Street, lie the offices of *Diversité* (the city's gay pride organization), *Les Archives gais du Québec* (the provincial gay archives) and *Image et Nation* (organizers of Montreal's gay and lesbian

⁸*L'Androgyne* was first opened in 1973 by Gay Montreal members and located at 1225A Crescent street. For references to the history of this institution see McLeod (1997).

film festival). In between, a number of other shops, cafés and bars, such as *Bistro 4*, *La Cabane*, *Eurodeli*, *Café Méliès* and *Second Cup*, were common reference points for many of the women I interviewed. While they are not lesbian spaces, they are perceived as semi-public environments that are often frequented by other lesbians. Their proximity to other institutions, the 'openness' of the overall clientele, and the frequent presence of other 'queer' people makes them social spaces where lesbians openly interact with each other and with the many other urban public cultures of the street. Here they are common urban figures that also participate in the student, punk, and artistic communities that form along the Main.

The symbolic space of the Main in these accounts is contained within the portion of the street that was once the central shopping corridor of the 'ethnic' enclave in the 1970s. In their descriptions of their week-end shopping excursions, afternoon café patronage, evening dining and the taverns that they frequent, it was clear that such activities take place between Prince Arthur and Duluth Streets. The area to the south, between Prince Arthur and Sherbrooke streets, has been subject to intense levels of reinvestment which have created a young elite landscape of upscale bars, restaurants and multinational clothing stores. Although some of the women I interviewed occasionally patronize these spaces and walk through this portion of the street, they saw it as incongruous, a space occupied at night by a non-residential population of wealthy heterosexuals: "Donc, cette section là de Saint-Laurent, je trouve que c'est une section qui est très jet-set. C'est vraiment les straights qui vont là, là. C'est les straights qui arrivent de partout qui sont là sur un cruise. C'est les apparences qui content là, puis nous autres?"⁹ (Béatrice, early 30s). Prince Arthur Street seemed to represent a hard southern boundary line between the socially diverse shopping street and the 'hot' area, described as a "bastion of heterosexuality" (Janice, late 20s). The strong identification with the old 'ethnic' shopping street was more than a function of the types of businesses. The area

⁹"In that part of St. Lawrence, I find that its an area that's really 'jet-set'. It's really the straights that go there, the straights who come from everywhere and are there to cruise. It's appearances that count there, and us?" (author's translation).

between Prince Arthur and Duluth Street was also the most symbolic in terms of its social dynamic and as a site of possible social interaction. In short, it was the portion of the street that most women perceived to be both most diverse and most 'open', the place where lesbian urban public cultures are a possibility.

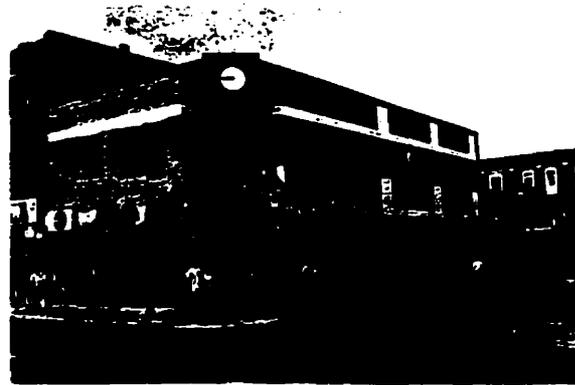
LESBIANS IN THE CROWD

*C'est comme on fait partie de la foule
urbaine*¹⁰

(Anne, francophone, early 30s)

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the Main has developed as an interstitial site in the material and

imagined geography of Montreal. In this 'space of difference', social interaction embodies Young's (1990a) ideal of "unassimilated otherness". The premise of framing the Main in this manner, has been to argue that the social and cultural diversity of this space alters relations of power by disrupting and at times inverting established gender norms. In the narratives of lesbians who use the space of the Main, the importance of social and cultural diversity in shaping the nature of social interaction is strongly apparent. Like many other Montrealers, the women in this sample found the Main an attractive space for urban exploration because of the 'ethnic' diversity of its shops and the populations that create space along the street: "C'est comme je disais, la diversité des gens, le côté ethnique, une boutique à l'autre, ce soit hongroise, zagreb, portugaise, polonaise, juive. C'est ces gens



Figures 7.5 and 7.6: Saturday Afternoon on St. Lawrence Boulevard looking north from Prince Arthur Street and from Guilbault Street, 1999.

¹⁰"It's like we're part of the urban crowd" (author's translation).

qui font la place aussi. Un côté ouvert"¹¹ (Irène, mid-30s). For most, the traditional multiethnic diversity of the street was the most obvious marker of social diversity. Most characterized the Main as a space shared by ethnic groups and they cited West Indian, Portuguese, Jewish, Italian, South Asian and African populations as the primary groups producing space along the street. When asked to describe the people who frequent the Main, they also included young families and couples, single residents, students, squeegee punks, and gays and lesbians as identifiable populations. Lesbians were seen, therefore, as one population among many, only one aspect of identity expressed and experienced within a multitude of other forms of identity and regimes of belonging.

On a practical level, most women saw the Main as a 'shared space' and were hesitant to describe it as a 'queer' space despite the important role it plays in their everyday lives.

...it's a lesbian space in that lesbians have taken some space on it, but along with many other people. Many, many other people have taken space on St. Laurent. It seems to be this magnetic place where people feel like they can have some space on it. 'I'll take this chunk and you'll take that chunk and then we'll all be here' (Dana, mid-30s).

As one woman stated, "...I'm not sure it's anymore a queer space than it is a Portuguese space, or an East Indian space. It's a space that's shared" (Robyn, late 20s). Another argued that it might be a lesbian space but it is also "... a lot of other spaces too. It's also a gay space, it's also an ethnic space, it's also a poor space..." (Josée, early-30s).

As a shared space, there is no single dominant register of belonging along this portion of the Main. Differences in terms of class, ethnicity, language, gender and sexuality constantly confront one another. As one woman who lives in the area and works

¹¹"It's as I was saying, the diversity of the people, the ethnic character, from one boutique to the next, be it Hungarian, Zagreb [sic], Portuguese, Polish, Jewish. It's those people who make the place too...an open character" (author's translation).

on the Main stated: "Everything is different on St. Laurent Street. Nothing matters. And my sexuality doesn't matter on St. Laurent. I guess that's what it is. That's what I appreciate the most about it" (Josée, early-30s). While 'ethnic' and social diversity does not necessarily erase heteropatriarchal relations of power that render lesbians invisible, the lack of a singular definition seems on some level to disrupt the hierarchies of difference that determine other urban spaces (Probyn 1995). The Main is the territory belonging to none, making it an accessible site to many, especially for those who lack access to public space. On the ground, many lesbians articulated this process by describing the Main as a space where there is no common denominator. One woman described the social dynamic in the following manner:

I think it's a space of diversity in the way that I really like diversity, not just sort of mouthing diversity like 'let's all be diverse', but it's about being dynamically diverse ...such contradictory things are happening all at once where you have such different kinds of communities colliding and yet they kind of are not really even aware of each other, and they are, at the same time (Dawn, late-30s).

In the copresence of differences and the form of situational interaction that takes place along the Main appears to embody the paradoxical combination of "strangeness and familiarity, distance or nearness, indifference or involvement" that became the hallmark of modern urban life in the late nineteenth century (Yúdice 1988: 231). In this respect the Main resembles descriptions of modern urbanism found in the writings of late nineteenth century Paris by *flâneurs* such as Baudelaire and Rimbaud (Berman 1982; Grafmeyer and Joseph 1979; Lofland 1973; Ross 1988; Sennett 1970, 1991). Here, where differences collide, where social interaction constantly shifts between anomie and communality, strangeness and familiarity, and where a lesbian in the crowd is a possibility.

The Main, however, is not simply a street in a modern metropolis, it is a place marked by differences based on class, ethnicity and language, that draws together and attracts many alternative and counter-hegemonic populations. These lesbian descriptions

of the Main stress the importance of other counter-cultural groups in reinforcing an awareness of difference and creating a more generalized site of resistance. The women in my sample often described the Main as an alternative space that has the power to attract people who revel in its diversity and deter those that would not accept its parameters: "Saint-Laurent a un côté un peu alternatif, 'underground', t'sais... C'est pas tout le monde qui aime ça, Saint-Laurent"¹² (Irène, mid-30s). The importance of other and interrelated alternative communities in creating a counter-cultural space was highly significant making daily social interaction comfortable for lesbians. In short, "...on St. Laurent it's just so full of freaks that you're never the weirdest one there" (Martha, late-20s). There are all sorts along the street:

...people who are conservative, liberal, [with] blue or green hair, whatever. You see it all, the whole gamut. In that aspect I find that people tend not to look or stare or tend not to be shocked by [homosexuality] as much as they would in other areas that tend to be a little more conservative (Sandra, late-20s).

The visible presence of alternative populations serves to code the Main as a space of 'openness' where encounters with difference itself is anticipated:

I think it's a more open environment, more open as in you can do it [be physically affectionate in public] and not get the same type of reaction from your spectators, and the people in the space are probably more open as individuals and that makes it more possible. So, it's partly the space and partly the people that are attracted to this openness that shows a comfort with sexuality and sexual orientation in public (Robyn, late 20s).

It is unclear whether this 'openness' translates into acceptance or indifference. Encounters with lesbians, refugees, squeegee punks or the homeless are part of the experience of the Main, a backdrop of marginality. As some subjects specified, the open character of the

¹²"St-Laurent is a bit alternative, underground, you know? It's not everyone who likes St-Laurent" (author's translation).

populations along the Main has more to do with repetition and exposure than with 'tolerance': "But in this neighbourhood [the Upper Main], it's not so much that it's so tolerant, it's just that it's such a weird neighbourhood. Everyone who lives in this neighbourhood has seen everything. Two girls holding hands, who cares? As long as you're not pan-handling anybody, no one cares" (Josée, early 30s).

Perhaps the more radical characteristic of the Main for the production of lesbian urban public cultures is its multiplicity. Unlike lesbian bars, the Gay Village and other queer spaces, these women valued the Main as a space where they experienced more than one aspect of their identity. The multiplicity of the Main, they reported, enabled them to construct and experience multiple selves. Along the Main, lesbians interact with society as lesbians, but also as women, and as subjects with ethnic and linguistic identities. Such experiences were not described as fragmentation and disruption, as others have depicted the experience of modern urban life (Berman 1982; Lofland 1973; Ross 1988; Sennett 1970, 1991). Rather, the Main accommodated an integration of the multiple aspects of self that are often subsumed in spaces shaped by more dominant and limited definitions of belonging. The Main was particularly important to their participation within broader urban cultures because it allows for the integration a lesbian identity with the experience of other aspects of identity:

You escape the ghetto of being in the Village where everybody assumes that you're a lesbian and nothing else. You can go to St. Laurent Street and be a lesbian and be so much more, it seems to me, than just a lesbian. It's where I feel the most comfortable with all the things that I am (Asha, late 20s).

This characteristic of the Main was particularly important for lesbians of colour. The combination of radical openness and the copresence a diversity of visible minorities accommodates and acknowledges a more complex experience and performance of identity. On the Main being visible as a lesbian is possible, and does not lead to the separation of sexual identity from 'ethnic' identity, a condition that often occurs in more homogeneous

lesbian and gay spaces. One woman of colour described this multiplicity as:

I feel very visible on St. Laurent, not in a negative sense, but just because maybe on St. Laurent there are a lot of people.... In the Village, of course I feel like a lesbian, but I feel like a lesbian of colour. There aren't very many people of colour there. I think the mix of skin types on St. Laurent is more diverse than it is in the Village (Janice, late 20s).

FROM THE CRACKS IN THE SIDEWALK: LESBIANS MAKING 'PLACE'

The importance of neighbourhood street spaces for the production of urban lesbian communities has been demonstrated through a handful of neighbourhood studies (Bouthillette 1997; Munt 1995; Retter 1997; Rothenberg 1995). Lesbians encounter difficulty sustaining their own commercial spaces, therefore streets serve as an important resource for social interaction and territorial definition (Rothenberg 1995). In contrast to the Village, primarily a site of "queer" night-life, Plateau lesbians identify the Main as a social space that lies at the centre of their everyday lives: "It's much more holistically intertwined with our lives than the Village, which is the place where you 'go out'. On St. Laurent Street it's more that you're wandering around and you bump into somebody and you go and have a coffee with them" (Josée, early 30s). In fact, they tend to identify the street as 'their' space: "St. Lawrence is more my space than The Village. I feel like the gay men own The Village and we rent space" (Robyn, late 20s).

As a site of daily activities, this area of the street serves as both a comfortable place to circulate openly as a lesbian and to integrate daily living, community and a more complex identity that includes sexual orientation. For my sample, activities such as shopping for affordable food, clothing and household goods are primary activities, as well as, hanging out, having a coffee and wandering through the street's many alternative bookstores. "I guess it functions as a sort of neighbourhood core, a place where you will hang out, shop for food, shop for clothes, magazines, go see art or shows, that kind of thing" (Dana, mid-30s). By repeatedly occupying the spaces of the street, lesbians have produced places where they circulate and openly perform the tasks of everyday life.

creating the possibility for a lesbian identity that stems beyond night life, direct actions and institutional spaces. Many woman stressed the importance of this function of the street in their everyday lives. As one woman stated, "To me St. Lawrence is one [street] that helps you connect your sexual orientation to your daily living. It's where you go buy your groceries. It's where you go have breakfast with your partner and your friends. It's where you do your everyday things, but you're able to do it as an out lesbian" (Robyn, late 20s).

St. Lawrence Boulevard serves as an accessible space for social interaction among Plateau lesbians, to communicate lesbian desire and community, and build a visible presence in the city. As a shopping street the Main offers an alternative to mainstream commercial culture that is valued as much for the diversity of possible social interactions as for the wide variety of goods found. While the activities along the Main centre on consumption, many women highlighted the importance of the Main as a site of social interaction both with broader urban culture and with other lesbians. As one woman argued, St. Lawrence is,

...a social place where I would probably run into people I knew, often other women, often other lesbians, in a place that I could feel comfortable just hanging out and browsing through stores... I guess I'm just thinking if you compare it to a mall, where it becomes like a mission, whereas you go to St. Laurent, yeah you had your little mission, but it was a very social place to be too. Just out and about, walking around and doing your business (Robyn, late 20s).

In most cases the Main is a place where lesbians meet many familiar faces: "Si je vais rencontrer des gens que je connais ou si je marche avec une amie, elle va connaître d'autres gens et on finissait par leur parler, ou il y a des fois qu'on croissait le petit regard de reconnaissance"¹³ (Anne, early 30s). As Rothenberg (1995) has demonstrated, this kind

¹³"If I meet people that I know or if I'm walking with a friend, she's going to know other people and we end up talking to them, or there are times when we exchange little glances of recognition" (author's translation).

of daily neighbourhood interaction contributes to the construction of a kind of 'imagined community' through looking, encountering and interacting. Meeting other lesbians in public space further contributes to a sense of being a community member outside of bar spaces:

The other thing that I really like is that, the last time I was on St. Laurent, we met four other lesbians that we knew on the street. It seems like lesbians go there...it seems like we tend to meet a lot of the people that we don't always see [when we are] on St. Laurent St., on a Saturday afternoon, just shopping. I meet people I know on that street, even people I know from different areas. That street conglomerates people. People go there and so it's nice. It gives you that kind of... community sense because when you're on the street you actually meet someone you know... It feels like a main drag (Asha, late 20s).

For a sexual subculture that revolves around fleeting moments of communal contact in bars spaces and nightclubs, or contained spaces such as women's centres and other women's homes, this haphazard social contact plays an important role in the reinforcement of lesbian identities because it undermines the separation of sites of lesbian sociability from everyday life. The Main acts as a place where lesbians stumble upon each other in the daylight, where they stop and talk to acquaintances and friends and visually acknowledge those that they only know by sight.

The centrality of the Main for social interaction among lesbians also translates into a certain appropriation of 'lesbian-friendly spaces' as communal sites, semi-public spaces such as bars, restaurants and cafés that lesbians frequent although they are not the primary nor the only clientele (Bouthillette 1997; Rothenberg 1995). In cafés, restaurants, bookstores and along the street itself, appropriation and visibility are a given. Bars are depicted as slightly more contested spaces. In the bars of the Main, various subcultures congregate, and sociability revolves around taverns with cheap beer that cater to a heterosexual student clientele and the alternative music scene. Although certain bars, such as *La Cabane*, are known as spaces where lesbians congregate, as a group they have no greater claim on these spaces than others. One woman described this ambiguity:

On voit souvent les lesbiennes même dans des endroits comme *La Cabane*... On y va, mais on n'est pas forcément bienvenues. Mais nous, on se sent à l'aise. Moi, je suis allée. Puis, c'était clair qu'on était des lesbiennes mais on n'était pas forcément reçues, ou bien reçues, ou particulièrement bien reçues... Dans les bars lesbiens on est particulièrement bien reçu, mais dans les autres bars, c'est comme, on est là, on fait partie de la formule¹⁴ (Anne, early 30s).

In other bars, there is less ambiguity. The lesbians of the neighbourhood are a visible and enfranchised social group, known and welcomed by the staff. Here, a lesbian clientele is inevitable for a variety of reasons. First, because lesbians live more complex and multiple identities on this street, they are participants in other forms of alternative culture that revolves around these bars. As part of the student clientele or a music scene in the bars of the Main, some congregate and interact with a broader-based clientele based on their social networks as artists or consumers. As one woman, an organizer of alternative musical and artistic events, argued:

Well, I think a lot of dykes, if they're in the music scene, which a lot of them are, or they're in the kind of comic book zine scene, or they like to play pool or they like to just drink beer cheap, those are things that dykes are often involved in and all those places are conducive to that. And a lot of dykes like to hang out with the boys too. The rock boys or whatever (Martha, late 20s).

Some taverns and show bars, such as *Miami*, *Bifsteck*, *Monkey House* and *Jailhouse*, attract a lesbian clientele because they feature women's music nights as part of the alternative music scene. Just before my interviews began, *Jailhouse*, a heavy-metal and punk music venue just off the Main on Mont-Royal, began to feature a women's music night called *Girls'pit*. Some lesbians from the area then began to frequent this bar for other events. In the music scene, the sexual orientation of the performers is unimportant, but there is a tendency among the women in my sample to frequent venues that feature

¹⁴"We often see lesbians even in places like *La Cabane*... We go there but we're not exceptionally welcome. But, we feel comfortable there. I went there and it was clear that we were lesbians but we weren't exceptionally well received, or even well received, or particularly well received... In lesbian bars we are particularly well received but in other bars, it's like we're part of the formula" (author's translation).

women's bands or alternative bands with known women musicians and performers. Venues that feature women's music and spoken word performances then become important sites for lesbian sociability. In other bars, lesbians from the neighbourhood are drawn in by staff members who are lesbian or associated with the lesbian community. At *Bifteck*, a tavern that sells cheap beer and caters to the student population in the area, "...there would always be a couple of tables of dykes having a beer and chatting" (Andrea, mid-20s). Because a woman associated with the community was bartending there, her friends frequented the space made it attractive to others: "That's the whole thing. If there's one gay person and some of their friends come in, that means we can all go there and we can take over" (Andrea, mid-20s).

The appropriation of 'lesbian friendly' cafés as sites of lesbian sociability, however, involves different strategies. Most of the cafés along the street are spaces that the women in my sample frequented on an individual basis. Like the street, cafés are sites of possibility where, on an afternoon, small groups and individuals went in search of social contact and often reported meeting other lesbians. These sites are seen as places where public and private identities collide and, in the diversified crowd, lesbians catch glimpses of one another. Queering these spaces and communicating desire to other women often involves very subtle strategies of communication, particular ways of looking that demonstrates their lesbian identity. One woman describes the specific strategies that she used to communicate her desire to other South Asian women or to other lesbians while sitting in cafés along the Main:

Sometimes I'll go and sit and drink a cup of coffee and I'll be reading *Tricone*, which is a South Asian lesbian magazine. If anybody knows anything about that, or even something more blatant, something that's lesbian, I have exchanged furtive glances in cafés with other women who are sitting alone and who have noticed what I'm reading or who might pick-up on it (Asha, late 20s).

Some cafés are more significant than others and have a reputation for being frequented by lesbians such as *Bistro 4* and, to a certain extent, *Second Cup* and *Café Méliès*. Many

women described how they communicate with other women by exchanging glances, and by using visual clues. *Bistro 4*, a café, bar and restaurant that has held special events for lesbians and was an artistic centre for writers and musicians until 1998, was a site where women went in search of chance meetings with other women. As a café with a significant lesbian history, *Bistro 4* served as a site of desire, where meeting other lesbians was not just a possibility but an expectation.

SITE OF UNCERTAIN EXCHANGE, DESIRE

Restoring the image of the flâneur from a heteronormative feminist debate about gender, sexuality and urban space, Munt (1995) turns to the butch drag lesbian. For Munt (1995: 121) "...the lesbian *flâneur* signifies a mobilized female sexuality *in control*, not out of control... In her urban circumlocutions, her affectionality, her connections, she breaks down the boundary between Self and Other. She collapses the inviolate distinction between masculinity and femininity". Munt (1995) uses the image of the lesbian flâneur to make lesbian desire present in urban public space and, more specifically, to locate that desire in the mobile and shifting contacts that occur in the streets of the modern metropolis. As we see in the case of the lesbians frequenting cafés on the Main, the use of public and semi-public spaces to communicate desire can be a productive force, creating forms of sociability, personae and places where these desires locate. Probyn's (1994) definition of desire allows us to see desire as a central productive force in the lesbian experience of the city. As Probyn (1994: 19) argues "...if we understand that desire is not a personal possession but that which moves us in affect, in effect to desire another's desire, bits bumping against bits, surfaces rubbing together, we nonetheless need modes of expressing the affectivity of desire as experience". More than a passive Eros waiting to be awakened or a sex act, Probyn's (1994) interpretation of desire is embodied, relational, productive, and present in the experience of social life.

Lesbian narratives of the Main reflect this interpretation of desire circulating in everyday social interactions and in relation to the possibilities attached to the Main as 'place'. Although more overt questioning with regard to 'cruising' did not elicit a response,

many of the women in my sample described 'desire' as central to their experience of the Main. In an environment where bodies are in constant movement and identities are less certain, the expression and exchange of desire between women is a celebration of possibility:

...sur Saint-Laurent, on a un certain contact. Pas nécessairement physique, mais...c'est sur que c'est plaisant de marcher sur une rue où tu peux, tu es permis de sourire à une femme,...d'aller sur une rue où tu peux rencontrer quelqu'un. C'est ça qui est intéressant. Sur Saint-Laurent, c'est facile¹⁵
(Nicole, early 30s).

Unlike sites of gay male public sex (Grube 1998; Ingram *et al.* 1998) or lesbian bars (Chamberland 1993; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Retter 1998; Wolfe 1992), the engagement with desire among this group of women on the Main is more haphazard. They catch each other's eyes while doing mundane tasks like shopping, or while strolling along in an active search for the clue to the other woman's desire, all the while merging with the traffic of the street. Possibility and uncertainty intersect along the Main, and the exchange between desiring bodies is tempered by the heteronormative character of the space and the mobile qualities of contact. This subtle play with the limits of the space was common in the interviews. The following is one very poetic example:

I can weave my way through and I may not feel anything, or I may in a period of five minutes feel like I have cruised five women. The contact has been made, the energies have been sent out and reciprocated, or not. That instantaneous gratification of recognition, playfulness, spontaneity...We both know that we're doing it and we both know that we're probably not going to carry through very far, but it's fun and dangerous. That space builds the tension, and at the same time it gives permission (Dawn, late 30s).

Despite the mobility and uncertainty of these experiences, narratives of desire have a

¹⁵...on St-Laurent, we have a kind of contact. Not necessarily physical but...it's certainly nice to walk along a street where you can, you are permitted to smile at a woman, ...to walk along a street where you could meet someone. That's what's interesting. On St-Laurent it's easy" (author's translation).

location in certain forms of exchange. As in any public space, the familiar 'gayze' is the primary clue to the presence of other lesbians on the street, and there are also important visual clues to their desire and identity: "Il y a un regard, une attitude de la personne, c'est ça. Une façon que les gens te regardent, une façon comment elles sont habillées, comment elles sont coiffées, l'attitude, la démarche, les petites choses comme ça"¹⁶ (Irène, mid-30s).

These narratives further indicate that desire among my sample is embodied in an image of the St. Lawrence lesbian who codes the Main as a site of desire. The specificity of the sample population, moreover, is revealed through their description of this urban characteristic. Unlike the heterogeneous character of the surrounding urban crowd, according to this limited sample, the St. Lawrence lesbian has an identity that is strongly tied to the youth and artistic subcultures of the street. As one woman perceived them, St. Lawrence lesbians are,

...more urbane than others. I'm going to see more of the kind of women that I find attractive...It's more a cross with the intellectual, arts community, urban, the urbanity of that noisiness, that confusion, that eclecticism, attracts. It's sort of that gravity that pulls in women who are more interesting to me (Dawn, late 30s).

Most women, however, described the lesbians that they associate with on the Main as young, white, anglophone or bilingual, and 'radical'. Bodily markers included shaved heads or short hair, combat boots, jeans worn low on the hips, and leather jackets:

It's not urban lesbian, it's like urban dyke. You know, it's like jeans and a chain on their belt and some funky tee-shirt or some kind of raver shirt, you know, that kind of thing. Very kind of sporty, urban dyke. Cool, they're like cool, you know?...They're people who know a lot of lesbians and are kind of seen as the cool lesbians, the ones who have parties (Janice, late 20s).

¹⁶There's a look, an attitude, that's it. The way that people look at you, the way that they're dressed, the way they wear their hair, the attitude, their walk, little things like that" (author's translation).

The St. Lawrence lesbian emerges as a stereotype, a visual image that codes the Main as a site of possibility and desire. The characteristics of her persona extend beyond her clothing and hairstyle. Her distinctive 'daring' and 'provocative' character makes her both an agent and object of desire:

Elles sont plus à la mode, elles sont peut-être plus jeunes, mais pas à la mode dans le sens huppée de terme, plus comme nous, à ma mode, relaxes, ou d'autres plus avec les coats de cuir, mais quand même assez relaxe. Plus, en anglais, 'daring', plus provocant. Des cheveux plus courts, plus colorés, puis qui a du look¹⁷ (Anne, early 30s).

Although there is a lesbian persona associated with the Main, for most women, this mixed environment still poses problems of detection. Picking each other out in a crowd depends on certain strategies and perceptions, especially since, as some women stated, lesbian aesthetics are diversified and there is no uniform aesthetic. In many ways, sharing the space with counter-cultural communities blurs gender identities and contributes to the circulation of desire in the space:

I think some people just don't see us or don't differentiate between lesbians and punks. To them we're just all freaks or we're all just young or something... I mean a lot of these girls, people just think they're boys. Who knows in general. I think it's pretty obvious and I think probably a lot of straight girls get taken for dykes as well and a lot of dykes get taken for straight girls (Martha, late 20s).

Like the possibility so aptly described by Munt (1995) in her invocation of the lesbian flâneur, the reduction of differences among female identities is central to the production of lesbian desire along the Main. Reducing differences between women makes this space a site of desire and identification rather than a space of prohibition and retribution:

¹⁷"They're more fashionable, they are perhaps younger, but not fashionable in the elite sense of the term, more like us, trendy, relaxed, or others more with leather jackets, but still quite relaxed. Also, in English, 'daring', more provocative. Shorter hair, more coloured, and there is 'a look'" (author's translation).

Souvent je ne sais pas [si une femme est lesbienne ou non]. Je trouve que beaucoup des femmes sur Saint-Laurent peut-être aussi lesbiennes que hétérosexuelles. Je trouve ça cool. J'aime ça. Je trouve ça fun qu'il n'y a pas de différence importante, physiquement puis [...]. C'est ça qu'on s'y confronte parce que, quand les femmes hétérosexuelles sont sur Saint-Laurent c'est pas la femme stereotype¹⁸ (Nicole, early 30s).

While the presence of a stereotype, the image of radical dykes actively occupying the spaces of the Main, serves to code this place as a site of desire, for most women it is the destruction of boundaries of sexual identification between women that gives their desire mobility. To follow Butler (1990), the Main is a space where the established heteronormative relationship between gendered bodies (anatomy), gender identities and sexual desires are, at times, incoherent (Bondi 1998; Valentine 1996). The presence of other women who resist existing norms of heterosexual female behaviour and presentation of self fill the Main with as many possibilities as uncertainties. Like other aspects of identity along the Main, uncertainty complicates gender identity, making it possible for lesbian desire to move beyond the confines of the late-night bar room and circulate in the afternoon sunlight of the street.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the Main is a border zone where a variety of populations, identities and activities come together in disruptive and radically transgressive ways. This chapter, has examined the ways in which one group of women use and interpret this border zone as part of their everyday lives. I have explored how the Main facilitates patterns of social interaction, place-making strategies and expressions of desire among 'downtown dykes', one of the least visible populations in the urban landscape. As a study of sexuality and space, this chapter advances an understanding of production of space by lesbians as women, and de-emphasizes the 'territorial' production

¹⁸"Often I don't know [if a woman is a lesbian or not]. I find that many women on St-Laurent could be either lesbians or heterosexuals. I find that cool. I like that. I find that fun that there isn't any important difference, physical or [...]. It's that that we face there because when heterosexual women are on St-Laurent, they're not stereotypical women" (author's translation).

of lesbian geographies. In contrast with most literature on streets as public spaces, it highlights their importance as accessible sites of social interaction and place-making. Finally, the narratives of the women demonstrate that such informal sites of communality can be understood and experienced as sites of desire, places where lesbian desire locates and circulates through the crowd.

The specificity of the site, however, is crucial to these lesbian narratives of city life and urban space. As an integral component of the thesis, this chapter points to the importance of the social and cultural multiplicity of the Main in the present-day communication and experience of female identities that are defined in opposition to established alignments of biological sex, gender and sexuality. As in the preceding chapters, the Main has an important role to play in the contestation of norms of gender behaviour and representation because of its border status. First, the specific group of lesbians that were interviewed for this chapter value the Main for the multiplicity of experiences and identities that it affords and draws together. The copresence of differences, particularly of alternative subcultures, leads to the rearrangement of hierarchies of identity along the Main. In a space with few 'queer' institutions and a hidden lesbian past, they participate in the street's urban public cultures as lesbians, sharing this border zone with a variety of 'others'. Although it is never foundational to the definition of the space, lesbian desire circulates along the Main because it is a place where established codes of gender and sexual identity are called into question by a variety of subcultural groups. Secondly, through their interpretations of the Main, it is possible to view the intersections between sexuality, gender, class, linguistic and 'ethnic' identities as these individuals move through the spaces of the street. Unlike bars or queer districts where sexual identity is highlighted, the Main is a space than affords the integration of other aspects of identity that are central to the everyday experience of urban life. With these observations in mind, I now bring this examination of the Main to a close by reconsidering some of the theoretical arguments discussed in Chapter 1 in light of the preceding stories of gender and alterity.

CONCLUSION

In the 1990s, contested issues of place and identity in Montreal are still enacted along the Main. In debates regarding language politics and national identity, for example, the Main now has a central symbolic role as the dividing line of a 'dual city'. The Main continues to represent, on the one hand, ideological, linguistic, social and political divisions, and on the other hand, the uncontrollable cultural and linguistic multiplicity of the modern 'Canadian' metropolis. As we have seen, other sources suggest a more complex role for this border zone in contemporary Montreal. From newspaper reportage of crime and seditious acts of 'anarchy' to restaurant reviews and murder mysteries, the Main has been the backdrop of divergent and, at times, seemingly unrelated stories in the city's history. Stories of the Main have been told in the films and novels of local artists, in the oral histories of immigrant and gay communities, by former factory workers and servers, and by the material landscape itself. As writers such as Gail Scott suggest, the Main has been the site of a wide range of the city's imagined and lived geographies, and is indeed the place where these multiple geographies meet one another. Scott's characterizes the Main as a rupture in the fabric of the metropolis where city life teems with possibilities for women to contest norms of gendered behaviour and express their particular -- and often decentred -- version of 'womanhood'.

Characterizing the Main as the spine of an expanding, multiethnic, industrial metropolis in the twentieth century, my own interpretation of the Main demonstrates that this street has played an important role in the expression of 'other' experiences of Montreal, and that gender has been at the centre of this process. Using this street as a case study, the goal has been to engage in debates about city life, border zones, gender and difference. Specifically, I respond to feminist ideals regarding the heterogeneity of city life and the transgressive power of margins (Golding 1992; hooks 1990; Munt 1995; Probyn 1994; Wilson 1991; Young 1990a, 1990b). Analyzing the interpretations of Montreal's material and imagined border zone as a 'space of difference' from a feminist perspective, I show how representations of women's identities, as well as women's

experiences of this site, are connected to the street's reputation for 'difference', alterity and transgression. In this sense, it is an effort to ground feminist spatial metaphors in a material space where a multiplicity of identities constructed around notions of gender have been forged and communicated (Smith and Katz 1993). The central objectives have been two-fold: 1) to examine how oppositional female identities inform the characterization of the Main as a border zone and 2) to investigate how the heterogeneous character of the Main has provided opportunities for women to contest marginalisation and communicate new and/or oppositional female identities.

Each locale investigated here has been interpreted in a manner that highlights how oppositional female identities underpin the representation of the Main as a space of difference. Specifically, the events surrounding these locales demonstrate that the interaction between different groups and the activities that involved women led to public debates that highlighted both the border status of the street and larger anxieties with regard to gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and space. Sometimes the copresence and alliances between groups that came together along the Main raised concerns among the city's various urban public cultures. The social world of the garment industry, for example, came to the attention of certain factions of Montreal society because of the proximity of young working-class women to immigrant men, as well as the presence of international unions and socialist movements in the workplace. More often, however, it was the more 'aggressive' actions and strategies of groups of women during strikes and parades, in the cabarets and theatres, and on the street corners that contributed to the construction of the Main as a space of difference. By the time of the economic expansion in 1910, for example, the identities of the female strikers in the garment industry became intimately tied to the factories, labour halls and social life of the Main. After World War II the strip-tease performers, sex-trade workers and servers of the Lower Main came to represent yet another 'threatening' form of womanhood, this time located in the street's cabarets and on its street corners. The interaction between groups and their strategies of resistance sparked debate regarding city life and norms of gendered behaviour, drawing factions from variety of quarters into dialogues about the social worlds of the city's border

zone. A variety of urban public cultures, for example, converged around the actions of the women strikers including suffragists, American labour leaders, the Catholic Church, the manufacturing elite and some members of local labour movements. There were also several social groups involved in debates regarding the entertainment spaces of the Lower Main. Shifts in scale and among key purveyors of discourse were also evident, beginning with Anglo-elite reformers, and shifting to the Francophone petit bourgeoisie and the Canadian Army by mid-century. Contests over the representation of this space related to issues of class, sexuality and national identity culminated in the 1960s among a Francophone literary elite and the sensationalist press.

Representations of the oppositional activities and identities of women who have inhabited the locales of the Main have served to code the street itself as a place where 'difference' resides. They also demonstrate the crucial role played by border zones in the experience and transformation of social life and gender relations in the metropolis. The representations and experiences examined here demonstrate that border zones are important because they can redefine the centre and juxtapose a variety of differences that may simultaneously refract against or reinforce one another. During strikes, raids, work or shopping, the Main is a place that brings unrelated individuals together to create affinities that transcend the homogeneity of 'community' or neighbourhood (Young 1990b). As the empirical body of the thesis shows, the heterogeneous character of the Main has often facilitated the definition and expression of female identities of alterity. Unexpected alliances and shared social worlds have been formed along the street that make it possible for some women and men to transgress norms of gender. The descriptions of the present-day street by lesbians, for example, emphasize the plurality of social groups along the Main as an asset in terms of living an identity outside heterosexual and gay male norms of sexuality. Liberating lesbian desire in many ways depends on the presence of other social groups that also disrupt established alignments between biological sex, the performance of gender and sexuality. This space of difference, of course, is historically constituted. The diversity of the labour force in the garment industry along the Main in the early part of the century, for instance, facilitated the rare

participation of French-Canadian women in labour politics during the 1910 cloakmakers' strike. Drawn into the world of the international unions found on the Main, new forms of female identity were also communicated during parades, on picket lines and on the streets of the garment district during tag-days. Finally, the importance of a copresence of differences along the Main is evident even among the marginalized individuals of the red-light district. The entertainments along the Main brought a wide array of the city's social groups together. The cosmopolitan working-class crowd at the vaudeville theatres early in the twentieth century, the socially and ethnically mixed audiences in the jazz clubs of the 1940s and the more recent transgressive 'queer' communities all testify to a social environment defined by multiplicity rather than exclusion. The presence of prostitution and the designation of the Lower Main as the city's 'immoral region' in many ways made the expression of other forms of sexual difference possible. Due to a shared sexual marginality among prostitutes and early 'queer' communities, the Main facilitated the construction of a social world of resistance in the cabarets and tourist rooms of the street in the 1950s and 1960s.

In contrast with the long standing 'ideal' of urbanism as radically pluralistic, however, these spatial stories demonstrate the importance of the paradoxical relationship between pluralism and segregation in 'city life'. In my interpretation of the Main, I draw primarily on authors who celebrate copresence and the heterogeneity that characterizes urban life (Berman 1982; Young 1990a, 1990b). While I do heed feminist warnings that such emphasis on 'difference' might serve to relativize gender, I readily accept the notion that the interaction between 'differences' is a progressive attribute of urban social life that can undermine the exclusion of women from 'the public sphere'. The heterogeneous character of the crowd and the social worlds of this border zone, however, never entirely levelled differences between groups and did not always undermine fragmentation and established inequalities. The locales of the Main illustrate that inequality and marginalisation are ever-present features of urban life even in an environment that seemingly highlights the progressive potential of pluralism. Occupying the Main has involved negotiating a variety of cleavages that structured localized social relations and,

more broadly, the urban experience in twentieth-century Montreal. The participation of women garment workers, as factory employees and as labour activists, in the ethnically diverse working-class culture that formed along the Main at the turn of the century was marked by cleavages based on ethnic origin and religion. The strikes and the May Day parades illustrate that this social world was much more accessible to Eastern European Jewish women, who participated in these activities through their respective ethnic communities. Class, gender and language also shaped how women participated in the public culture of the red-light district. The Lower Main did become a place where it was possible to express marginal gender and sexual identities, but this coincided with relations of class, ethnic and linguistic marginalization that made the Lower Main a somewhat distinct locale of working-class Francophone sociability. While the Main in many ways constituted a site where it was possible to transgress more hegemonic norms of respectable womanhood, the very real oppression and exploitation experienced by the women who worked along the city's frontier cannot be understated. Occupying the margins of heterosexual womanhood, the entertainment spaces of the Lower Main rarely provided the 'b-girls', sex-trade workers and performers with opportunities to do anything more than negotiate access to their clients and workplaces. Except during strikes and parades, the women garment workers experienced everyday life in the factories of the Main in terms of exploitation.

Rather than demonstrating that ideal of city life is inherently flawed when grounded in material urban space, the events and locales of the Main illustrate the importance of such interstitial sites for resistance. As the various locales and events described in this thesis demonstrate, it is precisely the contradictions embedded in such spaces which make them important in the expression, and discursive production, of alternate visions of womanhood. The feminist strategy of "crossing boundaries" inherent in occupying the Main as the city's 'third city' is central to this process (Bondi 1993; Pratt and Hanson 1994; Rose 1993a, 1994a, 1994b). As I discussed in Chapter 1, feminist spatial metaphors that stress the occupation of such 'paradoxical' spaces to subvert dominant categories that define real and imagined gender geographies find material

grounding in Montreal along the Main. By occupying sites along the Main where their presence was surprising and/or threatening to the social order of the city itself, the women strikers, socialist demonstrators, sex trade workers, servers and even today's lesbians have circumvented established binaries of identity and space by inhabiting this paradoxical location (Rose 1993a). The popular press and other agents of representation built images of these women and locales in the popular imagination. Although the resulting discourses perhaps had little relevance to their actual practices and experiences, contradictions in the interpretation and expression of oppositional female identities along the Main illustrate that they were much more complex than they appeared in any single form of representation. Their identities were often unrepresentable in terms of established norms of gender. Their activities, therefore, stimulated discourses and images because of these contradictions between their identities as women and the border status of the Main.

The Main, therefore, resembles what has been described as a 'third space', and strongly illustrates a set of epistemological and political projects in urban and feminist studies in which the relationships between space, time and identity are deconstructed (McDowell 1996; Soja 1995, 1996). Although many social aspects of borders and margins are investigated, the paradoxical nature of the Main as 'heterotopia' is a dominant theoretical theme throughout the thesis. Heterotopias are spaces where unrelated objects come together and speak 'of other spaces', counter-sites where societal spatial boundaries are juxtaposed and inverted (Allor 1997; Foucault 1980, 1986; Soja 1995, 1996). Using this framework, I have emphasized the importance of discourse, scale, juxtapositions and social multiplicity in the "present pasts" of the Main (Lefebvre 1991). Each chapter examines the localized dialogues between groups and the juxtaposition of divergent relations constituted in locales of the street. Within each specific locale -- the garment district, the red-light district and 'neighbourhood' shopping enclave -- the characteristics of 'heterotopia' are evident at various scales of representation and in a multiplicity of social relations that converge and shape the material landscape both today and throughout the past. The representation of women strikers, socialist demonstrators, sex-trade workers and the 'b-girls' shifted scales in public discourse around localized events that raised city-

wide and even national concerns regarding the actions of women along the Main. The locales that they occupied were further structured by social relations that functioned at the local, municipal and even international scales but came together in 'place'. Both the production processes and the labour movements in the garment district, for example, while experienced by most women and men at a local level, operated at the national and North American scales. Issues such as the undercutting of wages in the Canadian garment industry and the integration of the specific groups of women workers into American unions, however, were negotiated in the labour halls and on the street. Similarly, the preparation of the city for the 'eyes of the world' in the years leading up to Expo '67 by refusing permits to night club operators and creating by-laws to control cabaret workers, destroying the red-light district to protect Canadian men in the military from venereal disease during World War II, and reproducing American campaigns to expunge Montreal of 'commercialized vice' were practices that drew the commercial entertainments of the Main into an orbit of social relations that operated well beyond its borders. In this sense, each locale included in the thesis speaks very specifically about "other spaces". Each locale illustrates that contentions over the activities of women were central to debates about gender and sexuality in the modern metropolis that implicated many other sites within the city and the province.

Attention to the shifting scales of representation and social relations that have structured each locale enables the examination of the specific ways in which women experienced, and were represented in relationship to, various portions of the street at specific points over time. This approach also undermines a linear narrative of the street's development and makes the actions of specific groups of women more visible. Despite the close attention paid to the complexity of social relations surrounding each locale, the overarching strategy of the thesis has been to examine how they overlap, shift over time, and come together once again in different configurations to shape how the street is represented and experienced. The intersection of these various scales of social relations and representations on the Main has been integral to building associations between the street's various locales and the overall interpretation of the Main as a space of difference.

The locales of the Main explored in this thesis are intricately linked to each other through the reciprocal relationships between the construction of each locale as a contested space in the nexus of the dual city and the consistent expression of alterity through these locales in the past and present. What makes the Main a site of difference is the co-existence of these locales and their respective social worlds in the material landscape and the cumulative effect of representations and expressions of alterity and resistance expressed along the street.

The mixed nature of land use and contests over the presence and activities of women in each of these locales has contributed to the coding of the Main as a space of difference. The centrality of each locale to broader social structures and events, however, led to debates regarding the activities of women along the Main. Often attracting the attention of regulatory powers, a plethora of representations of women, gender relations, and the Main appear in government documents, royal commissions, debates between reformers and the municipal administration, police reports and even works of fiction. When by-laws were created, and government investigations or police raids took place here, they were covered in the metropolitan press. The centrality of the struggles of the garment workers and the presence of sex-trade workers, erotic dancers, transvestite performers and socialist women, therefore, made the Main central to the imagination of Montreal citizens. Although not all Montrealers ventured to the Main to work or be entertained, the different daily newspapers mapped spaces of labour agitation, sexual danger, poverty and pleasure for their readers that were central to how the Main has been understood. As we have seen, when the government, the police or reform groups constructed the identities of the women associated with the street as immoral, radical, impoverished, foreign, aggressive, threatening, oppressed and/or vulnerable, reports in the press reinforced the border status of the street in the minds of Montrealers. The factory worker, the b-girl, the radical socialist, the streetwalker, the drag queen and the contemporary lesbian strolling the Main have all been important participants in this landscape. Although each has been in a sense 'sited' in the variety of locales that shift with time, the Main remains the site where these identities come together at a discursive

level, even if they do not necessarily coexist or cross paths.

The focus on representation and the reflexive relationship between of the past and present did, however, pose important challenges for interpretation of the street and the groups of women involved in each locale. First, the realm of representation was important for illustrating that female identities are central to the discursive production of the Main as a space of difference, but at times these led to a diminishment of the very real oppressions experienced by some women, notably sex-trade and garment workers. While royal commissions, reports by the government, the police or private groups were central to the analysis of the discourses surrounding women and the Main, the metropolitan press allowed for an understanding of how these events appeared to the population at large. The press provided considerable evidence of the 'representation' of gender relations and allowed for the interpretation of what these struggles meant in the various quarters of the city at different times and among different social groups. The gap between the messages that the women wanted to convey and how they were described in the press is a feature of this method, especially concerning subjects and spaces in the past. Such an approach nevertheless presents researchers with the opportunity to understand how women and men in the past came to know and interpreted their city (Ryan 1997) and warrants greater attention in urban studies. Secondly, separating the locales of the street in terms of placement and theme enabled a closer examination of the specific relations of gender as they were experienced and represented in time and space, but this did inhibit an extended examination of relations between locales. I am convinced that a more careful examination of the relationships between the images and experiences of the red-light and garment districts and the 'ethnic enclave' would generate even greater theoretical and empirical insights, although this task was far beyond the scope of the thesis. Concern among Jewish community leaders regarding the 'white slave trade' after World War I, for example, suggests that this is an important avenue for future research.

As an exploration of Montreal's imagined and material 'border zone', a secondary objective of the thesis has been to call into question established interpretations of the

social and cultural geography of Montreal. The Main is very much a product of the specific socio-cultural relations in this city and speaks volumes about the particularities of place. As such, the thesis tells a different story of life in Montreal in the twentieth century. By examining the representations of gender and alterity that have informed the construction of the Main as a space of difference, I have attempted to expose 'the dual city' as one of the city's most important, and in many ways least credible, fictions. The diverse populations of the metropolis met on the sidewalks of this zone, and participated both directly and indirectly in the street's many social worlds. The thesis suggests, therefore, that social interaction between groups in Montreal, although contested, has been much more fluid and the city's social and cultural boundaries have been much more permeable than some established interpretations and popular readings imply (Blanchard 1953, 1992; Gubbay 1989; Linteau 1982, 1992b; McNicoll 1986, 1993). The intersections between gender and other forms of identity as they have been experienced, contested and represented along the Main, moreover, reveals that Montreal's borders are not solely defined by language and ethnicity. As the chapters show, gender, class and/or sexuality have been central to the shape and character of the Main's various social worlds. The identities that have been expressed along the Main have fused gender, sexuality, class, language and ethnicity in unusual and sometimes contentious ways because the subjects simultaneously occupy a variety of social and cultural positions -- some mainstream, some marginal -- that come together along the Main. The intersections between gender and other forms of identity along city's frontier explored in this thesis, therefore, ultimately demonstrate that the interpretation of the city's internal social and cultural geographies requires a more complex understanding of identity, representation and place.

A final contribution of the thesis is to draw a central commercial street into a feminist framework. Department stores, offices, shopping malls, factories, suburbs and settlement houses have all been examined by feminist researchers in part because gender has been so 'apparently' central to how these sites are defined and produced. This thesis, however, demonstrates that feminist interpretations of sites where a multiplicity of activities occur offer many possibilities for 'reimagining' the city. Ask any Montrealer

about the Main and, depending on age and identity, she/he may characterize it as either a site of 'ethnic' commerce, 'seedy' entertainments or fashionable restaurants. Although their descriptions of the space may be sprinkled with images of women, few would immediately point to the importance of women in constructing the material and social landscapes of the Main. Research projects that attempt a feminist interpretation of 'places' where the diverse populations of the metropolis come together, moreover, may well offer insights into the contested relationships between gender and city life that cannot easily be observed in studies of individual ethnic or social groups. Deconstructing an essentialist and universal definition of 'woman' as a category of analysis in urban studies and reimagining the city from a feminist perspective might involve 1) turning to sites where this identity is contested and undermined by a multiplicity of other experiences and representations, and 2) paying closer attention to the overlapping representations and interpretations of particular places by a multiplicity of social groups.

Typically sites of heterogeneous activities and social and cultural multiplicity, metropolitan thoroughfares are also important research sites for feminists because of their centrality to 'city life' in the metropolis. If modern urbanism provides women with the possibility to participate in the spectacle and the crowd, it is when they leave their homes for the department store, the office or the factory and find themselves on the streets that they experience 'city life'. With the material specificity of the Main as its focus, the task of this thesis has been to demonstrate that the interpretation of the 'city streets' as the embodiment of pluralism should account for the internal geographies of cities and pay closer attention to the characteristics of streetscapes where such ideals are enacted. A great deal of work, however, remains to be done on past and present experiences of identity and place on Montreal's sidewalks. While this thesis has illustrated the importance of the material sites of work, consumption and political expression to interpretation of the Main as a site of difference, significant enactments and experiences of gender and other forms of identity in the daily life on the street have yet to be explored. Although we know little of the daily tactics and experiences employed on the tramway or on the street corners, this reimagining of the experience and representation of Montreal's 'third city'



demonstrates the importance of particular urban sites for the fusion of gender and difference in the experience and representation of 'city life'.

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