

Amanda Gioia
ARCH 355
March 28th 2013

Henry F. Hall Building: Classless Spaces



Fig. 1 Interior of the Hall Building, ground floor, showing corduroy-textured concrete columns, 1965. Courtesy of Concordia University Archives. From Wes Colclough, *The Henry Foss Hall Building, Montreal: From Riots to Gardens in Forty Years*. (Palimpsest: Montreal 2010), Figure 4.

Concordia University's Henry F. Hall Building assumes an unconventional architectural form embedded with inclusive and egalitarian ideologies. The building's offices, classrooms and communal spaces are a good illustration of non-hierarchical spaces which adopt principles of equality. Founded on the utopian ideal of having an entire university in one building, Concordia

University, initially named the Sir George Williams University (SGWU), originated from the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). In 1873, the YMCA organized evening classes for students unable to attend university during the day. The Hall Building opened to the public in October 1966,¹ and since then Concordia University has maintained its egalitarian reputation by offering opportunities to students of diverse origins and socio-economic backgrounds, thereby decreasing income inequalities in society. In addition, Concordia has a significantly high percentage of part-time students and its rate of enrolment has recently increased with respect to other Quebec universities.² Building on the assertion that Concordia University promotes equality and encourages integration of students of diverse backgrounds, a collection of factual and analytical information is presented to address how the University's democratic educational position fits the architectural form of the Hall Building. This essay argues that the Hall Building's spatial quality is fundamentally connected to Concordia's philosophy of tolerance through the engagement of an inclusive architecture.

Concordia University's philosophy of tolerance is manifested in the Hall Building's architectural elements, such as the building's layout, the shared spaces and the building's use of materials. SGWU commissioned the firm Ross, Fish, Duschenes and Barrett as architects for the Hall Building. In 1964, the firm hired Irish architect James A.M.K. O'Beirne, who was approximately thirty-three years old at the time of his commission, to draw up the plans.³ Although it was common to hire a young architect for a major project during Canada's building

1. Concordia University, "Hall Building." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 20, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/hall/>.

2. Secor, "*Study on the Impact of Concordia University*." Last modified 2011. Accessed February 20, 2013. http://www.concordia.ca/documents/about-concordia/who-we-are/Concordia_economic_impact_E.pdf.

3. Anja Brock, "Seen but Ignored: Concordia University's Henry Foss Hall Building in Montréal," *JSSAC*, 34, no. 2 (2009): 64.

boom in the 1960s, it also reflects the university's desire for a modern radicalization in planning the university institution. Modern radicalization refers to the tendency in the 1960s to reject the old institutional styles and instead encourage socialization and apply urban planning techniques in new universities.

In an essay titled 'The Henry Foss Hall Building, Montreal: From Riots to Gardens in Forty Years', Wes Colclough reveals that the design process was truly democratic; the University's Committee on Development established that everyone from faculty, staff and students could provide input on their needs and requirements for the new school.⁴ The school's location in the business district allowed easy access for part-time students to attend class after work. Furthermore, the university's faculties, concentrated on one sixty-six by seventy-eight metre lot⁵ occupy the entire street block. In an essay titled 'Seen but Ignored: Concordia University's Henry Foss Hall Building in Montréal', Anja Brock reveals that the decision to house all faculties, offices, classrooms, laboratories, libraries, auditoriums and theatres in one building was partly a financial one.⁶ However, the outcome reflected utopian university ideals and presented an opportunity to experiment with urban planning techniques. Brock explains, the university did not have much space allotted for an outdoor campus but a wider "side-walk-campus" was made possible by recessing the ground floor and cantilevering the upper floors.⁷

4. Wes Colclough, *The Henry Foss Hall Building, Montreal: From Riots to Gardens in Forty Years*. (working paper., Concordia University, 2010), Palimpsest III: The Dialectics of Montreal's Public Spaces, 2.

5. Anja Brock, "Seen but Ignored", 65.

6. Ibid., 65.

7. Ibid., 66.



Fig. 2 View of the Hall Building's back façade from Bishop Street showing the sixty-six by seventy-eight metre structure which originally housed the entire university. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

The solution not only created extra shared spaces for the students, but rejected the traditional campus planning of the time. The wide sidewalk campus leads to the lobby where corduroy-textured concrete adorns the massive columns; an industrial aesthetic which makes no reference to social class. An escalator in the lobby runs to the mezzanine where students again have another shared space to socialize or study. The building allocates numerous shared spaces throughout the building, indicating Concordia University's inclination towards informal gatherings of equal individuals. Escalators are used extensively to connect the different departments on different levels, further rejecting the traditional campus style prior to the 1960s

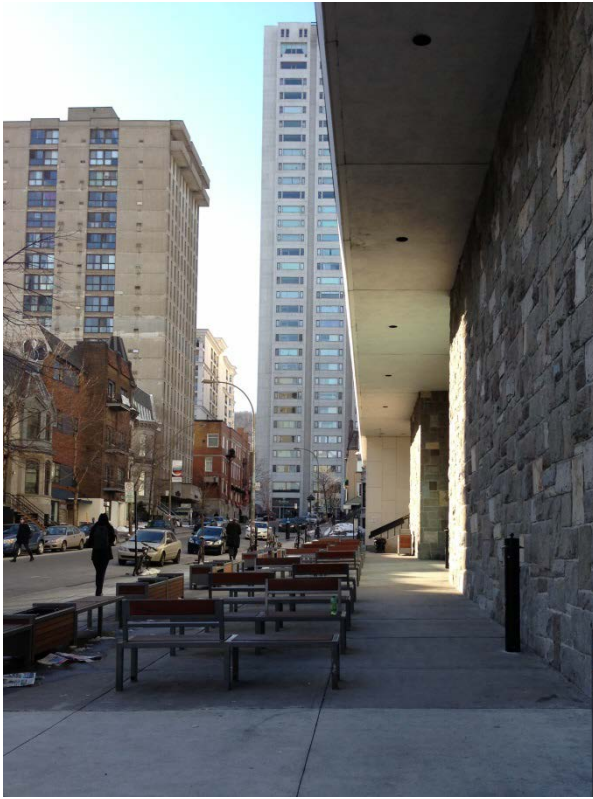


Fig. 3 “Side-walk-campus” on Mackay Street. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.



Fig. 4 “Side-walk-campus” on de Maisonneuve Street. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

by developing a vertical campus arrangement and emphasizing the link to other commercial buildings, like department stores. On the lower half of the building’s twelve floors, escalators open to a wide hallway. The hallway forms a rectangular loop around the building’s inner core where students may access their classrooms either in the inner core or around the perimeter. Sizes vary only according to their use and the layout indicates that no one classroom is more exclusive than the other. The windowless hallway leads right back to the escalators which serve to situate the students.

Although the upper floors of the building have been recently renovated, a similar layout continues. The areas around the escalators are separated by glass partitions on each side, through which a similar looped hallway may be accessed. To one side, the hallway has been widened, creating a long rectangular space, flooded with natural light, where tables, chairs and leather

sofas invite students to socialize or study in groups. On each floor, offices and classrooms are treated as equal spaces, whether located in the core or around the perimeter, where all window units have the same size and design. Brock indicates that although the use of low-priced, white prefabricated window units was a result of a low construction budget and does not consider the different rooms' lighting requirements, they serve to render all rooms around the perimeter equal. In addition, the repeated design of the sculptured concrete window panel makes for a completely uniform elevation on all sides, alluding to the notion of equality from the street. Although the Hall Building is not beneficial to all its users, this leveling out of spaces parallels Concordia's



Fig. 5 Mezzanine level showing escalator which attributes a public character in the students' shared space. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.



Fig. 6 Repeated design of prefabricated concrete window units makes for equal elevations on all sides. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

reputation as an inclusive university.⁸ The use of industrial materials and low-cost construction designs creates a non-exclusive environment for equal individuals to work and learn. Furthermore the use of escalators attributes a public character which matches the university's open philosophy.

Brock claims that the Hall Building's architectural qualities are often overlooked, and for the most part, totally forgotten in books on Quebec and Canadian university architecture.

Brock suspects this is because it is simply not as inspiring as the "more spectacular high-rise

offices" and "the imagination of the public like Expo '67" which attracted so much attention around the time of the building's opening.⁹ Compared to the traditional university design which asserts authority and exclusivity through classical elitist forms and rich materials, the Hall Building's invisibility is yet another aspect which maintains Concordia's inclusive reputation.

The building's utopian idea of housing an entire university in one building is investigated to show how it epitomizes the idea of equality. Postwar university design in the 1960s in Britain and in the United States adopted similar principles that served to modernize the university institution. The 1960s post war university was in need of a radical change as student numbers

8. Annmarie Adams, "Lecture no. 3: New Brutalism and Free Speech," Lecture, Architectural History 4 from McGill Architecture, Montreal, January 24, 2013.

9. Anja Brock, "Seen but Ignored", 62, 72.

doubled. It was common belief amongst new designers that most of the problems associated with the then current institutional system; social, political and architectural could be resolved with a utopian arrangement. In a book titled *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College*, architectural historian Stefan Muthesius describes the pressing circumstances in Britain in the 1960s. There was a desire for a new institutional system that would bring forth a sense of “for all”, and would phase out elitism, which higher education traditionally entailed.¹⁰ A sense of community in the years after World War II had translated into a desire for an urban social set up in all areas of life, especially in the educational system. A sense of community entails a communal agreement amongst citizens or students, which is not always the case from a realist point of view. Hence, informal student communities would form in these institutions and the increased sense of freedom, which the university provided, led to rejection of the current authority, as was the case with the Concordia Computer Riot.¹¹

In January 1969, Concordia students occupied the Computer Lab on the ninth floor, outraged by how the school’s administration dealt with racist allegations against a professor at the school.¹² Because utopianism involves an assertion for change, student revolt in the late 1960s was not only the case at Concordia, but it was a common occurrence in several countries in 1968, as students showed a sense of revolt for built institutions while using them for their own student rallies.¹³ Although student revolt is never particularly encouraged in schools, it does

10. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College*, (New Haven and London: Yale University, 2000), 3.

11. Ibid., 6.

12. Wes Colclough, *The Henry Foss Hall Building*, 6.

13. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 7.

require a set of shared values amongst the students. Hence after this event an increasing number of Concordia students were able to actively participate in the university's politics. Brock explains that this became one of the most important student revolts in Canadian history and as a result, Concordia's lively student community later became a model for other Canadian universities.¹⁴ Although, as Colclough suspects, the Hall Building became a site of contested space because it is the physical building itself that enables this type of community social structure.¹⁵

In American universities in the 1960s, campus planning was as important as the buildings themselves. Modern campus planning rejected the typical Beaux-Arts style and embraced popular trends in town planning. The modernist design of one continuous building or a multi-story building that fits multiple purposes marked a departure from the traditional functioning of an institution. Fusing departments together created a unified community structure such as that of Concordia's student community.¹⁶ By comparison, the traditional campus, made up of separate and detached pavilions with intricate ornament, represents the core of academic authority. The 1960s movement was not intended to be a radical break against this tradition, but a slow transition from a hierarchal institution toward an establishment which valued socialization.¹⁷ In Britain and in the United States, the idea that the campus should be planned as one big social unit gained popularity. Opportunity for students and staff to meet informally in non-hierarchal recreation spaces was important to the new university design. Separated institutional structures were an old model being replaced with a multilayered institution that would provide spaces for

14. Anja Brock, "Seen but Ignored", 62.

15. Wes Colclough, *The Henry Foss Hall Building*, 4-8.

16. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 25.

17. Ibid., 84.

spontaneous social encounters.¹⁸ The Hall Building's arrangement encouraged these types of encounters by allowing easy connections between departments. Furthermore, the building's abundance of shared spaces assigns importance to integration and socialization.

Town planning was an equally important model for utopian university design. In Britain, designers Chamberlin, Powell and Bon conceived an extension to Leeds University in 1960 based on urban elements such as high density and optimizing traffic. The notion of an urban community was reinterpreted for their university design. The young designers devised a plan to study the relationship between different departments within different faculties and within the same faculties in an effort to understand how to link each department.¹⁹ In an article titled 'The Modernist Moment at the University of Leeds, 1957-1977', author William Whyte explains how the 1960 Development Plan for Leeds University was a result of changing architectural taste as well as a shift in how the university saw itself. Chamberlin, Powell and Bon experimented with new approaches in architectural design to tackle the entire university environment. They conducted studies on behavioural patterns, conceived the design for spaces of any purpose; a space that could be adaptable or expandable and most importantly, they attempted to create urban communities.²⁰ The project was part of a wider movement of architectural experimentation in university design, similar to that of Concordia's Hall Building. The tendency to experiment on

18. Ibid., 85.

19. Ibid., 91.

20. William Whyte, "The Modernist Moment at the University of Leeds, 1957-1977," *The Historical Journal*, 51, no. 1 (2008): 171, 181-184.

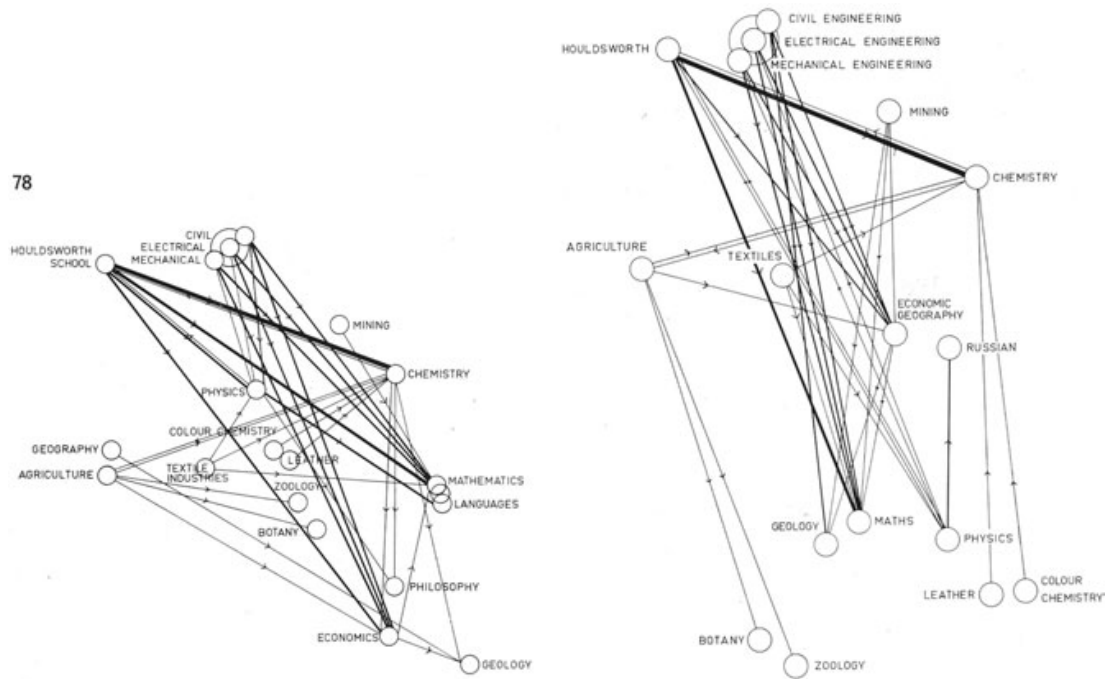


Fig. 7 The organizational diagram shows the changing relationship between different departments. From William Whyte, *The Modernist Moment at the University of Leeds, 1957-1977*. (Cambridge University Press: Oxford 2008), Figure 1.

wider issues such as urban planning indicates that these were intended to have the character of public spaces, and demonstrates a desire to create inclusive, classless spaces.

Canadian postwar universities are a mixture of English and American styles. Concordia University is comparable with Canadian university, Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Burnaby, British Columbia, established in 1965, around the same year as the Hall Building and was founded on a similar idea to house all departments of the university in one building. Arthur Erickson, designer of SFU, conceived a modern plan which responded to basic academic needs rather than following a strict institutional program. Erickson's aim was to unify all academic subjects in one body of knowledge; "One world, one university, one building." He criticised the traditional university program of random fragmented buildings. Erickson's notion of unity is representational of the modern style which emerged in the 1960s.²¹

21. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 193.

SFU and Concordia University are not only built with a similar utopian idea, but they also have several historic and demographic resemblances. Both universities underwent related challenges involving student activism in their early years. In addition, like Concordia, SFU has a significantly high percentage of part-time students. In 2011-2012, 47% of undergraduate students at SFU were enrolled part-time.²² Meanwhile, Concordia's part-time students made up 35% of undergraduates and 27% of graduates in 2011-2012.²³ These universities, separated by a vast distance, are bound by the 1960s utopianist planning ideas and by an inclusive architectural language. By virtue of these characteristics both universities have an open education philosophy which promotes equality throughout society.

McGill University is also an interesting university to compare given its proximity to the Hall Building. Its campus is composed of fragmented, elitist buildings which highly contrast Concordia's Hall Building. McGill's earliest buildings are a product of traditional university design, employing classicism, which dates back to ancient civilizations.²⁴ The Macdonald-Harrington Building for example, built in 1897, by architect Sir Andrew Taylor, was designed like many other buildings on campus. The symmetrical facade, with ornamental stonework and arched windows makes reference to Italian classicism.²⁵ The building's entrance is emphasized

22. Simon Fraser University - Institutional Research and Planning, "Table ST-07 - Unique Undergraduate Headcount by Full-time/Part-time Status, Sex and Faculty." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 21, 2013. <http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/irp/students/documents/ST07.pdf>.

23. Concordia University, "Fast facts 2011-2012." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 20, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/fast-facts/>.

24 . Adams, Annmarie, e-mail message to Amanda Gioia, March 17, 2013

25. McGill University, "Macdonald-Harrington Building ." Accessed March 18, 2013. <http://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/Macdonald-Harrington.html>.

with centralized wooden doors and two stone sculptured lions which rest atop podiums at the base of the front steps. Marble adorns the base of the walls of the interior entrance, asserting the building's authority and an indication of high social class. A long dead-ended hallway gives way to a staircase which resembles one found in a family home or a private club.²⁶ The students' architectural studios are located on different levels and vary in size according to their year, with the graduate studios at the highest levels. Domestic materials such as brick and wood are used throughout the building's interior. Meanwhile administration spaces are treated with the utmost importance, enjoying the luxury of oriental rugs and stained glass windows.²⁷ With the possible exception of the student's lounge, there is no remaining space allotted for informal gatherings among students, placing importance on solitary study. The resemblance to the family home and the hierarchal treatment of the spaces renders the building exclusive to outsiders. Furthermore, the use of domestic materials in the more private spaces and rich materials in the more public spaces makes reference to social class and exclusivity and parallels McGill University's more elitist educational position.

Prior to the revolutionary university design in the 1960s, designers like Sir Andrew Taylor still borrowed architectural ideals from some of the oldest universities such as Oxford and Cambridge.²⁸ The traditional university's distinguished reputation is apparent in the lavish buildings which serve to commemorate the aristocracy funding these institutions and their monastic origins. Muthesius notes how American Ivy League Universities such as Yale and Princeton recall the old Oxbridge style in their residence halls. Architectural design of the student houses often resembles a "half college, half monastery", shaping the students inside

26. Adams, e-mail

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

through the agency of an austere architecture, while making reference to educational aims.²⁹ The tendency to borrow from monastic architectural principles is common in traditional university design and privileges isolation and separation.

Symmetry is often employed in traditional university design as well, further stressing the importance upon separation. In monasteries, as in universities, space determines how individuals are brought together or kept apart. Furthermore, space determines their separation from the outside world. Traditionally the prestige of a university is measured by its exclusivity, manifested in a low acceptance rate. Hence in the most elitist universities, the architecture functions as a complimentary defence to keep the outsiders out and enhance the institution's stature. By contrast, the Hall Building's main entrance, located immediately at the edge of the sidewalk is easily accessible to the public. In addition, a connection to the metro system, made possible through an underground passage in 2010 allows even more public accessibility, further

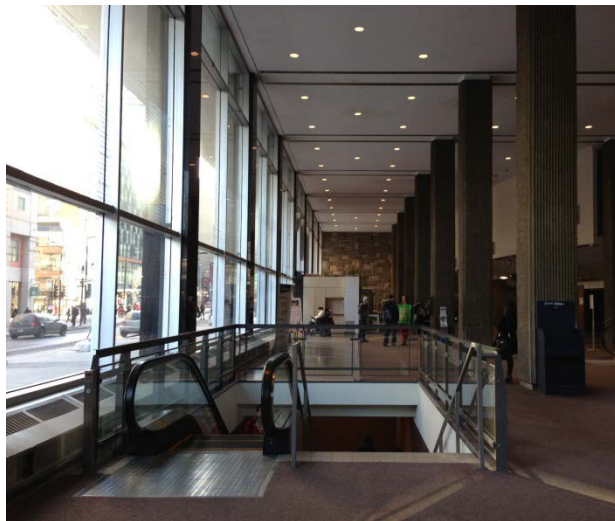


Fig. 8 The Hall Building lobby showing access to underground passage. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

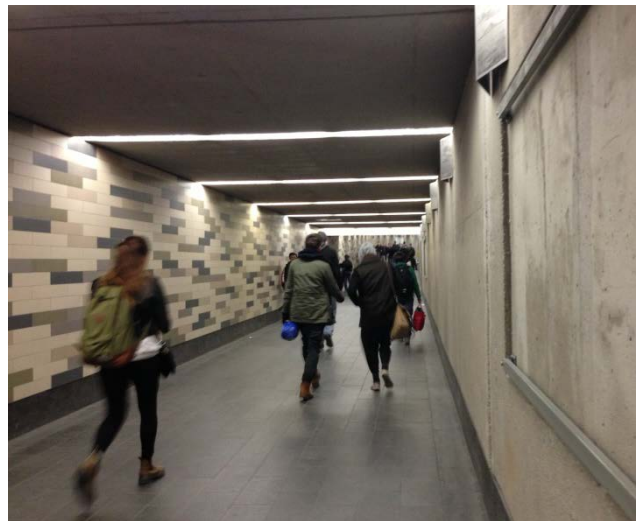


Fig. 9 Underground passage to metro system showing public accessibility. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

29. Stefan Muthesius, *The Postwar University*, 21.

exemplifying Concordia University's inclusivity and open educational philosophy.

As a former Concordia student and current McGill student, Chelsey Pigeon understands the fundamental difference between the Macdonald-Harrington Architecture Building and the Hall Building. She points out there are very few spaces to socialize or to meet people in the Macdonald-Harrington Building. On the contrary, the Hall Building presents a greater allowance for lingering. "It would be no surprise," she says, "that some might find Macdonald-Harrington to be intimidating. The building has its purpose and its inhabitants - those who do not belong to this group can sense it."³⁰

Chelsey further exemplifies the Hall Building's inclusive spatial quality in relation to Concordia's open education. She recalls the sense of community in the Hall Building which has enabled her to encounter a variety of people she would not have met otherwise. The openness of the lobby and plethora of meeting spaces such as the mezzanine, the university bar, and the cafe have a public character which creates sense of inclusivity and equality. Chelsey admits the mezzanine level is not an appropriate study space, although the off-setting of the tables, the abundance of chairs, the "mezz-society" and events booths all promote social exchange and renders it an obvious shared space.³¹

In addition, she mentions the way the classrooms in the Hall Building form a looped hallway which avoids a dead ended hallway that might suggest some rooms are more exclusive than others. The Hall Building's abundance of study spaces flanking the escalators are not limited to the designated department. Instead, most students take advantage of any study space available,

30. Chelsey Pigeon, email interview by Amanda Gioia. February 25, 2013.

31. Ibid.



Fig. 10 Eleventh floor study space flanking the escalators, showing the abundance of space allocated to informal gatherings among students from any department. Amanda Gioia, March 2013.

which often means another faculty's floor. Having witnessed this first hand, Chelsey believes “this facilitates inter-faculty connectivity.”

The People’s Potato on the seventh floor is another factor which encourages inter-faculty connectivity by attracting students to a donation based vegan lunch every day at noon. Because of these circumstances, Chelsey easily maintained relationships with the various people she met at Concordia. While perhaps there could be other factors contributing to her experience, she believes the Hall Building effortlessly links the different faculties well.³² Chelsey studied at Concordia from 2008 to 2011 and quite obviously did not experience the university’s strong

32. Ibid.

student community structure in its early years. However, study of the present day university indicates that Concordia has maintained its architectural and educational philosophies to this day.

Numerous changes have been made to the building since its opening, and over the years new Concordia buildings have been added to the Sir George Williams (SGW) Campus. With the number of students constantly rising in Concordia's early years, the Hall Building, which was initially massive in size, quickly was at a loss for space. The university's merger with Loyola College in 1974 soon resolved some of the problems associated with the lack of space. Laboratories and libraries moved out and the old spaces were reused in different ways, exemplifying the Hall Building's adaptability. In 1992 a much needed McConnell Library Building was added to the SGW Campus.³³ After the opening of the Engineering and Visual Arts Complex in 2005 and the John Molson School of Business Building in 2009, several units moved out of the Hall Building.³⁴ In addition, many classrooms and offices were moved to old buildings such as the Grey Nuns Motherhouse or the Faubourg Building. Since these buildings are located within a rather large radius, most Concordia buildings are interwoven in between many downtown buildings and are hard to detect as university property.

The Quartier Concordia project was initiated in an attempt to tie these buildings together into a cohesive campus. However, unlike a traditional campus, Quartier Concordia, located at the center of downtown buildings, is a shared outdoor space for both Concordia students and the public. The Quartier is a growing project consisting of a large open plaza, bike paths, pedestrian walkways, and civic infrastructure on the wide de Maisonneuve Street sidewalk. By comparison,

33. Anja Brock, "Seen but Ignored", 72.

34. Concordia University, "SGW Campus." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 9, 2013.
<http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/>



Fig. 11 Quartier Concordia. From Concordia University, "Quartier Concordia." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 9, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/quartier/>

McGill University's Roddick Gates define a clear threshold to the campus and the fragmented buildings are set far back from the busy Sherbrooke Street. The Quartier Concordia project aims to encourage interaction and street life, and to optimize different modes of transportation.³⁵ Most of all, it is a welcoming, non-exclusive urban space that links the city with the university campus. The unusual campus plan that exists today is characteristic of the democratic style Concordia has maintained since the opening of the Hall Building forty-six years ago.

Concordia University places importance on inclusivity and equality in both its architecture and in its education. The Hall Building is a good architectural illustration of Concordia's open philosophy. The uniform façade and the use of industrial materials have a public character which counteracts the notion of rank or elitism. The non-hierarchical plan and the profusion of social spaces create an atmosphere for individuals to collectively pursue a higher education. The building's unconventional aesthetic contrasts traditional university architecture,

35. Concordia University, "Quartier Concordia." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 9, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/quartier/>

which often makes reference to classicism and appropriates an exclusive architecture to maintain a certain level of prestige. Furthermore the Hall Building's application of 1960s utopian university principles parallels Concordia's desire to create a community structure which values inclusivity and integration. Although Concordia has undergone architectural expansion in recent years, its vision of a university for all remains manifested in its philosophy as well as in the new campus arrangement. Larger implications of these findings indicate that while high standing universities maintain great distinction, their elitist reputations do not increase the rate of enrolment in universities. On the contrary, Concordia University's Hall Building provides classless spaces for students to excel and contribute together to society.

Acknowledgments

Very special thanks to Professor Annmarie Adams for her time and assistance in composing this essay, and to Chelsey Pigeon for sharing her experience in the Hall Building.

Bibliography

Adams, Annmarie. "Lecture no. 3: New Brutalism and Free Speech." Lecture, Architectural History 4 from McGill Architecture, Montreal, January 24, 2013.

Brock, Anja. "*Seen but Ignored: Concordia University's Henry Foss Hall Building in Montréal.*" *JSSAC*. 34. no. 2 (2009): 61-74.

Chelsey Pigeon, (Former Concordia University student), interview by Amanda Gioia, Email interview February 25, 2013.

Colclough, Wes. *The Henry Foss Hall Building, Montreal: From Riots to Gardens in Forty Years*. working paper., Concordia University, 2010. Palimpsest III: The Dialectics of Montreal's Public Spaces, 1-33.

Concordia University, "Fast facts 2011-2012." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 20, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/fast-facts/>.

Concordia University, "Hall Building." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 20, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/hall/>.

Concordia University, "Quartier Concordia." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 9, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/quartier/>

Concordia University, "SGW Campus." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 9, 2013. <http://www.concordia.ca/about/major-projects/campus/sgw/>

McGill University, "Macdonald-Harrington Building ." Accessed March 18, 2013. <http://cac.mcgill.ca/campus/buildings/Macdonald-Harrington.html>.

Muthesius, Stefan. *The Postwar University: Utopianist Campus and College*. New Haven and London: Yale University, 2000.

Secor, "Study on the Impact of Concordia University." Last modified 2011. Accessed February 20, 2013. http://www.concordia.ca/documents/about-concordia/who-we-are/Concordia_economic_impact_E.pdf.

Simon Fraser University - Institutional Research and Planning, "Table ST-07 - Unique Undergraduate Headcount by Full-time/Part-time Status, Sex and Faculty." Last modified 2012. Accessed February 21, 2013. <http://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/irp/students/documents/ST07.pdf>.

Whyte, William. "The Modernist Moment at the University of Leeds, 1957-1977." *The Historical Journal*. 51. no. 1 (2008): 169-193.