Beyond the Decline:

Revaluing Montreal's Movie Palaces

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Abstract

While scholars and historians have done much to illuminate the movie palace's early twentieth-century history, this dissertation traces a neglected phase in this structure's development: its revaluation, sparked by a period of decline, from the 1950s up to the present moment, 2015. Moving beyond the dominant narrative of this object's late-modern decline, this dissertation advances a new cultural history of the movie palace, one characterized by buoyancy and resilience. Across the latter half of the twentieth century, it argues, movie palaces transitioned from outmoded, disreputable movie theatres to objects of preservation. The term "preservation" is here conceived in an expansive sense, capturing the movie palace's endurance by both formal and informal means, as well as the assorted forms and identities it has adopted over time— from the "twinned" or subdivided repertory theatre, the adult cinema and the revitalized performing arts hall, to the empty, ruinous structure awaiting reinvention. The late-modern movie palace, this work shows, is an ambiguous object. Repeated efforts to imbue this structure with essential meaning— in particular, assignations of heritage value— have ultimately revealed this structure's fluidity, its resistance to a fixed ontology. Indeed, this research demonstrates, the movie palace is a constantly evolving object; its meaning and value are always provisional.

This dissertation begins by tracing how a collection of socio-cultural, economic and industrial variables influenced the movie palace's initial postwar decline in North America, a stage often glossed over by historians and scholars. Through a close reading of trade journals and magazines, it highlights the role of the film exhibitor in relation to this history, revealing how, when and why this figure varyingly endorsed or resisted the movie palace's

obsolescence. It then turns to the local context of Montreal, Quebec where individual theatres negotiated wider forces of decline. Here, theatres persisted by shape shifting and performing new roles, becoming specialized venues for alternative subcultures and niche markets. Across this period, this work argues, the movie palace did not merely fade into obscurity; it discovered its mutability and asserted its modern potential. The most detailed case studies of this dissertation—of the Rialto and Seville theatres, respectively— reveal how and why the movie palace has continued to hold sway over cultural, social, economic and architectural matters in the city. As social actors in Montreal have, in different ways, laid claims to the fate of local theatres, these structures have become sites of contested meaning, caught at the centre of discord, debate and controversy. Efforts to resolve the tensions emerging at the site of the movie palace, however, have encouraged an ongoing engagement with this historic artifact. As such, the movie palace's competing values have been productive, ensuring that this old object retain modern significance in an ever-shifting urban landscape.

Résumé

Bien que les chercheurs et les historiens en aient fait beaucoup pour éclairer l'histoire des palaces du début du vingtième siècle, cette étude se penche sur une période négligée du développement de cette structure : sa revalorisation, suscitée par une période de déclin, allant des années 50 jusqu'à aujourd'hui, en 2015. En allant au-delà du récit dominant du déclin de cet objet durant l'époque moderne, cette dissertation propose une nouvelle histoire culturelle des palaces caractérisée par leur dynamisme et leur résilience. Cette étude affirme qu'au courant de la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle, les palaces sont passés de salles de cinéma malfamées à artéfacts à préserver. Le terme « préserver » ici se conçoit de façon exhaustive, capturant l'endurance des palaces de manière à la fois formelle et informelle, ainsi que les formes et identités diverses qu'ils ont adoptées au fil du temps — du cinéma de répertoire « jumelé » ou subdivisé, le cinéma pour adulte et la salle de spectacles revitalisée, à la structure vide et en ruines en attente de réinvention. Cette étude démontre que le palace de l'ère moderne est un objet ambigu. Des efforts répétés pour imprégner cette structure d'un sens essentiel — des attributions de valeur patrimoniale en particulier — ont ultimement révélé la fluidité de cette structure, sa résistance à une ontologie fixe. En effet, cette recherche démontre que le palace est un objet en constante évolution; son sens et sa valeur sont toujours provisoires.

Cette dissertation commence en retraçant comment une collection de variables socioculturelles, économiques et industrielles ont influencé le déclin initial de l'après-guerre du palace en Amérique du Nord, une étape souvent négligée par les historiens et les chercheurs. Grâce à une lecture attentive de revues spécialisées et de magazines, elle souligne le rôle des exploitants de salles de cinéma dans cette histoire, révélant comment,

quand et pourquoi ils ont, de manière variable, soutenu ou résisté l'obsolescence du palace. Elle se tourne ensuite vers le contexte local de Montréal, au Québec, où les théâtres ont négocié individuellement avec des forces de déclin plus larges. Ici, les théâtres ont survécu en changeant de forme et en jouant de nouveaux rôles, en devenant des salles spécialisées pour des sous-cultures alternatives et des marchés à créneau. Cette étude soutient que durant cette période, le palace n'a pas simplement sombré dans l'oubli; il a plutôt découvert sa mutabilité et affirmé son potentiel moderne. Les études de cas plus détaillées de cette dissertation — des théâtres Rialto et Séville, respectivement — révèlent comment et pourquoi le palace continue d'avoir une influence sur les questions culturelles, sociales, économiques et architecturales de la ville. Alors que des acteurs sociaux montréalais ont, de différentes façons, revendiqué le contrôle sur le sort des théâtres locaux, ces structures sont devenues des sites de sens contestés, pris au centre de discordes, de débats et de controverses. Des efforts pour résoudre les tensions émergeant des palaces ont par contre encouragé un engagement continu envers cet artéfact historique. Ainsi, les valeurs divergentes du palace ont été productives, assurant que ce vieil objet retienne un sens moderne au sein d'un paysage urbain en perpétuelle mutation.

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Introduction

A 2002 illustration in the *New Yorker* wryly comments upon a late-modern urban cultural phenomenon that has repeated itself in cities across North America (Fig. 1). Pictured is a nondescript movie theatre on an empty street corner. Its doors, windows and box office are shuttered. Above the theatre's horizontal marquee is a large sign, its bubbly three-dimensional letters spelling the word "MOVIES." This generic name reveals the origins of the building, which started out as a popular showplace for cinema. Like the doors and windows, though, the sign is now boarded over, testifying to the movie theatre's eventual loss of commercial and cultural viability. Below this, on the marquee itself, is a much smaller sign advertising "Groceries." Revealing another stage in the theatre's development, its conversion to a shopping market, the sign is now crossed out. This, too, was a lapsed venture. Further down is an even smaller sign, also barricaded, advertising "Bail Bonds." The building, it seems, for a while housed another operation, this time more marginal. Finally, on the sidewalk in front of the boarded-up theatre is a solitary vendor whose wares are summed up by two words scribbled on a small placard: "shoe laces." It is a pitiful sight, rendered more so by the street's ostensible lack of pedestrians. The shoelace peddler, the image suggests, was lured there by habit, instinctively drawn by the spectre of past commercial activity inside the building. But the theatre no longer houses any occupation inside its walls. The street it inhabits is vacant. This once-optimistic, well-

defined building is now seemingly abandoned, an urban outlier exhibiting ambiguous meaning. And yet there it lingers, awaiting the next stage in its history.

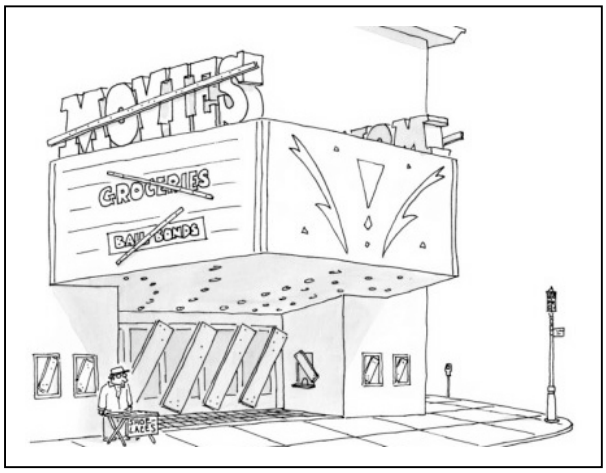

Fig. 1. Illustration of a former movie theatre, which operated as a grocery store and bail bonds office before being shuttered. Jack Ziegler. Cartoon. *New Yorker* 8 Apr. 2002. Print.

This illustration offers a caricature of a movie theatre in decline. Providing fodder for the artist, its hierarchy of signs-- moving from highest to lowest points of economic viability-- mirror the theatre's gradual loss of cultural currency. This is a familiar teleology. While the theatre itself is nondescript, and perhaps even references an actual theatre known to the artist, it captures a route most notoriously followed by the movie palace, an historic genre of movie theatre. The movie palace is the grand single-screen precursor to the contemporary multi- and megaplex cinema. Movie palaces, many of which were built in the 1920s, started out as spectacular showcases for cinema and vaudeville. Following the Second World War, these structures underwent a kind of death as various economic, social and cultural forces worked to ensure their obsolescence. Many movie palaces faded into obscurity. Others were demolished. Some, however, were reincarnated. Reborn under new names, vocations and material forms, some movie palaces have remained standing into the twenty-first century. Very few of those remaining have adhered to their original function

across their lifespan. Rather, movie palaces often carry with them a litany of past lives. Their histories recount disparate roles adopted over time to legitimize their continued existence.

While the *New Yorker* illustration depicts the downfall of a movie theatre, it also gestures, perhaps unwittingly, toward another vital characteristic of this object: its mutability. This, too, resonates strongly in the case of the movie palace, which has historically turned on a capacity to change. This image, then, also speaks to the movie palace's adaptive tendencies, its surprising resilience. It reminds us that conventional histories—such as those of the movie palace's decline—can sometimes obscure more nuanced accounts. This dissertation, the product of extensive mining, sets out to uncover one such alternative history, shining new light on an old object.

Decline and Revaluation

While the early history of the movie palace has provided rich terrain for film historians, this project shifts focus to a neglected phase in the history of this twentieth-century architectural icon-- specifically, the period following the decline of the movie palace, from the 1950s to the present day. Setting aside familiar narratives of these once-proud cinematic "temples," my project concentrates on the late-modern history of movie palaces—their ruination and revaluation— and the as-yet-unsettled question of their contemporary function and appeal.[1] The moment of ostensible decline in movie palace

[1] I use the term "late-modern" in a broad sense, to capture a time frame spanning the latter half of the twentieth century up to and including the present day, 2015. Elsewhere, the temporal parameters of the late-modern period have been conceived as beginning, roughly, in the early 1970s and continuing into the twenty-first century. See, for example, Rodney Harrison's discussion of the term "late-modern" and its application to histories of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century heritage practices and ideologies: *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013. Print. 76-79.

history, lamented by historians and preservationists alike, also constitutes a moment of transformation during which time these structures transitioned from outmoded, disreputable movie theatres to artifacts of preservation. Movie palace decline, from this perspective, is not just a cause for bereavement. Theatres that have been demolished, despoiled, or left to decay have given rise to robust countercurrents underpinning a modern preservation movement. "To expunge the obsolete and restore it as heritage," David Lowenthal asserts, "are, like disease and its treatment, conjoint and even symbiotic."[2] In this way, movie palace loss and recovery, disposal and re-use may be seen as part of a dialectical, yet mutually reinforcing process whereby obsolete theatres are recast, posthumously, as part of the architecture of urban memory. At the centre of this study is an analysis of this process and its meaning for modern culture.

This study brings to light a point in time when histories of film exhibition and architectural preservation converged and coalesced around the cultural object of the movie palace. Across its chapters, it examines specific cases in Montreal, each representing different variations on the late-modern movie palace: a set of local theatres responding to the initial decline of the movie palace; a revitalized neighborhood theatre in Montreal's Mile End neighborhood; and a downtown movie palace in ruins. Looking closely at these cases, it aims to parse the complex relationship between residual architecture, history and urban memory, to shed light on the process whereby cultural value is socially constructed, and to reveal how competing notions of "preservation" both shape and are shaped by the ambiguous artifact of the movie palace.

The case studies that my dissertation interrogates are in many ways linked: by their

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[2] David Lowenthal. "The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions." *Giving Preservation a History*. Eds. Max Page and Randall Mason. New York: Routledge, 2004. 19-44. Print. 33.

common emergence within early twentieth-century modernity, by their changing use and value over time, and by their modern endurance, albeit bearing different degrees of fidelity to their original form and function. Apart from these parallels, the theatres vary in terms of location, occupying separate places in the urban-cultural geography of Montreal. They have different life spans, with some theatres outlasting others. Further, the means by which theatres have survived a confluence of shifting economic, cultural, social and political forces over time represent another point of divergence. Local actors and public agencies have deployed an assortment of strategies, ranging from ad hoc, piecemeal preservation methods to fully rationalized modes of intervention to manage the phenomenon by which movie palaces age and depreciate. Individual theatres have distinct cultural histories, specific places within Montreal's urban public sphere, and unique relationships to city dwellers, both past and present. Thus, while Montreal's movie palaces have often been invoked *collectively* as part of the same conversation, routinely embroiled in discourses on preservation, municipal heritage, cultural history, neighborhood vitality and economic redevelopment, I argue that movie palaces, because of their variability, merit *individual* consideration.

Movie palaces are pulled at once toward fixity and change. As enduring historic artifacts and familiar urban landmarks, they are static objects, rooted in place. Yet movie palaces reside on unstable ground. They inhabit a social, cultural and economic landscape, which is eternally in flux. To maintain viability, then, they too must be willing to bend, to move along with their fluid environment. As movie palaces struggle to reconcile competing impulses, to be both durable and flexible, they often arouse discourse, debate and controversy. This study looks closely at such responses to the movie palace, laying bare the

stakes of their survival across the late-modern period. Specifically, it asks: What new cultural and social possibilities do old movie palaces represent for contemporary and future city dwellers? In short, why do movie palaces continue to matter?

Movie palaces have helped constitute the "memory infrastructure" of the city of Montreal, forming part of an urban framework of "collective memory."[3] However, Montreal's movie palaces are also elusive in character. The precise meaning they hold for present and future citizens remains hazy and ill defined. For preservationists, these structures are commonly seen as harboring important local cultural histories. But for the everyday citizen, such histories are not always transparent. More often than not, movie palaces are held up as paeans of a bygone era, while their actual histories remain vague or mysterious.

In this way, movie palaces frequently point toward, but do not clearly articulate, a shared cultural history. As silent witnesses of a departed era, they cannot speak for themselves. Hence, just as architectural ruins must be "spoken for, interpreted, and supplemented by a guided tour, a cautionary inscription, an informative notice, a historical reenactment," movie palaces often have to be "ventriloquized" by preservationists, historians, journalists, scholars, exhibitors and theatre owners.[4] Particularly in restored and revitalized form, movie palaces are re-imaginings of the past, necessarily fused with present-day ideologies and social practices. My study sets out not just to understand how movie palace preservation carries history into the present, but what happens to history and memory in this process, how existing methods of preservation complicate the modern

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[3] Randall Mason. *The Once and Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print. xxv.
[4] Jon Beasley-Murray. "Vilcashuaman: Telling Stories in Ruins." Eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. *Ruins of Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print. 215.

capacity for historical consciousness.

The movie palace's late-modern redefinition as a heritage object, either by official designation or by discursive association, I argue, is a response to its unstable identity. To align a movie palace with heritage is to imbue an otherwise precarious object with essential meaning and value. Heritage seeks to bypass cycles of newness and obsolescence, removing the movie palace from systems of consumption and disposal. But, as this dissertation suggests, assignations of heritage value give rise to further complications. Heritage and preservation are themselves unstable concepts, and their practical application rarely achieve consensus.

In Montreal, residents, preservationists, historians, journalists and municipal, provincial and federal governments, have each, and in different ways, laid claim to the fate of local theatres. Whether the stakes are individual or collective, commercial or cultural, private or public, social forces have repeatedly sought to harness the movie palace's unwieldy identity. Even when a movie palace has been officially designated a heritage object, this has ironically done much to illuminate the movie palace's fluidity, its resistance to a fixed ontology. The movie palace, this dissertation contends, is a constantly evolving object. This quality is both its malady and its cure.

Methodological Framework

This project sits at the intersection of three primary areas of study: the history of film exhibition and reception (that is, the socio-cultural history of moviegoing), the exhibition of film in Montreal and the history of architectural preservation. This approach offers a productive lens through which to understand the movie palace's evolution—that is,

as an object whose meaning has been repeatedly challenged, broken down and reformed by a collection of interrelated forces over time. The late-modern movie palace is, on the one hand, a product of wide-scale social, cultural and economic phenomena. Movie palaces across North America have had to respond and adapt to seismic changes unfolding over the latter half of the twentieth century-- reconfigurations of the film industry, of urban centres and of the discourses and practices of urban heritage. This study seeks to delineate some of these broader shifts while connecting them to local happenings in Montreal. As such, it offers a contribution to an existing body of literature surveying the wider history of the movie palace in North America, which I examine in the following chapter.

On the other hand, this project's focus on Montreal demonstrates that individual movie palaces, though steeped in a larger context, can also take on locally specific bearings. This project's spotlight on Montreal, most pronounced in the two case studies I analyze in chapters five and six, reveals a close-knit relationship between individual theatres and their surrounding environs.

History and Analysis

This dissertation is part history, part cultural analysis. Collectively, its chapters unpack the movie palace's late-modern evolution, stretching from the period of movie-palace decline, beginning in the 1950s, up to the year 2015, in which this project was concluded. At certain points, it ventures beyond this time frame, dwelling on the early history of theatres. These detours often bring to light a theatre's past to see how this has informed its trajectory. One of the fundamental tensions that this dissertation explores concerns the movie palace's temporal complexity, the ways in which a theatre negotiates

its past and present identities. Much of the ambivalence emerging at the site of the movie palace has centered on the degree to which a theatre's early twentieth-century form and function ought to be preserved and mobilized under modern conditions. In other words, to fully appreciate the implications of a theatre's disposition, its digression from or adherence to its origins, one must also be acquainted with its early history.

Together with this historical survey, this dissertation also offers an analysis of local movie palaces at particular crossroads and junctures. For example, it asks: What were the central debates that arose around individual theatres? What larger issues and ideas can these debates help to elucidate? What knowledge can we glean from the movie palace as it collides with and impacts assorted spheres of everyday urban life? To answer these and other questions, this project draws chiefly, though not exclusively, from theorizations of preservation and architecture, from studies of Montreal's urban history and from studies of film exhibition.

Selected Case Studies

This project is necessarily circumscribed by a set of constraints. It delves more deeply into some case studies than it does others. The Rialto and the Seville, for example, receive the most scrupulous attention in chapters five and six, respectively. While referencing numerous theatres in Montreal, this project does not account for the full inventory of movie palaces in the city. A number of historic theatres beyond those explored in this work remain active in Montreal's urban cultural landscape. Some notable examples include: the Empress (formerly Cinema V) in Montreal's West-End neighborhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, currently undergoing a restoration project set to divide the massive

building into four screening rooms specializing in English-language content; the Corona (formerly the Family Theatre) in the South West, a restored venue for live concerts; the Outremont, a popular theatre for live performance located in the predominantly francophone borough of Outremont; and the Chateau, which sits at the intersection of Saint Denis and Bélanger. Owned by *Le Centre Christian Métropolitain*, the Chateau is primarily a church, but moonlights as a rentable space for assorted events.[5]

Montreal is also dotted with theatres not preserved in their entirety, but still playing host to commercial and cultural activity. The Plaza, whose façade was integrated with the Plaza St. Hubert strip mall, now facilitates private events. Part of the Loews theatre in downtown Montreal re-opened in 2005 as the Mansfield Athletic Club, retaining some of its original murals and plasterwork. The other part was recently converted to a flagship store for Lolë, a Quebec-based sportswear brand, integrating the theatre's original domed ceiling. The Granada, in Montreal's East End, was converted into Théâtre Denise Pelletier, a decidedly modern venue for live theatre, though still showing traces of its original decor. The dilapidated Papineau theatre, located at the intersection of Papineau and Mont-Royal East, functioned as a bingo hall until 2009 at which point it was converted to *Zéro Gravité*, an indoor recreation centre.[6] The Dominion theatre, also on Papineau, today operates as the popular francophone concert venue *La Tulipe*.

Other local theatres exist more in vestigial form. The Monkland, Rosemont, Rivoli

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[5] Each of these theatres, with the exception of the Empress, has been ascribed official heritage value by the municipal and/or provincial government. The Corona was officially designated a heritage building by both the municipal and provincial governments. It was acquired by Virgin Mobile in 2012 and has since operated as the "Virgin Mobile Corona Theatre." The Outremont was classified as a heritage building by the provincial government. It is managed by *La Corporation Théâtre Outremont*, which works closely with the municipality of Outremont. The Château was cited as a heritage building by the municipal government. In addition to serving as a church, it has been rented out for concerts, live theatre productions, conferences, film screenings and corporate events.

[6] *Zéro Gravité* contains both a yoga studio and an interior climbing wall.

and Regent theatres all had their interiors gutted at different points in time. Retaining parts of their original facades, these neighborhood movie palaces now house various commercial enterprises.[7] The Snowdon theatre in Côte-des-Neiges, previously converted to a fitness centre, today stands empty. Several now-vanished theatres have played important parts in local histories of filmgoing, including several former first-run movie palaces located in downtown Montreal: the Strand, Capital, Palace and York theatres. The Ouimetoscope on Saint Catherine Street East, technically the first movie palace in North America, is discernible only by a commemorative plaque located at the site of the former theatre.

This list is not exhaustive. To be sure, I have selected individual movie palaces for this study from a wealth of possible examples. Each of Montreal's theatres, whether they have survived into the twenty-first century or not, bear complicated histories rooted in the social, cultural and economic dynamics of their respective neighborhoods and communities. No two theatres have followed exactly the same itinerary, and few have ended up in the same place. But as this dissertation shows, variability is precisely the thread that unites all movie palaces across the late-modern period.

The theatres that this study examines were selected for their potential as objects of critical inquiry. Each case, moreover, represents a specific archetype of the late-modern movie palace. This project explores, for example, the following categories: the demolished theatre; the "twinned" or subdivided theatre; the movie palace-turned-adult cinema; the theatre converted to repertory cinema; the restored and revitalized theatre; and the theatre-in-ruin. These, I would argue, are some of the most common iterations of the movie palace that have emerged over the latter half of the twentieth century and which continue

[7] The Monkland, Rosemont and Rivoli theatres each house different street-level stores. The Regent was converted to a Renaud-Bray bookstore.

to materialize in the twenty-first century. Further, these archetypes are evident not just in Montreal but also in cities across North America. Thus, while this study shows that Montreal's theatres have deep roots in local history and everyday urban life, it also offers an opportunity for other scholars to conduct comparative analyses between these cases and those in other locations.

Research Methodology

One of the central questions that this dissertation pursues concerns how Montreal's movie palaces were re-cast as objects of preservation. As this project shows, while movie palaces have come to be associated with heritage in more recent years, this association has not gone unchallenged. Theatre owners and exhibitors, preservationists, city council members, private developers, theatre enthusiasts and everyday citizens have each, in different ways, weighed in on the outcomes of local theatres. To understand how public opinion and local perceptions of movie palaces have shifted over time, this study traces the ways in which the movie palace has figured within both public and formalized discourses about heritage and architectural value. Discourse on the movie palace has helped to answer a number of important questions that I explore across the chapters to follow: Why and when has public interest in the movie palace waxed and waned? How can we account for a groundswell of interest in the movie palace at certain points in time? When, why, and by whom has the movie palace been revalued or, in contrast, dismissed?

Primary Sources: Archival Records and Official Documents

To piece together the movie palace's late-modern history, this study has drawn from a number of sources. It both engages with and expands upon existing literature on the

movie palace. It also relies upon a range of archival materials consulted at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Heritage Montreal's Documentation Centre, the Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale du Québec in Montreal (BANQ), the City of Montreal Archives, the Library and Archives of Canada (LAC), The Robarts Library at the University of Toronto, the McLennan and Blackader-Lauterman libraries at McGill University and the Concordia University library.

Particularly helpful were the records of The Historic Theatres' Trust (HTT), a non-profit charity in operation from 1989-2006. Based in Montreal, the HTT was one of the most active organizations with regards to the preservation of local theatres. This organization published its own quarterly news bulletin, sponsored lectures and seminars on movie palaces and compiled an inventory of over 2,000 film exhibition sites in Canada built before 1940. When the HTT dissolved in 2006, it donated the entirety of this archive to the CCA in Montreal, where it remains presently. At the CCA, I consulted photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, official reports on individual theatres, bulletins, pamphlets, flyers, emails, letters, press releases, meeting proceedings and video recordings all pertaining to movie palaces in Canada and/or to individual theatres in Montreal. From this collection, I uncovered significant detail regarding the HTT's formative role in Montreal's theatre preservation scene. Working in tandem with other heritage activists and volunteers, members of this organization often served as the primary interlocutors between the local community, the media and official government channels on matters related to the city's theatres. In particular, the founder and president of the HTT, Janet MacKinnon, was a vocal spokesperson on behalf of Montreal's endangered theatres.

Also part of the CCA's archival collection is a 1989 report compiled by Heritage Montreal entitled *La Réutilisation des Anciennes Salles de Cinéma à des Fins Culturelles.* This report was inspired by controversy surrounding the Outremont theatre, which was nearly converted into a commercial mall after it was closed down and sold in the late 1980s.[8] The collective efforts of l'Association des Citoyens d'Outremont, Heritage Montreal, *Sauvons Montréal* and a group of local cinephiles not only prevented the Outremont from having its interior gutted, but also helped draw unprecedented local attention to the city's remaining movie palaces. The report itself represents the first attempt in Montreal to implement (or at least gesture toward) some form of local, rationalized public policy specific to theatre preservation, a proposal for adaptive re-use modeled on the recycling of theatres in other cities in the United States and Canada. Actively endorsing the revaluation of the city's theatres, the report illuminates how and why these structures began to be redefined at this particular juncture.

Together, these resources have helped to clarify how movie palace preservation unfolded in Montreal, often at the intersection of grassroots, ground-level activism and nascent institutional policy. One protective measure frequently sought by preservationists is official heritage designation of specific theatres under municipal, provincial and/or federal jurisdiction. The process whereby movie palaces achieve heritage designation is one that unfolds over a significant period of time, sometimes years, and across different branches of government. Moreover, this process almost always begins with the activism of local citizens—residents, preservationists, city council members and so on— who bring

[8] Heritage Montreal. *La Réutilisation des Anciennes Salles de Cinéma à des Fins Culturelles*. Montreal: Heritage Montreal, 1989. Print.

specific cases of theatre preservation to the attention of municipal, provincial and/or federal governments.

The abovementioned records have provided much information concerning the grassroots activism of local citizens. To learn more about the institutional side of this history, I consulted a series of formal records of proceedings on individual theatres. Records from municipal, provincial and federal governments—housed at the City of Montreal archives, BANQ and the CCA, respectively— answered a number of questions concerning how a theatre comes to be classified as a heritage object. What, for instance, are the criteria used to determine a building's heritage value? How do these criteria differ between municipal, provincial and federal governments? On what grounds, in other words, are movie palaces deemed worthy of heritage credentials by government organizations?

Unpacking the various stages of this process in relation to each of my case studies has also necessitated an understanding of the laws on which both Quebec and Canada's preservation policies are based. In the province of Quebec, the Cultural Property Act, established in 1972, dictates preservation legislation.[9] Heritage designation at the federal level remains dictated by the Historic Sites and Monument Act (1953), which established the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, a division of Parks Canada.[10]

Several of the theatres this dissertation examines have been subject to various kinds of preservation legislation. The Rialto, for example, was subject to all three levels of classification, by municipal, provincial and federal governments. The Seville, conversely,

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[9] Much of the information on this Act and its implications for historic architecture is available in digital format on the website for the Ministère de la Culture, des communications et de la condition féminine. Further information on the Cultural Property Act is available at the Nahum Gelber Law library and the Blackader Lauterman Library, both located at McGill University.

[10] For a discussion of the implications of the Historic Sites and Monuments Act, which has remained unchanged since its last amendment in 1955, see: C.J. Taylor. *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Print.

was only cited as a heritage building under municipal jurisdiction. These categories are significant in terms of understanding the developmental route of individual movie palaces. The legislation under which a building is classified often determines the scope and rigor of protection it receives. In chapters five and six, the challenge in reconciling the ideals of heritage with the realities of theatres comes into sharp focus. Frequently, these case studies call into question the efficacy of heritage registers. Municipal, provincial and federal governments may classify sites as "historic," but these same governments, often mired in bureaucracy, lack everyday, on-the-ground vigilance. This responsibility often falls to local citizens and self-appointed stewards of individual theatres, for example, notifying governments of unlawful alterations to theatres. For this reason, governments have frequently been criticized for their inability to enforce the safekeeping of historic structures. Each of the formal records cited above have been invaluable to critically evaluating and parsing these complex issues.

Secondary Sources: Newspapers and Trade Magazines

This dissertation looks closely at the ways in which competing ideas about the movie palace were reported on by Montreal's local newspapers including, but not limited to the *Gazette*, *Le Devoir and La Presse*. Information gleaned from various newspapers has helped me to flesh out the local experience and public perception of movie palaces that official records often elude. The newspaper articles, advertisements and photographs I examined span the period 1924 to 2015, from the inaugural year of this project's oldest case study to the present day. The bulk of my research on Montreal's local newspapers was conducted via McGill University's libraries and collections. At Heritage Montreal's

Documentation Centre, I consulted further material germane to this project, namely its compilation of press clippings related to theatres in Montreal, across North America and abroad.

To understand how members of the film industry approached the movie palace amid its decline, the focus of chapter four, this study also relies upon archival materials consulted at the National Archives in Ottawa, Concordia University Library and the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto-- specifically, out-of-print trade publications including *Canadian Film Weekly* and its later iteration, *Canadian Film Digest*.[11] Old editions of *Box Office Magazine* and *Motion Picture Herald,* accessed in digital format online, were likewise helpful in rounding out this history. For this component of my research, I concentrated on the period 1930 to 1980, devoting the most attention to the post-WWII era when movie palaces underwent widespread decline.

Within these trade publications, I examined both statistical facts as well as news features commenting on current trends affecting film exhibition in Canada and the United States. Combing through these texts, I was able to a uncover a range of data on movie theatres including reports on theatre closings and openings, theatre construction and remodeling projects, per capita seating statistics, commercial profits and losses, technological, architectural and design trends, as well as key business appointments, mergers and divestitures. While these magazines do not divulge the private strategies of individual exhibitors, per se, they do provide evidence of the film exhibitor's primary

[11] *Canadian Film Weekly* (CFW), founded in 1941, was a trade magazine based in Toronto that remained in publication until 1970. It offered news stories and features related to production, distribution and exhibition sectors of the Canadian, American and European film industries. Its target readership included producers, distributors and exhibitors, or any members of the film industry working in one of these areas. From May 1965 to January 1957, CFW was published under the name *Canadian Film and TV Bi-Weekly Digest*, after which point it briefly returned to its original title, *Canadian Film Weekly*. In 1971, after already absorbing the *Canadian Moving Picture Digest* in March of 1957, the magazine became *Canadian Film Digest*.

concerns at a given point in time. Collectively, they offer a glimpse into the film exhibitor's surveillance and interpretation of industrial, technological, economic and socio-cultural changes happening across this period. Especially informative were columns by film exhibition magnates such as N.A. Taylor, addressing the current and future role of movie theatres in Canada.

From this research, I was able to trace a gradual shift in the way movie palaces were perceived by members of the film industry, moving from continued support of the movie palace in the early 1950s to outright denunciation of this type of venue by the late 1960s and early 1970s and, between these two stages, a period of ambivalence. Further, and most unexpectedly, I uncovered information that complicates the prevailing narrative of decline that has come to dominate histories of the post-WWII movie palace. Reports from trade magazines and newspapers reveal that some film exhibitors and theatre owners were promoting the retention and revitalization of older movie palaces from very early on, actively resisting rather than endorsing or consenting to their decline.

As a rule, I have tried to remain alert to both voluble trends and quieter countercurrents while conducting research for this project, acknowledging but also looking beyond dominant histories to smaller, lesser-known events. This, I argue, can offer a fuller picture of how the movie palace has come to be redefined over time. The movie palace's history, I hope to show, is irreducible to one factor alone. Rather, this object has intersected with a cluster of interrelated variables. As I explore in the following chapters, at times individual theatres have remained caught at the intersection of rivaling interests. At other moments, such tensions have played an innervating role, jolting dormant theatres back to life.

Chapter Outline

The chapters of this dissertation explore different yet associated dimensions of the movie palace's late-modern history. As I indicate above, this project approaches the movie palace as an object that sits at the intersection of three main areas of study: the history of film exhibition and reception, the history of film exhibition in Montreal and the history of architectural preservation.

Chapter 2 consists of a review of the literature that has stimulated the questions underlining this dissertation. It begins by outlining a paradigmatic shift in film scholarship away from film texts and toward film contexts, a historical "turn" toward the surrounding socio-cultural conditions of cinema as well as its exhibition, distribution and reception. Outlining some exemplary contributions to this field, it considers a range of studies from North America and abroad, before turning to scholarship centered on Quebec and Montreal. This chapter also situates studies of film exhibition in Montreal within broader cultural histories of the city, in part to illustrate that the city's history of moviegoing is a formative component of its urban cultural lineage. Together, these studies have influenced the approach of the present work, namely in their common shift away from the grand narratives of history to a concern for the local and the specific.

To accomplish the tasks laid out by this project, it necessarily intersects with an up-and-coming area of academic studies: the history of architectural preservation. This chapter thus provides a brief survey of the literature in this relatively young field, to illustrate how and why studies of architectural heritage and its preservation have flourished more recently. Due to the particular purview of this dissertation, it does not set out to provide an exhaustive survey of this area of study. Rather, it seeks to connect the

late-modern history of Montreal movie palaces to a wider ideological shift toward a concern for heritage and architectural preservation in the Western world.

Finally, this chapter includes a history of the movie palace, from its early twentieth-century emergence to its post-WWII-decline, drawing from the major literature on this subject. This section answers some central questions about the movie palace, laying important historical groundwork for the chapters to follow: What is a movie palace and how did it come into being? What was the movie palace's original meaning and value? How and why did this change over time?

Chapter 3 turns to some guiding conceptual issues that have informed the arc of this dissertation. It considers the ambiguous concept of the movie palace itself. Some of the differing conceptualizations of the movie palace that this chapter identifies resurface at later points in this study, particular during analyses of individual theatres. This chapter also introduces some of the key ideas that underline the chapters to follow. These ideas are organized thematically under three separate, yet interrelated sections: Restoration and Preservation; History and Memory; and Ruins and Rupture.

Chapter 4 tackles the initial decline of the movie palace in the era following the Second World War. This chapter's aim is twofold: first, to examine the period of movie palace decline in some detail; and second, to consider how the wider decline of the movie palace manifested itself on a local scale in Montreal. Movie palace decline, though widely acknowledged to have occurred at a specific point in history, is rarely studied in depth. In particular, the role of the film exhibitor in relation to this history lacks specificity. This chapter considers the film exhibitor's attention to broader social, cultural and economic shifts often named as causal factors in the movie palace's decline. It asks: Were film

exhibitors merely passive respondents to wide-scale changes beyond their control, or did they contribute in some way to the movie palace's decline? This chapter looks at how the movie palace was talked about across newspapers, trade journals and magazines. It pinpoints instances when the movie palace was more openly characterized as "obsolete" and posits how and why these discursive re-framings were both timely and strategic. Significantly, this same discourse on the movie palace also reveals simultaneous countercurrents-- that is, forces challenging its decline. Though more marginal, such examples suggest that the movie palace's decline was not, as many histories have suggested, a wholesale affair.

Finally, this chapter homes in on how these developments unfolded on a local scale in Montreal across the 1960s and 1970s. To this end, it focuses on two primary modes of informal theatre preservation in Montreal: the conversion of single-auditorium theatres to dual and multi cinemas, otherwise known as theatre subdivision; and the conversion of theatres so that they might serve alternative film markets-- in particular, that of adult cinema. This period in local history is often seen as an extension of the movie palace's decline, one in which theatres resorted to desperate measures in order to survive. But as this chapter shows, it was also a period that testified to their mutability and resilience, as movie palaces assumed new guises and generated alternative modes of spectatorship.

Chapter 5 examines, in detail, a specific case study: that of the Rialto theatre, an old movie palace in Montreal's Mile End neighbourhood. Tracing the history of this theatre, it ultimately zeroes in on a key segment in its development—1987 to 2001—during which time opposing forces vied for authority over the theatre. As a public good, steered by a collective desire for permanence, the preserved Rialto was expected to uphold history,

heritage and memory. Yet, as a private property in search of a new, commercial vocation, the structure was simultaneously pulled toward renovation and change. This chapter considers how this theatre negotiated a dual identity: at once a public site of collective memory, designated a historic building by municipal, provincial and federal governments, and a private property.

The Rialto has also struggled to reconcile its search for a modern vocation, one that would transform this architectural relic into a *useful* historic site, with a collective desire to preserve the original identity of this structure. This chapter argues that the Rialto has remained unstable largely because of its tensions and dualities. But these qualities have also aroused local interest in the theatre, ensuring that it remain active in Montreal's urban cultural scene. It bears mentioning here that a modified version of this chapter was published in 2014, in French, in the book *Formes Urbaines: Circulation, Stockage et Transmission de L'Expression Culturelle à Montréal*.[12]

Chapter 6 traces the history of the Seville theatre, marking out key stages in its evolution from a popular venue for cinema and live shows to a modern ruin. Caught in an impasse for more two decades, the building was left to decay. It eventually became an amorphous object onto which new meanings were projected. This chapters looks closely at the discursive activity, which accompanied the Seville's decline. In particular, it examines coverage by the local press, which, I argue, betrays a widespread desire to compensate for the structure's growing illegibility. This chapter explores a number of questions: What meaning did this historic movie palace hold for the local community? Why did it fall into

[12] Heather Gibb. "Le Rialto." *Formes Urbaines: Circulation, Stockage et Transmission de L'Expression Culturelle à Montréal*. Eds. Will Straw, Annie Guérin and Anouk Bélanger. Montreal: Les Éditions Esse, 2014. 208-217. Print.

ruin despite efforts to have it restored and re-used? And in what way was the Seville's evolution connected to changes in the surrounding urban environment? The final stage in the Seville's history, its ruination and eventual destruction in 2010, invites further contemplation. This chapter finally considers what it means to dwell among modern ruins, particularly in an urban context. What challenge does the modern ruin pose in the context of urban life, and what potential does its erasure foreclose?

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation. Rather than serve as an end to the discussion, however, it is offers an opening onto further work. This chapter not only reviews the key arguments made across the preceding chapters, and the research findings on which they are based, but underlines further questions provoked by this work. This dissertation, I contend, engages with pressing concerns for studies of film exhibition, urban culture and architectural preservation. But in so doing it also gestures toward prospective lines of inquiry, serving as a springboard to future study.

Chapter 2- Reviewing the Literature

Film Studies: From Text to Context

Janet Staiger, noting a long-standing tendency within film studies to privilege a text-centered approach to cinema asserts that, in writing film history, "looking just at celluloid texts will no longer do [...]."[13] Indeed, over the past twenty years, in an effort to expand the scope of cinema research, film scholarship has undergone what Graeme Turner identifies as a "paradigm shift," moving away from an exclusive emphasis on film texts.[14] Robert Allen, who describes this same phenomenon as a "historical turn" in film studies, notes a growing interest in what is variously termed "historical spectatorship, the audience, reception or the social experience of moviegoing."[15] Likewise, Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire and Sarah Stubbings observe that a "general turn to social and cultural history" has come to redefine cinema scholarship over the past two decades.[16] More recently, Richard Maltby contends, this shift has become an international trend, reaching "critical mass and methodological maturity" over the last decade, and earning a fresh label: "the new cinema

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[13] Janet Staiger. *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print. 120.
[14] Graeme Turner. "Editor's Introduction." *The Film Cultures Reader.* Ed. Graeme Turner. London: Routledge, 2002. Print. 5.
[15] Robert C. Allen."Race, Religion and Rusticity: Relocating U.S. Film History." *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Going to the Movies*. Eds. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen. Clyde Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007. Print. 27.
[16] Mark Jancovich, Lucy Faire with Sarah Stubbings. *The Place of the Audience: Cultural Geographies of Film Consumption*. London: BFI Publishing, 2003. Print. 12

history."[17]

No longer exclusively focused on the object of film itself—as did those approaches rooted in theories of the film apparatus developed in the 1970s—, scholars are now casting a wider swath, demonstrating an interest in "specific people, places and chronologies," audiences and spaces at particular moments in time, and considering such moments as fully constitutive of cinema history.[18] Kathryn Fuller Seeley and George Potamianos explain that this shift in media research, this expansion from text to context, takes into account the specific *circumstances* of film production, distribution, exhibition and reception.[19] Such studies range from the macro-historical—for example, examining national and global systems of film circulation— to the micro-historical, with an emphasis on local consumption and exchange or, in some cases, the intersection of these two spheres. Such an interest in the contextual, moreover, includes a concern for broader social and cultural conditions: how moviegoing has both shaped and been shaped by aspects of everyday life as well as by "the many meanings motion pictures (have) assumed in popular culture."[20]

Maltby, together with Melvin Stokes, contend that this project, a form of historical revisionism, constitutes part of a larger effort to "restore agency" to those individuals and groups who may have gone unrecognized within the grand narratives of film history. "For cinema history to matter more," they argue, "it must engage with the social history of which it is a part, not through practices of textual interpretation, but by attempting to write

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[17] Richard Maltby. "New Cinema Histories." *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*. Eds. Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011. 3-40. Print. 3.
[18] Kathryn Fuller-Seeley and George Potamianos. "Introduction: Researching and Writing the History of Local Moviegoing." *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Cases of Local Moviegoing*. Eds. Kathryn H. Fuller Seeley and George Potamianos. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print. 3.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.

cinema history from below."[21] From a methodological standpoint, writing this history "from below" involves looking at actual, rather than abstract or theoretical, circumstances of cinemagoing: real people at particular times in particular spaces, specific sites of media consumption and locally-contingent viewing conditions. Among these local currents and wider trajectories sits the history of movie theatres. In a broad sense this includes their patrons, locations and vocations, along with their material, spatial and temporal dimensions.

Film Exhibition and Its Histories

The 2011 anthology *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies* illustrates the recent drift toward the contextual highlighted above.[22] In addition to studies of underground, rural and regional cinemagoing in the United States and Canada, contributing to a growing body of North American case studies, this volume includes studies of film exhibition, reception and distribution in Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands and South India.[23] Unearthing a range of previously undocumented histories, this work reveals both the value and need for more contributions to international studies of film's circulation and consumption.

Both American and Canadian scholars have contributed much to the work on film

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[21] Richard Maltby and Melvin Stokes. "Introduction." *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Movies.* Eds. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert Clyde Allen. Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007. 3.

[22] Maltby et al. 2011.

[23] See, for instance: Daniel Biltereyst, Philippe Meers and Lies Van de Vijver. "Social Class, Experiences of Distinction and Cinema in Postwar Ghent." 101-124; Clara Pafort-Overduin. "Distribution and Exhibition in the Netherlands, 1943-1936." 125-139; John Sedgwick. "Patterns in First-Run and Suburban Filmgoing in Sydney in the Mid-1930s." 140-158; Mike Walsh. "From Hollywood to the Garden Suburb (and Back to Hollywood): Exhibition and Distribution in Australia." 159-170; Deb Verhoeven. "Film Distribution in the Diaspora: Temporality, Community and National Cinema." 243-260; Stephen Putnam Hughes. "Silent Film Genre, Exhibition and Audiences in South India." 295-309. Maltby et al. 2011.

exhibition and reception. American scholars, focusing on audiences, spaces and social practices in the United States have made important inroads in the field. Douglas Gomery, for instance, has provided one of the most comprehensive histories of cinema exhibition to date, shedding light on the business strategies of the American film industry. Gomery, in his study, reveals how corporate forces have both influenced and been influenced by the social and cultural experience of cinemagoers.[24] He not only approaches exhibition history from a broad, national perspective, looking at industry trends and practices across the United States, but also covers an expansive time period, from 1895 to 1992 (when his study was published). It bears mentioning that a large proportion of moviegoing histories have thus far concentrated on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the period from "the advent of commercial cinema in the U.S. in 1896 to the full industrialization of film production, distribution, and exhibition in the 1920s."[25] Moreover, one of the tendencies of film historiography generally has been to privilege large modern cities—New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, for example— and to conceive of these urban centers as stand-ins for the whole of cinema history.

It is true that many early film venues—kinetoscope parlors, nickelodeons, movie houses and, eventually, movie palaces— were often concentrated in urban settings and that films, similarly, were often produced and distributed by city-based companies. During the early twentieth century the Hollywood film industry, in particular, concentrated much of its business in urban centers, specifically when deciding where to build "its large, first-run

[24] Douglas Gomery. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Exhibition in America*. London: BFI, 1992. Print.
[25] Allen. "Race, Region, and Rusticity." 27.

movie theatres […] which also tended to account for the bulk of Hollywood's revenues."[26] Thus, in many ways the city did become the "most visible" site of film consumption.[27] It is for these reasons that film historians have often characterized early film production and cinema's initial cultural reception as a predominantly urban phenomenon: "something that was by, for, and of the big city."[28]

Ben Singer has lent further theoretical credence to this argument, linking the experience of early cinema to the sensorial and psychological experience of the urban metropolis, what he terms the "hyperstimulus" of the modern city.[29] Fuller-Seeley and Potamianos claim that this is a common trope of the "modernity thesis," connecting film's development to that of the modern metropolis. Yet, this framework poses certain problems. For one, it often conflates cinema spectators with the city itself, envisioning "a vast, anonymous, homogeneous mass audience in an equally vast, skyscrapered, fragmented, rapid-paced urban milieu."[30] Such an image can be reductive as it tends to "level-out" all experiences into one overarching narrative.

Additionally, some scholars suggest that this type of work points to an urban bias across film history, thus calling for a "de-centering" of the city within cinema scholarship.[31] Yet, I would argue that the central issue is not an overemphasis on the urban experience,

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[26] Robert C. Allen."Decentering Historical Audience Studies: A Modest Proposal." *Hollywood in the Neighborhood. Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing*. Ed. Kathryn Fuller-Seeley. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. Print. 20.
[27] Fuller-Seeley and Potamianos. "Introduction." 5.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ben Singer. "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism." Eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz. *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print. 73.
[30] Fuller-Seeley and Potamianos. "Introduction." 5.
[31] Robert Allen, for example, proposes that film scholarship ought to "de-center" the urban metropolis within the history of cinema, moving away from a tendency toward "Gothamcentrism." He suggests looking instead to small-scale, individual case studies of local neighborhoods and communities. See: Robert C. "Decentering Historical Audience Studies." 20

but rather a larger tendency toward generalization. One potential corrective to this generalizing tendency, particularly when approaching an urban context, is to zoom in on specific sites of film exhibition nestled within individual communities in the city, making room for marginal, peripheral or alternative encounters with cinema. Another option, which some scholars have pursued, is to study smaller cities, towns and rural areas in order to help us account for local variation and regional difference, which are also constitutive of film history.

Robert Allen has contributed important scholarship to the latter area of study. Allen's 1979 study of nickelodeons and early attempts to regulate spectatorial practices was influential in terms of generating early interest in the socio-cultural history of cinema.[32] More recently, his study of early moviegoing practices in the rural South offers an illuminating counter-narrative to the above-mentioned "modernity thesis" emblematized by scholars such as Miriam Hansen.[33] Hansen argues that early cinema venues in cities provided an "alternative public sphere" for otherwise marginalized groups, a space in which the urban working-class, new immigrant communities and women could "negotiate the historical experience of displacement in a new social form."[34] Allen, however, argues that this experience of cinema does not account for the majority of people in the Southern United States residing in rural towns and the countryside.[35] Allen points out that African Americans living in the South were largely excluded from the experience of public moviegoing not just during cinema's formative years, but for much of cinema's twentieth-

[32] Robert C. Allen."Motion Picture Exhibition in Manhattan, 1906-1912: Beyond the Nickelodeon." *Cinema Journal* 18.2 (Spring 1979): 2-15. Print.
[33] Miriam Hansen. *Babel and Babylon*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991. Print.
[34] Hansen 25.
[35] Ibid.

century history. Thus, African Americans were usually not included among the urban working-class represented in narratives of modernity, nor did they participate in the "alternative public sphere" described by Hansen.[36]

A growing number of scholars have contributed to research exploring moviegoing in smaller cities and rural districts. Gregory Waller has conducted some of the most important work in this area, particularly with his examination of cinemagoing in small-town America, where reception and exhibition were inflected by everyday negotiations of class, race, and gender.[37] Others have looked closely at specific sites of media exhibition located in particular communities. Jeffrey Klenotic's discussion of the Franklin Theater, a small movie house in the North End district of Springfield, Massachusetts, offers a valuable example. Many working-class and immigrant communities in the North End, Klenotic shows, continued to favour small, neighborhood motion picture houses instead of their larger, more luxurious downtown counterparts. For these communities, the Franklin, and the social dynamics inside the theatre, served as an extension of the "front stoops, stairwells and streets" of neighborhood life.[38] Klenotic's description of the Franklin as a space of conviviality, moreover, offers a stark counterimage to the regimes of silence and rules of social decorum imposed in many downtown movie palaces. This local movie house thus diverged from the homogenizing trends of big-city movie palaces while challenging the "egalitarian" vision they often projected. Klenotic's findings show why it is important to

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[36] Arthur Knight's study of African American cinemagoing at the Apollo, a small-town theatre in the American South, provides further evidence of significant gaps in the dominant canon of cinema history. See: "Searching for the Apollo: Black Moviegoing and its Contexts in the Small Town US South." *Explorations in New Cinema History*. 226-242.

[37] Gregory A. Waller. *Main Street Amusements: Movies and Commercial Entertainment in a Southern City, 1896-1930*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995. Print.

[38] Jeffrey Klenotic. "'Four Hours of Hootin' and Hollerin'': Moviegoing and Everyday Life Outside the Movie Palace." *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Movies.* Ed. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen. Clyde Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007. Print. 130.

look beyond "forces of standardization" in order to uncover alternative histories, which can be found at specific exhibition sites.

Other studies remain rooted in the city, but pay heed to under-represented boroughs and neighborhoods. Judith Thissen's study of the Jewish Immigrant community residing in New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the twentieth century offers a case in point. Her research provides evidence of the variability of early narratives of modernity and spectatorship, tracing the differing accounts that arise by virtue of local contingencies. Thissen notes that, around this time, exhibitors and theater owners in many Jewish neighborhoods in the United States had successfully transformed cinema from a "*goyish* entertainment […] into a form of entertainment appropriate for Jews as much as for Gentiles."[39] However, her research shows that despite this development, the Jewish community in New York's Lower East Side remained divided over the encroachment of American cinema. Members of the Jewish working class faced off against self-appointed leaders of the community, including members of the Jewish intelligentsia. Each group represented a competing stance on the growing presence of cinema in the public sphere.[40] Thissen reveals how movie attendance became an expression of agency for Jewish working-class citizens, a means to disavow longstanding community hierarchies and traditional elitist values. Inside local movie houses, the choice to watch a film doubled as an act of resistance, and thus became connected to broader negotiations of identity within the community.

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[39] Judith Thissen. "Next Year at the Moving Pictures: Cinema and Social Change in the Jewish Immigrant Community." *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of the Movies.* Eds. Richard Maltby, Melvyn Stokes and Robert C. Allen. Clyde Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2007. 113-129. Print. 114.
[40] Ibid.

Film Exhibition and Local Culture: Canada, Quebec and Montreal

The aforementioned studies, while only a small fraction of the growing scholarship on the social history of moviegoing in the United States, reveal a large degree of variation across local and regional histories. Canadian scholars, too, have contributed much to delineating the early twentieth-century history of film exhibition and reception. Robert M. Seiler, Paul Moore and Douglas Baillie have each shed light on Canada's early history of cinema exhibition.[41] In particular, these authors have reconstructed links between the development of Canada's theatre chains (and, specifically, the national "duopoly" maintained by Famous Players and Odeon Theatres), the urban geography of movie theatres, and related changes in commercial, cultural and economic life in Canadian cities."[42]

In Quebec, some of the most important historical research on film exhibition and reception has emerged out of collaboration between scholars from the University of Montreal, Concordia University, Valleyfield College, and Laval University: André Gaudreault, Germaine Lacasse, Jean-Marc Larrue, Louis Pelletier, Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan, and Pierre Véronneau. Their research group, "GRAFICS," has created an online digital archive entitled "Silent Cinema in Quebec 1896-1930" where visitors can access detailed

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[41] See: Paul S. Moore. "Nathan L. Nathanson Introduces Canadian Odeon Producing National Competition in Film Exhibition." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 12. 2 (Fall 2003): 22-45. Print; Paul S. Moore. "Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. *Urban History Review* 32. 2 (Spring 2004): 3-20. Print; Robert M. Seiler. "Nathanson, Zukor, and Famous Players: Movie Exhibition in Canada, 1920–1941." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 36. 1 (2006): 59-80. Print; Douglas Bailie. "Cinemas in the City of Edmonton: from the Nickelodeon to the Multiplex." *Prairie Forum* 21. 2 (1996). Print.

[42] Seiler suggests that Famous Players (formed in 1920) and Odeon Theatres (formed in 1941) created a "duopoly that defined movie exhibition in Canada for more than half a century." 59. For additional detail on the history of film exhibition in Canada, in particular the role of Famous Players, see: Majunath Pendakur. *Canadian Dreams& American Control: The Political Economy of the Canadian Film Industry.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. Print. Pendakur's book explores Canada's longstanding struggle to forge a viable indigenous film industry, which he largely attributes to the American dominance of Canadian film exhibition and distribution.

histories of film production, exhibition and reception in Quebec.[43] Their research is extensive, having uncovered much about the particularity of Quebec's early film history, a period Gaudreault, Lacasse, and Sirois-Trahan contend was largely centered on film reception rather than film production, insofar as local filmmakers would not start screening their own works until 1906.[44] Moreover, because the province's film industry had limited financial resources to spare for production, much of the cinema circulating in Quebec during this period came from other countries-- in particular, the United States. Foreign films, Gaudreault, Lacasse, and Sirois-Trahan explain, were integrated within and sometimes completely eclipsed by live, locally produced performances.[45] This tendency, which continued even after 1906, is outlined in detail by Lacasse, who suggests that between 1915 and 1930, film exhibition in Quebec was often defined by a process of "cultural appropriation," whereby American film content would be adapted to local performances.[46] Quebec's silent film narrator, the *Bonimenteur*, went beyond merely clarifying scenes or translating intertitles for audiences; instead, he chose to integrate American cinema with vaudeville programs, sometimes lampooning a film with comedic monologues, lectures and songs, effectively "transforming a foreign film into a local theatrical show."[47] Lacasse also indicates that, throughout the 1920s, a number of

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[43] André Gaudreault et al. *Silent Cinema in Québec, 1896-1930*. University of Montreal. n.d. Web. 11 Apr. 2012. <www.cinemamuetquebec.ca>.

[44] André Gaudreault, Germain Lacasse and Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan. Ed. *Au Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma…Pour Une Nouvelle Histoire des Débuts du Cinéma au Québec*. Québec: Nuit Blanche, 1996. Print. 16.

[45] Ibid. 17-18. See, also: Jean-Pierre Sirois-Trahan et al. "The Reception of 'Talking Pictures' in the Context of Quebec Exhibition, 1894-1915." *Film History* 11.4 (1999): 433-443. Print. 437. In tracing the history of early synchronized sound experiments in Montreal, the authors reveal that the public reception of 'talking pictures' was largely shaped by local conditions of film exhibition-- in particular, by competition between two of the city's largest movie theatres at the time: the Nationoscope and the Ouimetoscope.

[46] Germaine Lacasse. "American Film in Quebec Theater." *Cinema Journal* 38.2 (Winter 1999): 98-110. Print. 98.

[47] Ibid. See, also: Gaudreault and Lacasse's discussion of the role of the *Bonimenteur*. *Au Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma.* 137-146. Here they explain that the *Bonimenteur,* who remained a vital part of local film shows up

Quebecois plays, mostly melodramas, appear to have been adapted from or loosely based on American feature-length films, occasionally substituting American for French-Canadian characters and plotlines.[48] This, he claims, is one of the ways in which foreign cinema was adapted to, modified by and combined with local entertainment, creating a unique hybrid of American and Quebecois cultural forms.

While Quebec had earned itself the moniker "Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma" (the nation of cinema's enemies) due to its strict censorship laws and alleged mistrust of cinema, what the GRAFICS scholars reveal is that, contrary to popular belief, Quebec's masses actually embraced cinema in the early decades of film history. However, religious leaders who held considerable influence over Quebec society and culture often limited the public consumption of film.[49] Gaudreault, Lacasse and Sirois-Trahan argue that any resistance to cinema in Quebec was spearheaded, mainly, by the all-powerful clergy and by radical conservatives. In fact, it was the popularity of-- rather than any collective misgivings about-- the film medium that spurred intellectual, political and religious groups to campaign against cinema.[50] These groups resisted cinema, believing that it had secured too large a place in French Canadian culture and society.[51] Louis Pelletier similarly argues that moviegoing culture thrived in Montreal across the first half of the twentieth century despite such resistance. This was made possible in large part by an assortment of "mediators," including local censorship boards and enterprising showmen, who made

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until the 1920s, was often used as a tool for circumventing censorship laws, sometimes presenting otherwise questionable cinema as part of a *conférence illustrée* [illustrated lecture] to inscribe the film within a respected tradition of image projection for pedagogical purposes.

[48] Lacasse notes that such adaptations at times did not credit original source material. Ibid. 101.

[49] See Gaudreault and Lacasse's detailed account of censorship in Quebec in a section titled, "La Naissance de la Censure au 'Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma.'" *Au Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma.* 105-112.

[50] Gaudreault et al. *Au Pays des Ennemis du Cinéma* 12.

[51] Ibid. 11.

foreign films more palatable to moral authorities and audiences.[52]

These and other details emerging out of historical research by members of GRAFICS have been vital in terms of tracing the local contours of film exhibition in Montreal across the early cinema period. Other studies, which have proven equally useful, outline the cultural nuances of everyday life in specific neighborhoods in the city. Studies of "the Main," Montreal's St. Laurent Boulevard, long regarded as the dividing line between the English-speaking West and French-speaking East as well as the historical axe of settlement for new immigrants, show how and why this street has occupied a prominent place in the cultural imaginary of the city. Jean-Marc Larrue and André Bourassa offer a rich account of the Main, covering the period 1891 to 1991. Here they delineate a history of spectacle along this artery, tracing the ways in which theatre, vaudeville and cinema impacted and intersected with the surrounding community.[53] Additionally, Martin Allor's spatial analysis of cultural activity along the Main looks at the socio-cultural dynamics of this strip, which he views as a site of negotiation, a "liminal zone of discursive and geographic space," where mediations of language, ethnicity and class unfold on an everyday basis.[54] These are just some of the contributions to a body of work exploring the cultural history of the Main, of which cinema culture has been a formative part.

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[52] Pelletier has provided significant research on the corporate history and programming strategies of local film exhibitors in Montreal from the period 1912 to 1952. His work demonstrates how Montreal showmen negotiated local control over theatres and their programming at a time when vertically integrated, transnational corporations maintained substantial authority over film exhibition and distribution. See: Louis Pelletier. "The Fellows Who Dress the Pictures: Montreal Film Exhibition in the Days of Vertical Integration (1912-1952)." PhD Thesis. Concordia University, 2012. Print.

[53] See: André G. Bourassa and Jean-Marc Larrue. *Les Nuits de la "Main": Cent Ans de Spectacles Sur le Boulevard Saint-Laurent, 1891-199.* Montreal: VLB, 1993. Print.

[54] See: Martin Allor. "Locating Cultural Activity: The 'Main' as Chronotrope and Heterotopia." *Topia* 1 (Spring 1997): 42-54. Print.

Dane Lanken and Jocelyne Martineau have further elaborated upon Montreal's cultural history and its implications for cinema, having each contributed detailed inventories of the city's theatres built in the first half of the twentieth century.[55] Charles Acland has examined the more recent history of film exhibition in Canada in his book *Screen Traffic*. Here, Acland traces the ways in which industrial and popular discourse about modern cinema, and its reception in North America, circulated within and responded to an increasingly globalized marketplace across the period 1986 to 1998.[56] In his study, Acland argues that everyday patterns of film consumption were informed by popular knowledge of wider industry machinations. Corporate decisions, furthermore, were often founded upon an idea of a locally based, yet internationally-oriented film consumer, "one whose cinematic interests are not bound by local or national limits, and who looks instead to a globally circulating popular film culture."[57]

In one pertinent section of his analysis, Acland engages with the contentious issue of Canadian national cinema-- that is, Canada's difficulty in producing a viable indigenous film industry. The saturation of Canadian screens with Hollywood fare and the purported lack of audience enthusiasm for homespun films have been regularly framed as direct consequences of American cultural imperialism.[58] Acland challenges this explanation, arguing that the parameters of Canada's film industry have been defined by a number of unacknowledged forces: the tastes, preferences and movie-going habits of local audiences;

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[55] See: Dane Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era, 1884-1938.* Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993. Print; and Jocelyne Martineau. *Les Salles de Cinéma Construites Avant 1940 Sur le Territoire de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal.* Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Direction du Patrimoine de Montréal, 1988. Print.
[56] Charles Acland. *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
[57] Ibid. 11.
[58] Ibid. 163-195.

the business strategies deployed by Canadian distributors and exhibitors; the various forms of legislation introduced by provincial and federal governments; and the discursive portrayal of Canadian national cinema and its audiences by journalists, policymakers and scholars.

While *Screen Traffic* elucidates the particularities of and challenges to film exhibition in Canada, Acland elsewhere narrows his focus, looking at specific cinemas in Montreal located along another historic row of cultural life: Saint Catherine Street.[59] Structuring his discussion around a series of research journeys, three separate walking trips between1998 and 2002, Acland looks for the visible "markings of temporality" imprinted on individual cinema spaces. Locating the varying "rates of change" at these sites, he demarcates corresponding pockets of cultural and commercial activity along this strip.[60]

My project is in some ways analogous to Acland's site-specific analysis insofar as I, too, will be looking at distinct "zones" of cultural life in Montreal. Yet my investigation considers not only the "surface life" of buildings, the material signs of change or stasis at individual locations, but also traces the rhythms of urban life in, around and in relation to specific theatres. The changes to an individual movie palace's form and function, I have found, often correlate with shifts in the surrounding milieu.

Montreal is a distinct place with its own complex history. I aim to show that the city's movie palaces both responded to and were reconfigured by specificities of place as much as they were influenced by wider trajectories across Canada and the United States.

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[59] Charles Acland."Haunted places: Montréal's Rue Ste Catherine and its cinema spaces." *Screen* 44.2 (2003): 133-153. Print.
[60] Ibid. 138.

Though pulled along by broader currents, individual theatres were also bound up in local constellations of urban life. Tethered to individual streets and communities, Montreal's movie palaces are inextricable from the city's dynamic *quartiers.*

Historicizing Preservation

Preservation-- of buildings, monuments, statues, artworks and objects-- is, of course, not a novel concept. Likewise, tradition, history, memory, storytelling, roots, myth and memoir are "as old as humanity."[61] However, scholarly attention over the last three decades has become acutely focused on the modern relationship to vestiges of material culture. Studies emerging across this period have been wide-ranging, including critical analyses of museums, artifacts and collections, modern "archaeologies" of material culture, and work on architectural ruins.[62] This surge of scholarly interest in the contemporary relation to material residues, moreover, has been linked to a heightened concern for memory developing in the late twentieth century. Scholars such as Richard Terdiman and Andreas Huyssen have identified a prevailing concern for memory as a key phenomenon of late-modern Western cultures.[63] Meanwhile, the scholarship on heritage-- its sites, objects,

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[61] David Lowenthal. "The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions." *Giving Preservation a History*. Eds. Max Page and Randall Mason. New York: Routledge, 2004. 19-44. Print. 20.

[62] See, for example: Ed. George W. Stocking Jr. *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985. Print; Tony Bennett. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1995. Print; Susan A. Crane, Ed. *Museums and Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Print; *Museums, Monuments and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. Print. For a provocative study, originally published in 1984, of the cultural narratives we assign to material souvenirs and collectibles, see: Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham and London: Duke University press, 1993. Print. For archaeologies of contemporary material culture, see: Richard A. Gould and Michael B. Schiffer, eds. *Modern Material Culture: the Archaeology of Us*. New York: Academic Press, 1981. Print; or Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas. *The Absent Present: Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*. Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas, eds. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. Print. For literature on ruins, refer to Chapters 3 of this dissertation.

[63] For instance, see: Richard Terdiman. *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993. Print; Andreas Huyssen. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of*

practices and discourses-- has also grown, largely in response to the rising professionalization, commoditization and globalization of heritage ideals across this period.

However, the history of architectural preservation, to which this dissertation turns, remains a nascent area of study.[64] Only in the past decade has this topic seen a groundswell of interest as a number of scholars have undertaken to trace this history in various corners of the globe.[65] This dissertation may be situated within an emergent body of work that seeks to map out the late-modern history of architectural preservation, tending specifically to shifting practices, discourses and ideologies in North America.

Histories of architectural preservation in the United States and Canada have proceeded along parallel tracks. Initial excitement over urban renewal and development in both countries following the Second World War was eventually eclipsed by a pervasive concern for the sanctity of historic architecture. In the United States, this ideological shift is often linked to the 1963 demolition of New York City's time-honored Pennsylvania Station.[66] This event became the subject of vehement public backlash, leading to new

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Amnesia. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. Print; and *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. Print.

[64] Early critical studies of heritage and its preservation include: David Lowenthal. *The Past is a Foreign Country.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. Print; Patrick Wright. *On Living in an Old Country*. London: Verso, 1985. Print; and Robert Hewison. *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*. London: Methuen Publishing Ltd. 1987. Print.

[65] For a detailed history of architectural preservation, dating from antiquity to modernity, see Miles Glendinning. *The Conservation Movement: A History of Architectural Preservation*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print. For a comprehensive anthology of essays exploring local cases of preservation in the United States, see Max Page and Randall Mason, eds. *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print. And for essays dealing with the ethical issues, theories and practices concerning the preservation of art, architecture, monuments and heritage sites in Europe, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, see Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker, eds. *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*. Amsterdam: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009. Print.

[66] Randall Mason argues that the emergence of a late twentieth-century "antidevelopment ideology" is bound up in the story of Penn Station's demolition. See: *The Once and Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Print. xi. Before this, the most commonly cited

legislation in New York City that would prevent the occurrence of similar kinds of destruction in future.[67] Three years later, the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act would bring federal legislation to bear on local cases of historic preservation, marking a huge stride toward the development of a public policy of conservation.[68]

With respect to Canada, C.J. Taylor highlights the post-WWII development boom that inspired the material overhaul of Canadian city centers, including Halifax, Quebec, Montreal and Vancouver, as a direct corollary to the destruction of stately homes and historic neighborhoods. Taylor contends that, by the 1950s, a "development mentality" came to dominate Canada's public consciousness, one in which "anything new was perceived as good, while old buildings were bad, reflecting stagnation."[69] Around this same time, a number of notable countercurrents were gaining traction. Across Canada, local groups organized to protect old neighborhoods and period houses and in some cases, activists sought help from municipal and provincial governments.[70] Governmental assistance became more accessible in 1953 after the introduction of the Historic Sites and Monuments Act, which, following a 1955 amendment, allowed for the federal designation of national historic sites on the basis of architectural merit alone. Previously, emphasis had

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case of early grassroots preservation activism in the United States dates from 1853 when a group of activists, led by Anna Pamela Cunningham, lobbied to rescue Mount Vernon. See *Giving Preservation a History* 6-7.

[67] Ibid, xi.

[68] The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 introduced the National Register of Historic Places and provided financial aid both to individual states for the preservation of historic properties and to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which became federally licensed in 1949. Several states used this financial assistance to assess the condition of historic buildings and sites, producing an inventory of candidates for the National Register. Before the National Historic Preservation Act, federal legislation remained limited primarily to government-owned sites. The federal government first took part in the field of preservation with the attainment of the Gettysburg battlefield in 1895. This history is outlined in some detail by Christine Boyer. See *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994. Print. 392.

[69] C.J. Taylor. "Conserving the Architectural Landscape, 1954-67". *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Print. 156

[70] Ibid.

been placed solely on ties to historic events and figures.[71] By the end of the decade, the federal government would work increasingly with municipal and provincial governments and local organizations in the selection and preservation of historic buildings, coming up with an inventory of commendable examples-- a selection process which remains in place today.[72]

While my dissertation does not set out to recover the history of architectural preservation in its entirety, I do aim to draw a connection between this broader ideological shift in North America in the latter half of the twentieth century and its local manifestations in Montreal. Dane Lanken notes that, by the early 1970s, Montreal was known worldwide as a "builders' banana republic" under Mayor Jean Drapeau's regime, with its "anything goes attitude on building and demolition."[73] During this period, many of Montreal's historic buildings-- greystones, houses, churches and convents-- were demolished to make way for new high rises, office buildings, parking lots and highway systems. The tipping point, Lanken contends, came in 1973 with the demolition of the venerable Van Horne mansion. This greystone manor had been sitting for more than a century at the corner of Stanley and Sherbrooke Street in downtown Montreal. Despite ardent public support to save the Van Horne mansion, Mayor Drapeau approved its removal. Largely in reaction to this event, a number of local organizations assembled to advocate for the future preservation of historic architecture, among them *Espaces Vert* (1971), *Sauvons Montréal* (1973) and Heritage Montreal (1975).

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[71] Ibid.

[72] The first official register for historic sites may be traced back to post-revolutionary France with the establishment of the *Commission des Monuments Historique* in 1837. The *Commission* was asked to come up with an inventory of France's historic buildings.

[73] Dane Lanken. "Montreal: At the New Crossroads." *Grassroots, Greystones and Glass Towers: Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture*. Ed. Bryan Demchinsky. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1989. 11-15. Print. 12.

The literature on the history of architectural preservation in Montreal is sparse. The texts that have helped me piece together the city's historical relationship to its built heritage include Gilles Lauzon and Madeleine Forget's *Old Montreal: History Through Heritage*, Alan Gordon's *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930*, Donna Gabeline, Dane Lanken and Gordon Pape's response to postwar urban renewal, *Montreal at the Crossroads*, the anthology *Grassroots, Greystones and Glass Towers: Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture,* Jean-Claude Marsan's coverage of architecture and urban development for *Le Devoir, a* local newspaper, collected in *Sauver Montréal: Chroniques d'Architecture et d'Urbanisme,* and a series compiled by the *Commission des Biens Culturels du Québec* entitled "Les Chemins de La Mémoire: Monuments et Sites Historiques du Québec."[74] Martin Drouin's book, *Le Combat du Patrimoine à Montréal (1973-2003),* offers perhaps the most comprehensive history to date of architectural preservation in Montreal. In this work, he traces the grassroots fight to protect and legitimize the city's architectural heritage, mobilized around the concept of a shared "Montreal identity."[75] (HG transl.)

My research, which examines how and why Montreal's historic movie palaces have either persisted or disappeared over time, considers the decisive role that local heritage activists have played in relation to this history. This relationship, we could say, was first

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[74] Gilles Lauzon and Madeleine Forget, eds. *Old Montreal: History Through Heritage*. Montreal: Les Publications du Quebec, 2004. Print; *Alan Gordon. Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Print; Donna Gabeline, Dane Lanken and Gordon Pape. *Montreal at the Crossroads*. Harvest House, Montreal, 1975. Print; Bryan Demchinsky, Ed. *Grassroots, Greystones and Glass Towers: Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture*. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1989. Print; Jean-Claude Marsan. *Sauver Montréal: Chroniques d'architecture et d'urbanisme*. Montréal: Boréal, 1990. Print; Commission de Biens Culturels du Québec. *Les Chemins de La Mémoire : Monuments et Sites Historiques de Québec*. Québec, Québec: Publication du Québec, 1990-1991. Print.

[75] The heritage movement's rhetorical deployment of an "identité montréalaise" [Montreal identity] incidentally grew up alongside an emergent discourse on Quebec national identity. See: Martin Drouin. *Le Combat du Patrimoine a Montréal (1973-2003).* Sainte-Foy: Presses de L'Université du Québec, 2007. Print. 14-18.

cemented in 1973 when the Capitol theatre, a large movie palace in downtown Montreal, was slated for demolition. The Capitol would be one of the first buildings that *Sauvons Montréal*, then a newly formed coalition of local heritage groups, would campaign to protect.[76] While the theatre was ultimately destroyed, this effort nonetheless prefigured a series of intercessions made by the local heritage community on behalf of the city's remaining theatres, which I explore in the following chapters.

Preserving the Movie Palace

Ben M. Hall's 1961 ode to the "golden age" of the movie palace, *The Best Remaining Seats*, is the first historical text devoted exclusively to this architectural icon, providing a rich account of its role within urban leisure culture in the United States. Hall's book would have carried particular resonance at a time when many old movie palaces, supplanted by suburban shopping mall cinemas, were sold off by theatre chains, abandoned by theatre owners and/or razed to make way for new developments. Indeed, Hall's discussion of the movie palace is noteworthy for its eulogistic overtones, already detecting the material decay and industrial displacement of these structures in the early 1960s: "The clouds that once floated over a thousand balconies have drifted away for good. The machines broke years ago. One by one the stars have blinked out, their tiny bulbs blackened..."[77] Hall bemoans the "bowling alleys, supermarkets, garages, and apartment houses" which have begun to dislodge "the once-proud Granadas, Strands, Rivolis, Tivolis, and Orientals."[78] *The Best Remaining Seats* would be the first of many picture books published between then and

[76] Drouin 236.
[77] Ben M. Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*. Rev. ed. New York: De Capo Press, Inc., 1988. Print. 254.
[78] Ibid, 254

now that would chronicle the history of the movie palace in the United States. Succeeding publications would also cover histories of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.[79] This particular body of literature has collectively supplied a rich photographic archive of historic theatres, in some cases capturing the last images of a theatre before its demolition.[80] It has also drawn attention to the plight of endangered movie palaces, making an implicit (or in some cases explicit) plea for their conservation.

Significantly, Hall would go on to set another precedent, founding the Theatre Historical Society of America in 1969, the first official group assembled for the preservation of old movie theatres. In 1976, the UK would establish the Theatres Trust, a national advisory public body for theatres, which reports to the federal government, and in 1989, Canada would start its own organization, the Theatres' Trust (later renamed the Historic Theatres' Trust), a non-profit charity based in Montreal. In addition to collecting a vast

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[79] See (in chronological order): Dennis Sharp. *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies*. New York: F.A. Praeger, 1969. Print; David Atwell. *Cathedrals of the Movies: A History of British Cinemas and Their Audiences*. London: The Architectural Press, 1980. Print; David Naylor. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981. Print; Joseph M. Valerio, Daniel Friedman, Nancy Morison Ambler. *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*. New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories Division, Academy for Educational Development, 1982. Print; John Lindsay *Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving*, Erin, Ontario, Boston Mills Press, 1983. Print; David Naylor. *Great American Movie Theatres* Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987. Print; Constance Olsheski, Mike Filey, and John Lindsay. *Pantages Theatre: Rebirth of a Landmark*. Key Porter Books, 1989. Print; Maggie Valentine. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. Print; Richard Gray. *Cinemas in Britain: One Hundred Years of Cinema Architecture.* London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996. Print; Robert Berger, Ann Conser and Stephen M. Silverman. *The Last Remaining Seats: Movie Palaces of Tinseltown*. Los Angeles: Balcony Press, 1997. Print; John Lindsay. *Palaces of the Night: Canada's Grand Theatres*. Toronto: Lynx Images, 1999. Print; Michael Putnam, *Silent Screens*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Print.; Ross Melnick and Andrea Fuchs. *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theatres* Voyageur Press, 2004. Print.; Allen Eyles and Keith Skone. *Cinemas of Hertfordshire*. Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003. Print.

[80] See, for example: Putnam (2000).

archive on Canada's theaters, the Theatres' Trust lobbied to have official heritage status given to a number of historic theatres, including several located in Montreal.[81]

A number of scholars writing about the history film exhibition in Canada have noted the rise of movie palace preservation in North America. Moore, Acland, Lanken and Martineau, in particular, have each acknowledged this development in their work. However, no scholar has yet to chart how the local expression of a wider architectural preservation movement intersected with the late-modern redefinition of the movie palace. My study of Montreal's movie palaces sets out to redress this gap, drawing important connections between these phenomena.

Historicizing the Movie Palace

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the more recent evolution of the movie palace. Yet a brief history of this architectural form is integral to such an undertaking, for the modern incarnation of the movie palace is always, in some measure, speaking to its past. Much of the literature on the movie palace frames its emergence as an urban trend beginning in the United States. Charlotte Herzog, for example, describes the movie palace as form of "big city" theater built in the United States between 1913 and 1932.[82] Douglas Gomery similarly identifies the movie palace as "principally an American phenomenon."[83] It should be noted, however, that movie palaces were cropping up in vast

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[81] The Rialto, located in Montreal, received heritage designation from all three levels of government, in part as a result of the Trust's activism. Additionally, Montreal's Seville and Corona theatres were cited by the city of Montreal as a direct consequence of intervention from this organization.

[82] Charlotte Herzog. "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style." *Cinema Journal* 20. 2 (Spring 1981): 15-37. Print. 15.

[83] Douglas Gomery. "The Picture Palace: Economic Sense or Hollywood Nonsense." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3.1 (1978): 23-26. Print. 24.

numbers around the same time across Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.[84]

While the 1920s are traditionally considered the peak years of movie palace construction, large, well-appointed theatres began to appear more than a decade before this. Prior to 1910, exhibitors and theatre owners had been attempting to sever ties with cinema's dirty-storefront and peepshow-parlor roots, transforming nickelodeons into "handsomely decorated and well-equipped little theaters" and converting existing theatres into movie houses.[85] By 1910, theatres constructed specifically for cinema exhibition were becoming regular fixtures along city streets. Richard Butsch indicates that luxury movie houses were appearing as early as 1908 in the United States and that by 1915, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Lexington each had grand movie palaces with 1,000 seats or more.[86] The changing material character of the movie house, we now know, was part of a wider campaign to attract a middle-class clientele. Borrowing the upscale designs and luxurious accoutrements of legitimate theatres and opera houses, exhibitors and theatre owners imbued the space of cinema with an air of genteel respectability where the bourgeoisie could "play at being fashionable"[87]

"With the movie palace," Herzog asserts, "the movie theater emerged as the major form of mass entertainment of the 1920s."[88] She here underlines a key point: that the movie theatre-- not the movie it featured—became the primary attraction during this period. Variously dubbed "super palaces," "deluxe palaces" or "queens," movie palaces had

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[84] For a history of movie palaces in Britain, refer to Sharp (1969) and Atwell (1980). For one of the first picture books devoted to movie palaces in Canada, see Lindsay (1983). Print. For a history of movie palaces in Australia and New Zealand, see Ross Thorne. *Picture Palace Architecture in Australia and New Zealand*. South Melbourne, Vic: Sun Books, 1976. Print.
[85] Richard Butsch. *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print. 158.
[86] Ibid. 160.
[87] Ibid. 161.
[88] Herzog 32.

by the 1920s been transformed into urban spectacles unto themselves. Intent on setting the space of cinema apart from the surrounding environment, movie palaces wrested the attention of passersby. In addition to large, brightly lit exterior marquees and ornate facades, movie palaces by this time had anywhere between one thousand to six thousand seats. They often boasted giant lobbies, heavily ornamented interior decor, uniformed ushers and doormen, private balconies, in-house orchestras, impressive Wurlitzer organs, live stage shows and "high-class" film screenings.[89]

Although Herzog characterizes movie palace architecture and design as a style "unique to the movies," she nonetheless points out that this style was, essentially, a fusion of well-known antecedents. Movie palaces, she argues, appropriated characteristics from the vaudeville theater, traveling show, circus, penny arcade, dime museum, kinetoscope parlor, retail store and opera house, providing "an adaptation of all the functional and iconographic motifs of the earliest motion picture exhibition contexts, a composite of the formal and functional advantages of these locales."[90] In this way, movie palaces appealed to the public's desire for spectacle, pillaging the most useful and attractive qualities of other entertainment venues, creating a familiar, yet distinct amalgam. Movie palaces borrowed perhaps most rapaciously from legitimate theatres and opera houses. These venues were pillars of high culture, commonly decorated in the eighteenth-century, neoclassical Adam Style, which was heavily inspired by the art and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome.[91] By the late 1920s and early 1930s, many movie palaces shifted to an "atmospheric" style where designs were intended to evoke a foreign destination-- an Egyptian temple or

[89] Ibid. 15.
[90] Ibid. 32-33.
[91] Dane Lanken 14.

Spanish terrace, for example-- or, in some cases, a celestial setting. Atmospheric theatres would sometimes have painted blue ceilings meant to emulate the sky, or light shows casting "images of drifting clouds…or twinkling stars."[92] The outlandish décor at some movie palaces solidified their association with fantasy and illusion. As Hall indicates, the movie palace architect "was an escape artist."[93] It was the job of the architect "to build new dream worlds for the disillusioned; and as he piled detail on detail, each prism, each gilded cherub, every jewel-eyed dragon became part of a whole […] a feast for the eye, a catapult for the imagination."[94]

The Movie Palace and Cultural Decline

Although movie palaces were well attended in their heyday, lauded by studios, theatre owners and exhibitors alike, they were not universally beloved. Frequently, in fact, they were the subjects of vehement criticism. Even in their peak years, movie palaces were at times dismissed as garish reproductions of classical, neo-baroque or Italian Renaissance architecture. For some, these imitations, the simulacra of great works of architecture, pointed to nothing more than the degradation of taste. One critic in the United States wondered if the public's exposure to movie palaces would result in an entire generation of citizens growing up without the ability to discriminate real works of art from their facsimiles: "these Americans visiting the great sites of antiquity will be heard to remark: 'So this is the Taj Mahal: pshaw…the Oriental Theater at home is twice as big and has electric

[92] Ibid.
[93] Hall 94.
[94] Ibid.

lights besides.'"[95] Siegfried Kracauer, writing about Berlin's displacement of modest neighborhood movie houses in favour of opulent picture palaces, notes that the city's major theaters have adopted "the American style." Kracauer's distaste for the extravagant movie palace is palpable: To call these heavily ornamented exhibition spaces "movie theaters," he asserts, "would be disrespectful."[96]

Often mixing different period styles and genres, movie palaces by the end of the 1920s adopted what David Naylor calls a " free-style approach to design." This shift in style ignited some of the most heated criticism of the era. Thomas Talmadge, an architect by trade and one of the most outspoken detractors of the movie palace, saw this liberal approach to design as a form of cultural sacrilege: "No more pitiful degradation of an art has ever been presented than the prostitution of architecture that goes on daily in the construction of these huge buildings […] taste and beauty abased to the lowest degree."[97]

Early critiques of the movie palace extended beyond matters of taste. In fact, it was the threat they posed to established hierarchies of culture that had inflamed defenders of the traditional order. Lary May has argued that before the arrival of the movie palace, architecture often served to uphold sharp distinctions between the economic and cultural echelons of society. Urban buildings, he contends, often **"**manifested different styles for different classes, mirroring the cultural hierarchy of the large cities."[98] Initially, movie palaces attempted to continue this hierarchy via the spatial organization of their auditoria, which "divided the high-paying from the low-paying customers in boxes, balconies and

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[95] Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats* 94
[96] Siegfried Kracauer. "Cult of Distraction: On Berlin's Picture Palaces" *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* [*Das Ornament Der Masse*]. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995. 323-328. Print. 325.
[97] Qtd. in Naylor 31.
[98] Lary May. *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Print. 109.

loges."[99] Such demarcations inside early movie palaces effectively "mirrored [the] divisions of the larger social order."[100] Over time, however, this arrangement changed. Movie palaces grew more democratic and their once-specialized balcony seats became equal in design to the "ground-floor lobby."[101]

Defenders of the legitimate theatre perceived the movie palace, a new form of "mass art," as a threat to the conventional order, threatening to undercut "Anglo-Saxon visions of public space" wherein different classes kept to their respective venues.[102] One's attendance at the legitimate theatre or opera house, for example, was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century an expression of cultural competence. These spaces are where aristocratic audiences would go to assert what Pierre Bourdieu would call a sense of "distinction."[103] The grand movie palace inevitably challenged this situation, becoming increasingly known for its inclusive spirit, offering the "consumption of luxury" at prices the middle class could afford.[104] In 1927, Harold Franklin, president of West Coast Theatres Inc., described the movie palace as a fundamentally democratic social institution where it was "not uncommon to see a Ford and a Rolls-Royce discharge their occupants, at the same time, before the box office."[105] Franklin's statement admittedly reeks of hyperbole. Individual case studies have shown that the degree to which class mixing unfolded inside

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[99] May, for instance, cites the Capitol and the Paramount in New York, as well as the Uptown in Chicago. Each of these locations had policies of differentiated seating, with areas divided into separate price brackets. 104.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid. 107.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Transl. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.
[104] Butsch. 161.
[105] Harold B. Franklin. *Motion Picture Theatre Management*. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927. Print. 16.

movie palaces has at times been overstated, varying considerably by location.[106] Further, as May points out, such characterizations of the movie palace tend to obscure tensions emerging at the site of the movie palace as it struggled to reconcile its "aristocratic values" with its "democratic reception."[107] However, the overriding point here is that the movie palace, in bringing a sense of wealth and opulence to the masses, audaciously challenged the status quo.

While some saw in the movie palace an opportunity to elevate the masses, to bring the bourgeoisie in contact with "highbrow art and civilization," others saw an inherent conflict in this approach.[108] Specifically, they observed that the solicitation of mass attendance was not motivated by a desire for widespread cultural uplift but chiefly, by a desire for profit. The movie palace, in this sense, undermined any possibility for cultural elevation among its patrons, particularly as it became flagrantly commercialized. May, for example, argues that the introduction of "'garish' electronic billboards," the glittering marquees that would be the movie palace's hallmark, undercut the theatre's high-culture values.[109] Like street hawkers, these loud, showy signs were forms of publicity, shameless in their mode of address. We see this commercial impulse reflected, also, in the growing number of seats crammed inside these structures by the end of the 1920s. Thus, the movie palace struggled to balance its profit-making agenda with its projected image of class and elegance. Eventually, sophistication gave way to excess as the "demands of commerce"

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[106] The aforementioned studies by Robert Allen, Jeffrey Klenotic and Judith Thissen offer useful examples.
[107] Lary May. "Designing Multi-Cultural America: Modern Movie Theatres and the Politics of Public Space 1920-1945." *Movies and Politics: the Dynamic Relationship*. Ed. James Combs. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 183-213. Print. 193.
[108] May. *The Big Tomorrow* 106.
[109] Ibid. 107.

overshadowed the movie palace's aim to "uphold refined standards."[110]

Movie palaces, even in later years, have been criticized for their commercial leanings. Following their postwar decline, they would come to be seen as material evidence of financial glut, particularly on the part of film industry magnates.[111] Robert Sklar, writing in 1975, describes movie palaces as "economic white elephants, simply ornate, gaudy monuments perpetrated by ambitious movie moguls."[112] Indeed, the large number of empty and abandoned movie palaces that would later remain standing beyond their prime did seem to testify to a widespread economic miscalculation on the part of the film industry. Could it be that industry tycoons simply lacked the foresight to see that the movie palace business would not be sustainable over the long term? Gomery argues that this kind of estimation, reducing the movie palace construction boom to a case of overindulgence, is largely inaccurate. Conversely, he asserts that movie palaces were the product of a calculated and ultimately very prosperous enterprise. In their colonization of specific districts, offering live shows together with first- or second- run cinema, movie palaces served as the "cornerstone of American film exhibition between 1925 and 1950."[113] These theatres were extremely profitable ventures in their day, strategically built on bustling downtown commercial streets and, following the decentralization of many cities, later expanding to outlying business areas, neighborhoods and recreation districts.[114] Adding further support to Gomery's thesis, Herzog points out that the movie palace in fact provided a viable solution to a range of problems posed by its forebears, creating a space

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Gomery. "The Picture Palace." 23.
[112] Robert Sklar. *Movie Made America*. New York: Random House, 1975. Print. 149-152.
[113] Gomery. "The Picture Palace" 26.
[114] Ibid. 26-32. Gomery maps the layout of a number of cities including New York, Indianapolis, Madison, and Chicago, and situates the strategic construction of movie palaces within the urban geography of these centres.

that would offer "quality entertainment to as many people as possible at one time, as often as possible, and for the most reasonable price."[115]

I outline these differing positions, in part, to make a case for a more evenhanded approach to the movie palace. This, I hope, will counterbalance a late-modern tendency to mythologize the movie palace, to recount its history as a tragic fall from grace. From the very beginning, the movie palace has been the subject of competing interests and values. It has remained at the mercy of the fickle tastes and an unpredictable public. The movie palace's shifting place within an existing cultural hierarchy (or along a cultural spectrum, depending on one's preferred model) has remained an important aspect of its history. One Toronto journalist writing in 1971, for instance, captured a dominant sentiment toward the movie palace at a time in which it experienced a decline in public favour. With interior décor of "genuinely heroic vulgarity," movie palaces were, for this writer, "on the way to overdue oblivion."[116] This sentiment, however, was not the only one in circulation at the time, as I shall show in chapter 4. Indeed, one of the objectives of this study is to delineate the rival opinions within a wider cultural field that have reconstructed the meaning of the movie palace over time.

The Canadian Movie Palace

Further research on the history of movie palaces in Canada is needed. Although Lanken, Martineau, Moore, and Lindsay have provided rich accounts of the development of movie palaces in Canadian cities, knowledge of this subject remains limited. In particular, historical detail concerning the period between 1930-1950 is lacking. It is clear that movie

[115] Herzog 32.
[116] Dwayne Edmonstone. "Movie Palaces on the Way to Overdue Oblivion." *Toronto Star* 28 July. 1971. N. pag. Print.

palaces remained in business across this period, but the specific programming offered at theatres and the practices of local film exhibitors require more attention.

My own investigation of the movie palace in Canada has uncovered a number of ways in which that history departs from its American counterpart. For instance, large and luxurious theatres built specifically for the movies began to appear in Montreal as early as 1907, predating those in the United States, with the opening of the Ouimetoscope and the Nationoscope. As upscale theatres designed specifically for cinema projection, each of these locations boasted high-class viewing conditions and seating to accommodate between 1,000 and 1,100 people. Reportedly, at the time, these theatres were the largest of any venues in the Western world that catered specifically to cinema.[117] Paul Moore's study of movie palaces in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver furthermore shows that, by comparison, filmgoing in Canadian cities was even more heavily concentrated along downtown shopping streets than in the United States.[118] As hubs of commercial and leisure activity, Moore argues, Canada's downtown streets helped establish the urban geography of the movie palace, working to combine "the scene of nighttime amusement with the daytime location of shopping" and this strategy informed the movie palace business from the 1920s up to the early 1960s.[119]

My study begins where many others leave off, picking up on a story not yet unraveled in depth: that of the declining movie palace. It is by now known that movie palaces, though profitable in their day, could not be sustained over the long term. Although most movie palaces remained in business throughout the 1930s and 1940s, conditions

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[117] Sirois-Trahan et al. "The Reception of 'Talking Pictures'" 434.
[118] Moore. "Movie Palaces" 4.
[119] Ibid 11.

began to radically shift following the Second World War. Converging forces, including mass suburbanization, the rise of television and the introduction of drive-ins, suburban shopping malls and multiplex cinemas, contributed to a sharp decline in audience attendance at traditional single-screen movie palaces, particularly those located downtown. Unable to attract the large audiences they were built to accommodate, many movie palaces were sold off by theatre chains, abandoned or demolished to make way for new real estate. Many remaining movie palaces were taken over by independent exhibitors or private owners. To stay in business, some movie palace owners began, in the 1960s and 1970s, to appeal to niche audiences, screening cheap B-movie and exploitation genres, converting movie palaces to triple-bill Grindhouse theatres, and attracting raucous cult film followers. Moore contends that in Canada, downtown streets in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal were subsequently transformed into zones of "cheapness and sleaze" as movie palaces became increasingly geared toward disreputable crowds. These venues were now frequented by an audience of "rambunctious young men," which, Moore rightly points out, represented "exactly the demographic 'threat' that early twentieth-century showmen worked hard to repress with their campaign for middle-class respectability."[120]

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, growing associations between movie palaces and disreputable crowds were exasperated by the conversion of many theatres to adult cinemas screening pornography. Further, in addition to losing much of their aesthetic luster over the years, many movie palaces were materially altered to compete with more cost-effective multiplex cinemas. Adopting the strategy of having several screens at one exhibition site, a number of movie palaces were carved up into smaller auditoria. In this

[120] Ibid. 14.

instance, theatre owners often compromised on acoustic quality, comfort and space, and "introduced cheaper, sleek, modernist facades."[121]

Histories of the movie palace do not tend to dwell on the more disreputable aspects of this structure's trajectory. Likewise, preservationists seeking to revalue or safeguard threatened movie palaces have been known to emphasize the movie palace's accomplishments, particularly its contributions to local or national histories of cinema and architecture. Theatre architects and designers, in this context, have been characterized as important local artists and craftsman, whose creations must be conserved for posterity. By exploring other areas of the movie palace's history, its forays into seedy territory, this dissertation does not set out to invalidate the movie palace as an object of worth, nor does it seek to discredit those who have made a case for its revaluation. Rather, its primary aim is to grasp the mechanisms by which this structure came to be revalued over time, and to identify which variables have worked for or against this transition. Filling in the various dimensions of the movie palace's history is essential to this project, which seeks to understand how this object came to be re-imagined in more recent years.

While taking into account broader histories of the movie palace, this study proceeds with an eye to local specificity and nuance. In some instances, activities in Montreal closely mirrored those in the United States or in other Canadian cities. However, the dynamics of the Montreal community, the local field in which this history has played out, hold equal importance in this work. Speculation regarding what might become of the city's remaining theatres, for instance, has often centered on what these venues could potentially offer to areas in Montreal. Do theatres invigorate or encumber individual streets and

[121] Ibid. 15.

neighborhoods? Can they offer a contemporary and future service to the local community? Such questions, I will show, are often further complicated by the opposing views of local players.

Chapter 3- A Conceptual Foundation

Across the literature I have surveyed, the movie palace has been varyingly conceived as a cultural artifact, a wax museum, a symbol, a monument, a fetish object, a dream house, a temple, a cathedral, an artwork, an eyesore, a "white elephant," a ruin, a toxin, a social sphere, a commodity, a piece of real estate, a business, an advertisement and an architectural genre. Any conception of a movie palace, moreover, is inflected by both historic and present-day perceptions and experiences. In the chapters that follow, I examine how specific ideas about the movie palace were mobilized to promote either its removal or continuation. Chapter 4, for example, traces the movie palace's transition from a dominant entertainment venue to an obsolete movie theatre. It explores how, when and why the movie palace was redefined as an outmoded object, looking specifically at the way in which film exhibitors and theatre owners variously supported or challenged this shift. Chapter 5 delineates an assortment of meanings assigned to one theatre in particular, the Rialto, across its lengthy history. Chapter 6 considers how another local theatre, the Seville, struggled to reconcile its official heritage status with its empty, woebegone appearance, and how the cinema was envisaged as both savior and scourge of Saint Catherine Street.

All of the chapters of this work are underpinned by a concern for the modern treatment of the aging movie palace. As such, they are propelled by a set of related questions. Why, broadly speaking, do we preserve material remnants of the past? More pointedly, why have movie palaces been deemed worthy of preservation? Who decides if they are preserved and how are these decisions enforced? What effect does a preserved

movie palace have on the wider community? And why are some approaches to preservation widely sanctioned while others are not? To begin to answer some of these questions, it is imperative that we first consider some of the conceptual tensions on which this study is based.

I) Restoration and Preservation

The nineteenth-century European intellectual debate between two disparate philosophies of architectural preservation was the first to broadly legitimize "extreme, polemical positions" in the context of architectural preservation.[122] Miles Glendinning, who chronicles this history, argues that from this point onward conservation across the West "was always, at least potentially, fighting a kind of 'war,' whether against rival factions or competing national heritages."[123] The two sides of this nineteenth-century conflict are historically linked to a number of figures, but most notably, in France, to architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, representing a policy of "interventive restoration," and in Britain, to critic John Ruskin and designer William Morris, representing the preservation, or, "Anti-Scrape" ideology.

By the mid nineteenth century, France was committed to a national policy seeking to modernize conservation practices, adapting older buildings to present developments, while ensuring that architectural heritage be "'instrumentalized at the service of the state."[124] This policy was most famously deployed in the reorganization of Paris, a state-commissioned project led by urban planner Baron Georges Haussmann. What became

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[122] Miles Glendinning. *The Conservation Movement: A History of Preservation: Antiquity to Modernity*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print. 117.
[123] Ibid. 117.
[124] Glendinning 90.

known as the "Haussmannization" of Paris, this project saw the removal of many older quarters, tenements and "slums" in order to open the city up to a new plan of wide streetscapes and grand boulevards. A careful selection of older churches and monuments were preserved, however, signifying a concurrent investment in heritage. The belief underpinning this approach was that the city's important monuments and churches had been buried within the clutter of old, ramshackle districts. This way, they would be highlighted through new methods of "'isolement' [isolation] or 'dégagement' [clearance]."[125] This project, it was thought, would emancipate the city's historic buildings, "liberating them from degrading squalor."[126]

This national policy of "radical openness in the urban fabric" typified by Haussmann's overhaul of Paris was complemented by a dramatic policy of "interventive restoration" applied to individual buildings.[127] Viollet and his older contemporary Jean-Baptiste Antoine Lassus were key practitioners of this approach. Early on, their restoration projects were more moderate, insisting upon a degree of "restraint and objectivity."[128] Following Lassus' death in 1857, however, Viollet pursued "increasingly radical schemes of intervention, linked with clearance and repair."[129] He soon became known for his dramatic restorations of medieval castles and gothic churches, his work premised on a rationalist form of re-construction that included modern updates, additions and alterations.[130]

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[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid. 91.
[129] Ibid.
[130] See: Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. *The Foundations of Architecture*. Trans. Kenneth D. Whitehead. 1990 ed. New York: George Braziller, 1854. Print; and *Discourses on Architecture*. Trans. Benjamin Bucknall. 1959 ed. New York: Grove Press, 1875. Print. In these texts, Viollet argues for a revised approach to architecture and architectural education in Western society, suggesting that historic sites be used and adapted to contemporary needs and conditions.

From its popularity in France, restoration mania spread to other European countries and eventually to the United States.[131] In England, however, the early and mid-nineteenth-century restoration of medieval churches eventually sparked a fierce counter-movement. Here, art and architecture critic John Ruskin would emerge as the strongest proponent of an anti-restoration ethos, which he outlined in his seminal text *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*.[132] Ruskin's fondness for Gothic buildings in some ways recalled the Romantics' earlier veneration of "picturesque" ruins, particularly his affection for the textures and appearances of aging buildings. However, concerned about the encroachment of capitalist development, he also saw the preservation of historic buildings as an antidote to modern alienation. Looking to restore a sense of tradition and community to society, he argued that old buildings ought to be allowed to age, permitting only the slightest repair. In so doing, they could "physically embody the collective social and natural memory," uniting past, present and future generations.[133] Ruskin expressed a quasi-spiritual reverence for older building due to what he saw as their "living" essence, materializing "nature's sacred evolution process."[134] For Ruskin, restoration was fundamentally destructive, doing away with a building's history as well as its claims to authenticity, its "truth and life."[135]

William Morris, an interior decorator and furniture designer by trade, later became the leading defender of Ruskin's ideology in the late 1870s, heading up the Society for the

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[131] For a discussion of restoration and its diffusion to other European countries, See Glendinning 97-115.
[132] In his book, first published in 1848, Ruskin organizes his ideas into seven moral tenets of preservation. See: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. 6th ed. Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent, England: George Allen, 1889. Print. An important, though less impactful, precursor to Ruskin was August W.N. Pugin and his book *Contrasts*. Glendinning notes that Pugin was the first to deploy the rhetoric of good and evil in the context of architectural preservation, a tactic later adopted by Ruskin. See: August W.N. Pugin. *Contrasts: Or a Parallel Between the Noble Edifices of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries and Similar Buildings of the Present Day*. Reprint of 1841 edition. New York: Humanities Press, 1969. Print; and Glendinning 117.
[133] Glendinning. 120.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), a private pressure group. This group, under Morris, would give the anti-restoration doctrine the more "populist" name, "Anti-Scrape."[136] Campaigning against restoration, they, like Ruskin, expressed their cause in moral terms, as a battle between good and evil, labeling "any restoration (or 'scrape') of that 'living' fabric as intrinsically immoral, and the restorers as wicked men."[137]

This history highlights a point in time in which the preservation cause was expressed in emphatically moral terms. It is also when the rhetoric of life and death became central to the discourse on architectural preservation.[138] Like Ruskin and Morris, Belgian architect Louis Cloquet would similarly make an important distinction between "dead" and "living" monuments when considering how old structures ought to be treated in the present. Contrary to Ruskin and Morris, however, Cloquet's "living" monument was more in alignment with an ethos of restoration. In 1893, Cloquet defined dead monuments as "the documents of history such as pyramids, temples, and ruins that should not be touched, but only preserved" while living monuments were those "to which architects were given freer rein to restore."[139]

The distinction between "dead" or "living" architecture resonates strongly in the context of this dissertation, given that movie palaces are seen as having undergone a kind of death in the postwar era as many theatres were closed down, abandoned or demolished. In turn, one often sees the rhetoric of life and death deployed around surviving movie palaces upon their reopening. "Rebirth," "reincarnation," "resuscitation," and

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[136] Glendinning, who describes SPAB as the "ancestor of all modern conservation campaigning societies," notes that none of the group's predecessors were as focused in their conservation campaigns. SPAB was known for deploying Ruskin's ideology in "pragmatic and outcome-oriented" terms. Ibid. 122-123.
[137] Ibid. 116-117.
[138] Ibid. 120
[139] Christine Boyer. *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments.* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994. Print. 380.

"revitalization" are terms that frequently reappear in the discourse on re-appropriations of old theatres. In a story that repeats itself time and again, movie palaces are routinely "brought back to life."[140]

But what can we make of those theatres that exist in that nebulous space between life and death? The meaning of a shuttered theatre, for example, is more opaque. Is an old, dilapidated movie palace a living entity, as Ruskin and Morris would have argued, to be revered for its organic expression of age and decay? Or is it more like Cloquet's "dead" monument, similarly demanding preservation, but only because it has lost all ties to the living world? Modern ruins, which I explore in Chapter 6, represent a particularly complicated scenario. These are often not permitted to remain over the long term, to be preserved in a state of decay, if they occupy urban commercial streets, as movie palaces typically do. The decaying movie palace is more frequently seen as a contagion. Left alone, it threatens to contaminate its immediate surroundings, dragging neighboring buildings into a morass of financial and cultural ruin. To secure the preservation of an old, abandoned movie palace, then, one must cast it as something closer to Cloquet's "living" monument, open to change and poised to assume a new state of being.

The nineteenth-century polemics of preservation, between the "good" preservationist and the "evil" restorer/developer/planner, have continued to inform twentieth-century cases of architectural heritage. Over time, a strict division between "restoration" and "preservation" has proven difficult to uphold. Individual cases of

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[140] See examples of this rhetorical tendency, for example, in: Kay Kritzwiser. "Keeping the Dream Palace Alive." *The Globe and Mail.* 4 Dec. 1982: 4. Print; Anna Kozlowski. "New Life for Old Theatres." *Technote* 9 (Apr 1986): 1-8. Print; "Curtain Up: New Life for Historic Theatres." *Information Series* 72. National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1993: 1-23. Print; Maxime Jacobs. "Le Théâtre Rialto Sort Du Coma." *L'Express D'Outremont* 15 Oct 1993: n. pag. *Cinémas*. Tome 2, Heritage Montreal, Centre de Documentation, Montreal. Print.

preservation often land in the grey area between these two poles, requiring compromise from both camps. Even so, diverging opinions concerning how to manage a movie palace often expose the persistence of such historic binaries, an idea I return to later in this dissertation.

II) History and Memory

The late-modern movie palace is the product of a wider cultural zeitgeist propelled by a fascination with bygone eras and their material vestiges. David Lowenthal, in his discussion of what he views as a modern preoccupation with heritage, argues that over the course of the twentieth century, particularly from mid-century onward, a "backward-looking concern" has come to dominate Western culture. Increasingly, Westerners possess a growing preoccupation with history and roots, endorsed by a growing "nostalgia for things old and outworn."[141]

Christine Boyer attributes this tendency to our "postmodern" condition, which is amplified in and by the contemporary city. For Boyer, we find ourselves unmoored in urban expanses, adrift in streams of relentless change and mired in the pieces left behind. Lost in this "sea of fragments and open horizons" we grasp for some sense of stability, some utopian promise of unity, by holding onto the past.[142] Lowenthal similarly suggests that because things obsolesce at an accelerating rate, a process buoyed by market forces, we look to the past as a means of coping with the present: "Beleaguered by loss and change, we

[141] Lowenthal, David. "The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions." *Giving Preservation a History*. Eds. Max Page and Randall Mason. New York: Routledge, 2004. 19-44. Print. 20.
[142] Boyer 3.

keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability. Hence preservers' aversion to let anything go, manias for period styles, pagan cults at megalithic sites."[143]

Boyer and Lowenthal point toward a collective malaise underneath this modern concern for heritage, a shared cultural anxiety that pushes moderns to hold onto their past. Heritage and its preservation, in this vein, are reassuring and stabilizing. Beyond this initial impulse to preserve the past, however, lie actual encounters with historic remains, once salvaged. These encounters constitute the lived interaction with material vestiges, the feeling, knowledge or understanding we attain from meeting the past in the present.

When Walter Benjamin trawled the deserted, nineteenth-century Paris Arcades and the abandoned objects contained therein, he discovered the detritus of mass culture. Benjamin characterized these remains in devastating terms, as "evidence of unprecedented material destruction."[144] Although Benjamin's *Arcades Project* reflects on the burgeoning modernity of the nineteenth century, as a historical undertaking it betrays an interest in and concern for the conditions of the *contemporary* moment—the early twentieth-century rise of consumerism, the commodification of material objects and the emergence of mass culture.[145] *The Arcades Project* carried political import for Benjamin, revealing the alarming proximity of the recent past. Here, he located an impulse that, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, lies in dialectical contrast to the "futurist myth of historical progress."[146] Awareness of the destructive forces of modernity, he believed, might awaken twentieth-century mass society from its collective dream state. The abandoned arcades could offer the jarring self-

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[143] Lowenthal 23.
[144] Susan Buck-Morss. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989. Print. 95.
[145] See: Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*. Transl. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002. Print.
[146] Buck-Morss 95.

recognition that society needed, as people were otherwise walking around seduced by the "phantasmagoria" of modern existence.[147]

Christine Boyer's work on historic preservation is largely indebted to Benjamin's interest in cultural residues and discarded objects. In her discussion, Boyer considers how physical remnants of the past collide with, inform and shape our interpretation and experience of the present. Similarly, she sees the potential for an awakening to our present condition through an engagement with historic remains. Boyer, however, argues that too often the methods deployed by cities to manage older architecture undermine the possibility for critical insight.

In her discussion of historic preservation, Boyer pits history and memory against one another. History, she argues, is a "constructed or recomposed artifice," often fabricated for a specific purpose, whereas memory is more authentic, "a lived and moving expression."[148] Different types of preservation, or forms of memory storage, among which she names photography, cinema, architecture, archives and museum collections, share a common problem: they often "bracket history from their own point of view."[149] As we look back in time via preserved objects and archival collections, we do so through a particular frame that invariably alters the artifact's context, reshaping and reconstituting history in the present.[150] Frequently, she argues, architectural fragments of the past, as they are re-framed by a set of contemporary constraints, prevent an authentic engagement with history and instead "appear denigrated by nostalgic sentiments that fuel their preservation

[147] Ibid. 92.
[148] Ibid. 70.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

or reconstruction."[151] For this reason, the prospect of maintaining a collective memory of older sites, places and buildings is repeatedly compromised by "historicist reconstructions."[152]

The management of a city's historic streets, buildings and monuments points toward the degree to which we refashion history for our own aims in the present. Boyer, for instance, underscores the ways in which contemporary cities have arranged architectural fragments of the past into compositions, scenes or "city tableaux."[153] Underpinning this propensity, she argues, is a capitalist, consumer-driven economy and culture. "Since the early twentieth century," Boyer states, "architecture has been a commodity as well as a form of publicity."[154] For Boyer, the contemporary city plunders from the past only to market itself in the present. Her analysis of the old South Street seaport in NYC, a now restored and revitalized section of Manhattan, is a fitting example. The South Street seaport showcases the location's mercantile history, but it does so primarily as a marketing strategy. Boyer contends that the preserved architecture of this district constitutes nothing more than an eye-catching frontispiece, emptied of any "authentic" history. Further, such displays of history are exaggerated representations, "estranged and removed from the contemporary city" and as such, are largely antithetical to the production of genuine collective memory.[155] Across such spectacles of history, architecture is drained of its potential to incite historical consciousness. Instead, it is reduced to decoration, "pictorialized" for the consumption of city dwellers and tourists.

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[151] Ibid. 1-2
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid. 69; 372-373.
[154] Ibid. 5.
[155] Ibid. 440.

Boyer thus argues that modern representations of history foreclose genuine encounters with the past. Even so, much can be learned from the means by which history is framed by later generations. David Gross, for example, suggests that our modern obsession with heritage, namely, a shared impulse to store, collect and preserve, frequently rests on romantic notions of an "allegedly better" age.[156] Embedded in the urge to preserve historic remnants is not just a critique of the present, but also a distorted view of the past. For this reason, he proposes that if and when we appropriate the past in the present, we do so "critically." With respect to historic preservation, any perspectival distortions-- signs of continuity with and rupture from the past-- can illuminate how artifacts, and the histories they represent, are perceived and valued in the present.

III) Ruins and Rupture

For Boyer, the problems that she identifies underscore a "memory crisis" in contemporary culture.[157] Despite this crisis, however, she discerns another important quality of historic forms and the way in which they are treated in the present. The preservation and revitalization of older architecture in the urban environment, flawed as such practices may be, nonetheless betray a yearning for a shared experience of the city, a collective desire for authentic urban memory. This backward-reaching impulse ultimately "reveals an empathy for lost totalities, even though no one actually speaks out in favor of a

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[156] David Gross. *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992. Print.

[157] Richard Terdiman, who coined the term "memory crisis," sees an anxious concern for a disappearing past as a defining feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernity. See: Richard Terdiman. *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993. Print. Rodney Harrison, much like Boyer, attributes a late-modern tendency to stockpile and/or repurpose obsolete objects and buildings to a "memory crisis," stemming from an overall sense of uncertainty afflicting post-industrial, Western societies. See: Rodney Harrison. *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print. 3.

unified city."[158] Indeed, Boyer suggests that we provoke our own memory crisis insofar as the preservation of historic architecture, the act of carrying the past into the present, motions toward "the very desire to establish rupture, to break with recent traditions."[159] Our desire for the visible presence of historic residues can thus be linked to a desire for pleasure derived from our affective encounters with these structures. Such encounters cause "an unexpected shift of attention, allowing a reappraisal of their presence in the city."[160] In essence, present-day city dwellers long for and seek out a particular kind of perceptual and cognitive "rupture" generated by historic architecture, specifically for the pleasure this evokes.

Historic movie palaces certainly provoke a similar type of rupture, sometimes just by virtue of their large size and heavy adornment. Urban movie palaces, in some instances, stand out amid rows of more modern, unassuming constructions. An old theatre bearing the sheen of restoration can be an arresting marvel in the modern metropolis. Alternatively, a theatre that has withered with age might similarly beguile or fascinate. Architectural ruination, in fact, has also been linked to this notion of rupture.

Tim Edensor, in his discussion of industrial ruins, echoes Boyer's belief in a collective desire for rupture. However, he relates this desire to the precarity of the wider social order. For Edensor, social order is maintained by exerting authority over the material world, by the "predictable and regular distribution of objects in space."[161] One of the primary means by which societies enact a sense of control over their environment is by

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[158] Boyer 4.
[159] Ibid. 26.
[160] Ibid. 19
[161] Tim Edensor. "Waste Matter: The Debris of Industrial Ruins and The Disordering of the Material World" *Journal of Material Culture* 10.3 (2005): 311-332. Print. 312.

discerning waste from that which is "not yet over and done with." [162] They then exercise this authority by deciding how to manage discrete categories of surplus material.[163]

The need to ferret out and dispose of excess material, Edensor asserts, has become particularly acute in our current era of accelerated consumer capitalism. Market forces generate a cultural obsession with the new and as a result, production is increasingly based on principles of abundance. Subsequently, assorted "regimes of disposal" have emerged over time (garbage collection and containment, reprocessing sites, landfills and so on) so that "matter out of place" can be expunged from view.[164] Increasingly, though, such methods of erasure cannot keep pace with rapid rates of production. As a result, outdated objects and forgotten artifacts linger beyond their obsolescence, accumulating over time. Societies are thus riddled with fragments of the past, leaving citizens no choice but to confront unwanted material remnants in the present moment.

While encounters with residues and ruins threaten to upset the social order, this disruptive quality also gives rise to unanticipated ideas, experiences and, echoing Boyer, even pleasures. Ruins, Edensor argues, are characteristically indeterminate, somewhere between the conditions of expulsion and erasure. And it is precisely because of their "unfinished disposal" that they remain objects of considerable appeal, always open to possibilities of re-use and re-interpretation.[165] Michael Thompson likewise makes a case for the promise embedded in discarded material objects, which hinges on their "indeterminacy." For Thompson, all objects maintain a degree of appeal even once they have been consigned to obsolescence. "Transient" objects, those that have been abandoned

[162] Ibid. 314.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid. 315.
[165] Ibid. 317.

or neglected, often suffer a corresponding depletion of value and life expectancy. Even so, Thompson suggests that forsaken objects occasionally slide into an open-ended category, which he calls "rubbish." Objects here may persist "in a timeless and valueless limbo where at some later date (if it has not by that time turned, or been made, into dust) it has the chance of being discovered."[166] Thompson challenges the notion that the value of an object derives intrinsically from its physical properties. Material signs of neglect or age do not necessarily entail an irredeemable loss of value. Rather, value is conferred upon objects by external forces. Such forces are subject to change over time and thus value, too, is prone to fluctuate. In fact, he argues, the process whereby cultural cachet is conferred upon objects is contingent upon their use, remaining "closely tied to the social situation that they render meaningful."[167]

The question of use is central to the movie palace's existence, given that it cannot easily survive as an empty, freestanding monument. More often than not, old theatres resort to commercial enterprises or cultural vocations to remain viable. Janna Jones' ethnographic study of the Tampa Theatre, a preserved movie palace operating as a repertory cinema in the Southern United States, offers a particular case in point. The theatre's conservation, its salvation from demolition, was made possible by a communal desire to retrieve an authentic movie palace experience. Yet, this desire to return to the movie palace in its heyday, Jones indicates, has been accompanied by the impossibility of satisfying this yearning.

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[166] Michael Thompson. *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979. Print. 9.
[167] Ibid. 7.

After attending the Tampa theatre's screening of *Casablanca* (1942), Jones concludes that a return to the social experience of the movie palace, is, ultimately irretrievable: "[…] even as I come early to stand in line, mingle in the lobby, listen to the organ before the film begins, and watch Casablanca, it is no longer really possible to go to the picture palace […] even as I replicate the behaviors of past picture palace audiences, the experience that fascinates me is not attainable."[168] Jones' commentary once more speaks to the tenuous relationship between history and memory. Movie palaces like the Tampa, in fully restored form, are re-imaginings of history, invariably mediated by modern frameworks, ideas and perceptions. All movie palaces, regardless of their use, are contingent upon modern interpretation.

So focused on rescuing historic artifacts, preservationists often do not account for the question of interpretation. That is, how movie palaces, once they are salvaged, will be read and understood by patrons, neighbors and onlookers. Part of this dissertation will consider how movie palaces have been spoken for or "ventriloquized" by various forces in the city of Montreal.[169] Much like ancient ruins, movie palaces "are incessantly seen as pointing beyond themselves, to some absent totality."[170] It is important to consider how and why this totality is recapitulated, compromised or repressed, and by whom.

Any attempt to speak on behalf of the late-modern movie palace, I argue, is a response to its fundamentally unsettled meaning. This dissertation considers how, when and why a range of social entities seized upon and struggled over the movie palace's open-

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[168] Janna Jones. "Consumed with the Past: Nostalgia, Memory and Ghostly Encounters at the Picture Palace. Cultural Studies- Critical Methodologies." 1.3 (2001): 369-391. Print. 381.
[169] Jon Beasley-Murray. "Vilcashuaman: Telling Stories in Ruins." *Ruins of Modernity*. Ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print. 215.
[170] Ibid. 214.

ended identity. Movie palaces are regularly pulled between competing values: past and present, historic and modern, public and private, commercial and cultural, tangible and intangible. Even once bestowed with heritage credentials, endowed with cultural distinction, they remain entangled in a process of constant negotiation. As such, their meaning is always provisional.

Chapter 4- From "Cathedral" to "Chair Factory": The Movie Palace in Decline

Introduction

In the fall of 1973, the Capitol theatre, an old movie palace in downtown Montreal, awaited demolition. The theatre had stood for fifty-two years at the intersection of Saint Catherine Street West, a busy commercial artery, and McGill College Avenue. No longer the popular, first-run cinema it had once been, the venue remained open for business, most recently showcasing live performances by the illusionist Reveen.[171] The real estate branch of the Capitol's parent company, Famous Players Corporation, intended to replace the theatre with a modern high-rise.[172] To bid farewell to the structure, the company hosted a glamorous 1920s-themed soirée at the theatre, at which point it also unveiled development plans before a packed auditorium.[173] Reportedly, upon revealing a replica of the "18-storey, smooth-sided" *Centre Capitol*, the building set to replace the theatre, the audience unleashed a torrent of "boos and catcalls."[174] After the presentation concluded, one brazen audience member marched up on stage and, in a show of dissent, dumped champagne over the miniature tower.[175]

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[171] Reveen. Advertisement. *Gazette* [Montreal] 31 Oct. 1973: 51. Print.
[172] The real estate branch of Famous Players, a subsidiary based in Toronto, was part of the U.S. Gulf and Western Conglomerate. See: Dane Lanken. "Capitol Theatre Closing Doors for the Last Time on November 11." *Gazette* [Montreal] 31 Oct. 1973: 51. Print.
[173] The closing gala held at the Capitol was set to include a private auction for current and former employees in order to sell off the theatre's decorative objects, including oil paintings, vases, chairs and sculptures. See: Lanken. "Capitol Theatre Closing Doors."
[174] Dane Lanken. "Even the Corn Wouldn't Pop at Last Capitol Picture Show." *Gazette* [Montreal] 12 Nov. 1973: 3. Print.
[175] Ibid.

This snapshot of the Capitol's closing gala, a nod to the theatre's cultural heyday, captures some of the competing sentiments underlining its removal in 1973. On the one hand, new plans for the site held the promise of economic and material renewal. Montreal's spatial identity had recently undergone a number of changes. The city's addition of an underground subway system together with fervent development leading up to Expo' 67, a globally lauded event, seemed to anticipate a bright future.[176] Additionally, the downtown core was in the midst of a "renaissance," following the opening of the Place Ville Marie shopping plaza in the early 1960s.[177] This project alone expanded office space downtown by "four million square feet," while generating seven million dollars in tax revenues.[178] The removal of the Capitol was, for developers, in keeping with this spirit of economic revitalization, making way for a modern reimaging of the city.

On the other hand, the Capitol's upcoming demolition revealed a growing aversion to urban renewal. Occupying coveted real estate in Montreal's urban core, the theatre was one of many buildings razed around this time, caught in an unbridled "wave of mid-town demolition."[179] The swift addition of office towers often happened at the cost of older architecture, "falling before bulldozers and wreckers' balls almost daily."[180] By the early 1970s, local citizens had begun taking note of Montreal's increasing proclivity for demolition, giving way to a period of "runaway development."[181] Donna Gabeline, Dane

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[176] For a description of this period of expansion and the spirit of optimism it generated, see: Dane Lanken. "Montreal: At the New Crossroads." *Grassroots, Greystones & Glass Towers: Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture*. Ed. Bryan Demchinsky. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1989. 11-15. Print.
[177] Gabeline, Lanken and Pape suggest that the Place Ville Marie shopping plaza, which opened in 1962, initiated a period of regeneration in Montreal's downtown core. See: *Montreal at the Crossroads*. Montreal: Harvest House, 1975. Print. 183-184.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Lanken. "Capitol Theatre Closing Doors."
[180] Gabeline et al. 9.
[181] Ibid.

Lanken and Gordon Pape later captured the crux of this growing concern in their 1975 pseudo-manifesto, *Montreal at the Crossroads*. If current developments were to continue unabated, they believed, Montrealers would wind up estranged from their own city. Emptied of its heritage, the urban core, in particular, would be rendered "almost unrecognizable."[182] Such concerns spoke to a collective desire to preserve the sediments of Montreal's distinct urban-cultural history, to maintain old forms amid new ones.

The Capitol's demolition, it bears noting, was a byproduct of an intersecting phenomenon affecting older movie theatres across North America. Film exhibitors, after a period of prosperity in the immediate postwar era, were by the late 1950s caught in a full-scale industrial crisis. Steeply declining movie theatre admissions confirmed that cinemagoing was no longer the central leisure activity it had once been. Many movie theaters across the ensuing period struggled to remain open. Most conspicuous among these troubled theatres were the massive, amply seated movie palaces constructed in vast numbers across the 1910s and 1920s, dotting city streets. From the 1960s onward, these structures underwent what many historians, journalists, and scholars have framed as a period of wholesale decline.[183] Indeed, histories of the movie palace have often been narrativized along similar lines. Woeful in tone, these accounts trace the movie palace's shift from a grand cinema "temple" in the 1920s to a forgotten relic by the 1960s. Yet, as I

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[182] Ibid.

[183] For chronicles of the movie palace's decline see, for example: Ben M. Hall. "The End of the Dream." *The Best Remaining Seats: the Golden Age of the Movie Palace*. Rev. ed. New York: Da Capo Press, 1988. 252-254. Print; Vernon Scott. "Splendid Movie Palaces Among TVs Victims." *The Washington Post* 15 Oct. 1972. Print: TC18. Print; Robert Frausto. "The Decline of the Great Movie Palaces." *Planning: The ASPO Magazine* 40.2 (Feb. 1974): 15-19. Print; Robert F. Irving. "Movie Palaces of the '20s: Gone with the Wind." *Inland Architect* (21 Feb. 1977): 16-21. Print; Dane Lanken. "What Happened Then." *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938*. Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993. 165-167. Print.

explore in this chapter, there are a number of factors that complicate this narrative of decline.

This chapter begins by exploring those forces that produced the movie palace's obsolescence. A number of intersecting developments have been named as causal factors in the postwar decline of the urban movie palace, including but by no means limited to the baby boom, mass suburbanization and the rise of television. All of these are seen as having relocated social and commercial activity away from urban centres. Furthermore, a growing number of material goods-- automobiles, washing machines and radios, for instance-- were newly available to consumers, made affordable through competitive sales and "time payment plans." [184] These goods, together with a rash of new leisure activities—bowling alleys, night baseball, stockcar racing and bingo halls— competed for the moviegoer's time and money.[185] As the public reoriented itself toward domestic life in the suburbs and consumer spending habits diversified, urban movie theatres struggled to attract patrons. Cities suddenly found themselves with a glut of movie houses—too many seats for too few customers—and numerous theatres closed down.[186]

For exhibitors, the loss of theatres was necessary. These casualties would mark a step toward industry-wide recovery, re-concentrating business across a smaller number of key venues. Over the next decade, as the giant movie palace saw more and more empty

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[184] N.A. Taylor, "Our Business." *Canadian Film Weekly 1955-56 Yearbook*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1956. 21+. Print. 21; N.A. Taylor, "Our Business." *Canadian Film Weekly 1956-57 Year Book of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry.* Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications Canada, Ltd. 21+. Print. 21.

[185] Nat Taylor, in 1956, suggests that collectively, these new consumer goods and leisure activities represent "potent competition" for the movies. Ibid. 21.

[186] Within film industry discourse, this phenomenon was commonly referred to as "overseating." See, for example: Ibid 21; and "Winning Battle Against TV." *Canadian Film Weekly* (15 Apr 1953): 5. Print. In 1976, Taylor refers to overseating as a "particularly vicious disease," which had previously hampered the business of film exhibition. See: "Our Business: The Canadian Scene." *Canadian Film Digest 1976 Yearbook*. Toronto: Film Publications Canada, 1976. 7. Print.

seats, it became a primary target for removal. The vacant movie palace was a glaring symbol of commercial failure, broadcasting widespread disinterest in moviegoing as a habitual cultural practice. Eager to shed these associations with economic infirmity and regain a robust image, exhibitors began to distance themselves from the movie palace. A holdover from a bygone era, the movie palace was recast as old-fashioned, over-seated and "uneconomic."[187] Before long, exhibitors adopted a new model: the multi-cinema. Known for housing two or more smaller, plainer auditoria, the multi-cinema was promoted across trade magazines as the modern, cost-effective alternative to the antiquated movie palace.[188] In this way, the movie palace's downfall was not merely a consequence of the decline in moviegoing, a product of shifting socio-economic conditions, but a phenomenon endorsed by exhibitors themselves to envision a more successful future.

Yet, not all film exhibitors turned away from the movie palace. Even as the industry began to renounce older film venues, some theatre owners, in the 1950s and 1960s, moved against this current, attempting to reanimate shuttered theatres. These early countercurrents prefigured a number of formal revitalization projects that would emerge in the 1970s.[189] Theatres converted to performing arts centres and symphony halls, for instance, stood firm against the twin currents of demolition and renewal. These projects favoured permanence, returning the movie palace to its roots in live spectacle while restoring its aesthetic character. Embodying an ornamental style, the preserved movie palace stood in sharp relief to the towers of concrete and glass cropping up in many cities.

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[187] Taylor, N.A. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis." *Canadian Film Weekly* (20 Mar. 1970): 1-2. Print. 1.
[188] Ibid. 1-2. This article illustrates the film exhibitor's endorsement of the multiplex.
[189] For an overview of theatre restoration and conversion projects taking shape in North America across the 1960s and 1970s, see, for example: David Naylor. "An End to the Slaughter." *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1991. 182-214. Print.

This chapter considers those theatres that shape-shifted and performed new roles to remain active across the 1960s and 1970s. Inflected by wider trajectories across North America, Montreal offers a useful case study for, across this period, the city contained a large inventory of old theaters that negotiated prevailing forces of decline. Further, while some theatres in the United States and parts of Canada were subject to formal revitalization projects, Montreal's movie palaces had to wait until the late 1980s for similar interventions.[190] Significantly, the endurance of Montreal's theatres did not happen by virtue of formal preservation schemes. Here, preservation unfolded informally, with theatres assuming new guises.

For the purpose of this discussion, I consider two primary modes of informal preservation in Montreal, which at times intersected and overlapped: the conversion of movie palaces to multi-auditoria theatres, also known as theatre subdivision; and the conversion of movie palaces to adult cinemas featuring pornography. Such adaptive strategies, evident in cities across North America, have traditionally been read as signs of the movie palace's waning prestige: as these once-grand theatres slipped into "sad anonymity," they physically changed or resorted to marginal, even disreputable, practices to remain afloat.[191] However, what I aim to show is that these theatres did not merely fade into obscurity; they demonstrated surprising elasticity, assuming makeshift forms and housing provisional modes of spectatorship. Local movie palaces, in becoming "residual"

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[190] In the early 1970s, theatre revitalization projects were less common in Canada than they were in the United States. The Orpheum in Vancouver is perhaps the best-known exception. The building was spared from redevelopment plans in the early 1970s when a local grassroots campaign convinced the city administration to intervene. It was then restored by the Vancouver City Arts Council and eventually re-launched as a performing arts centre. For a discussion of the Orpheum, see: Naylor. *American Picture Palaces* 184; and John Lindsay. *Palaces of the Night: Canada's Grand Theatres*. Toronto: Lynx Images, Inc. 1999. Print. 202-208.

[191] Vincent Canby. "Old Movie Palaces Don't Die, They Just Turn Into 2 or 3 Smaller Theatres." *New York Times* 29 Jul. 1968: 24. Print.

urban forms, were subject to re-appropriation by new cultures and practices.[192] This episode in the history of the movie palace, then, might be more constructively grasped as a morphological stage in a wider evolution, as opposed to a period of lamentable decline. Embedded within local histories of Montreal's faded movie palaces are more nuanced tales, signs of buoyancy and resilience. Cast aside by forces of obsolescence, the struggling movie palace, I argue, discovered its mutability as an urban-cultural form, ultimately revealing its modern potential.

Part I: Wide-Scale Changes

Postwar Prosperity

During the Second World War, and in the immediate period thereafter, film exhibition was a thriving business in North America. In the United States, movie theatre admissions were stable across the war and reached an unprecedented high point after it ended, peaking in 1946 with the "highest per capita levels in history."[193] Likewise, in Canada, the business of film exhibition was booming, "locked in a fixed pattern of prosperous operations" during the war while the immediate post-war era was characterized by an "unbroken rise of the box-office."[194] Though movie theatre admissions began to decline in the United States following its peak year of 1946, they continued to rise

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[192] The term "residual" is here meant to invoke Raymond Williams' conceptualization of older cultural forms and practices, as well as their marginal position with respect to the "dominant" culture. Williams observes that the old has a tendency to persist (or resurface) amid the new, usually residing on the fringes of the dominant culture. "Residual" culture he defines broadly, as "experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, [but which] are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue-- cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation." See: "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory." *Problems in Materialism and Culture.* New York: Verso, 1980. 21-49. Print. 40.

[193] Douglas Gomery. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Exhibition in America*. London: BFI, 1992. Print. 82.

[194] "Industry Title: 'The Shifting Scene.'" *Canadian Film Weekly* (24 Nov. 1954): 1 +. Print.

in Canada. Annual admissions reached a record high of 248 million in 1952, while the largest number of box office receipts was recorded a year later, 1953, at $100, 889, 361.[195] Business was so good, in fact, that *Canadian Film Weekly* declared cinema's most feared competitor, television, a benign threat in 1953: "that medium has done its worst and is now losing ground to the movies in the battle."[196] This proclamation, we now know, was premature, as television would have yet to make a significant impact on the Canadian marketplace. Its confident tone, however, was typical of film exhibition discourse at the time, reflecting the industry's success.

Canadian film exhibition, moreover, was in the throes of a theatre-building boom, what cultural critic Gerald Pratley described as an "orgy" of new construction.[197] In 1953, *Canadian Film Weekly* reported a dramatic rise in the number of movie theatres, from 1,323 in 1945 to 2,500 in 1952.[198] Most of the theatres constructed during this time were not of the massive, heavily adorned genre, epitomized by the luxurious palaces of the pre-war

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[195] There are some discrepancies concerning Canada's peak year of theatrical moviegoing. Charles Acland alerts us to this issue in *Screen Traffic*, naming 1953 as the peak year with 256 million annual admissions, while acknowledging that some sources highlight 1952 as the peak year. My own research has uncovered further inconsistencies in this regard. *Canadian Film Digest* in 1972, for example, reports that the peak year of paid admissions was 1952, with a total of 261,475,867 admissions, while 1953 reflected the highest number of box office receipts, totalling $108,603,966. In 1979, *Canadian Film Digest* reveals the same trend-- 1952 as the peak year of admissions and 1953 as the peak year of box office receipts-- though the figures listed here differ from those listed in 1972. In 1979, the figures, drawn from Statistics Canada, are lower than those reported in 1972, indicating total annual admissions of 247,732, 717 in 1952 and $100, 889, 361 in annual box office receipts in 1953. See: Charles Acland. *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. 72; "Box Office Statistics." *Canadian Film Digest 1971-72 Year Book.* Toronto: Film Publications Canada Ltd., 1972. 14. Print; "Box Office Statistics." *Canadian Film Digest 1979 Yearbook*. Toronto: Film Publications Canada Ltd., 1979. 3-4. Print. 3.

[196] *Canadian Film Weekly* often looked to conditions in the United States, where television had made earlier inroads in the marketplace, to predict and/or prepare for the impact of television in Canada. For instance, see: "Winning Battle Against TV."

[197] Pratley attributes public disapproval of the theatre construction boom to a nation-wide housing shortage at the time. Some members of the public, he suggests, would have liked to see investments in new housing rather than new movie theatres. Pratley, Gerald. "The Movie Scene- Sunday September 12th 1948." *The Movie Scene*. CBC Radio. 12 Sep. 1948. 1-12. Print. 3.

[198] *"Still Going Up!" Canadian Film Weekly* (28 Oct. 1953): 5. Print.

era.[199] Rather, many new structures adhered to a simple, pared-down aesthetic, a look in line with the "International Style" of architecture, which had begun influencing movie theatre design in the 1930s.[200]

Some vestiges of the movie palace persisted among new constructions, however. The new 2,390-seat Odeon theatre in Toronto opened in 1948, retaining the size and high-end services of the traditional movie palace.[201] Included among its features was a dining lounge, an art gallery and services to "make the customer feel he is top man around the theatre."[202] Yet, to assert its modern status, it eschewed any decorative embellishment deemed excessive by contemporary standards, the "elaborate gilt whirlygigs and thingamabobs" of the movie palace.[203] The Odeon was notable, instead, for its streamlined interior, its "superb simplicity."[204] As one reviewer explained: "When you sit down in one of its comfortable seats, your eye is carried directly to the screen. Nothing between you and Ann Sheridan or Margaret Lockwood exists to draw the gaze or dilute the story [….]"[205]

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[199] Not everyone approved of this trend in theatre design. Pratley, for instance, argued that there were "too many theatres" at the time "consisting merely of four walls and a marquee." For Pratley, such theatres were lacking the beauty and craftsmanship of the traditional movie palace, and thus unworthy of screening modern motion pictures. See: Pratley 4

[200] The "International Style" was the name given by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, in 1932, to describe a new type of modernist architecture that had spread across Western Europe in the 1920s and early 1930s. One of the main tenets of the International Style, articulated by Hitchcock and Johnson, was the "avoidance of applied decoration." See: Colin St. John Wilson. "The Other Tradition." *AA Files*. 24 (Autumn 1992): 3-6. Print. 3. For more on the history of early 20th-century modernist architecture, see Leland M. Roth. "Versions of Modern Architecture, 1914-1970." *Understanding Architecture: Its Elements, History, and Meaning*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2007. 519-565. Print.

[201] The Odeon project had drawn some criticism for its large size and hefty construction costs. For Pratley, however, this building represented the "beautiful and solidly built" type of theatre that he saw as lacking among new constructions. Pratley argued that it would serve as a durable monument to Canadian theatre architecture while offering a valuable contribution to contemporary society-- a place to relax and escape from everyday life. Pratley. "The Movie Scene" 7.

[202] Bruce West. "Movie Palace: Art Gallery, Dining Room, 2,390 seats." *Globe and Mail* 9 Sep. 1948: 17. Print.

[203] Ibid 17.

[204] Ibid.

[205] Ibid.

The notion of eliminating environmental "distractions" from the exhibition space was in fact a growing tenet among theatre designers and architects. Promoted since the early 1930s, most reliably by American architect Ben Schlanger, the modern movie theatre favoured function over form and in so doing, re-imagined the relationship between audience, cinema and exhibition space. In a 1931 edition of *Motion Picture Herald*, Schlanger was already calling for the rejection of "applied ornament" that was common to the movie palace.[206] To modernize existing theaters, he proposed that owners remove any decoration or "false construction" added to the walls or ceiling-- such additions were now "obsolete."[207] Theatres, moreover, were getting smaller. In January 1932, the *Film Daily* reported that theater executives everywhere were in agreement that "the day of luxers seating 3,500 and 6,000 is virtually over" and that, under present economic conditions, such theatres now came with financial risk.[208] That same year, American theatre architect John Eberson, noting a reduction in size and luxury appointments among newer neighborhood theatres, declared an end to the movie palace's reign. Known for pioneering and promoting the most outlandish "atmospheric" movie palaces of the 1920s, Eberson stated that "the day of the garish, ornate, non-functional elements which marked, even marred theaters of the past is gone forever."[209]

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[206] Ben Schlanger. "The Economics of Theatre Remodeling: Selecting the Changes to be Made." *Motion Picture Herald* (11 Apr. 1931): 18+. Print. 154.

[207] For example, he argues that many theatres contain a large amount of "suspended and attached" construction to form and give shape to the ceiling, walls and proscenium. Because these parts are non-essential, from a structural standpoint, and easy to remove, he suggests they be eliminated from existing theatres. Ibid 18.

[208] "Passing of Big DeLuxers Seen by Theatre Executives: Economic Situation Shows Fallacy of Large Size Houses." *Film Daily* 58. 1 (3 Jan. 1932): 1+. Print. 3.

[209] Qtd. in Lary May. "Designing Multi-Cultural America: Modern Movie Theatres and the Politics of Public Space 1920-1945." *Movies and Politics: the Dynamic Relationship*. Ed. James Combs. New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1993. 182-213. Print 199.

Eberson's declaration precipitated a move toward the modernist approach in theatre design, which in reality, unfolded gradually, over several decades. Emerging scholar Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece suggests that the expansion of the modernist style directly correlated with the "slow dying of the movie palace," which began in the 1930s and culminated in the 1960s.[210] Over time, she explains, designers began "shrinking auditorium size and seating, reducing or eliminating vestiges of live theatre such as proscenia, darkening the lights, removing extraneous decoration, and designing an auditorium that directed visual attention at the screen."[211] All of these changes were employed in an effort to continue the basic set-up of a movie theatre: projecting cinema onto a screen before an auditorium of seated spectators. The modern movie theatre, however, would do away with the movie palace's attention-seeking aesthetics.

Szczepaniak-Gillece characterizes the removal of decorative flourishes from the exhibition space as a strategy of "neutralization," transforming the movie theatre into a smaller, simpler, rationalized structure. Unlike the movie palace of the 1910s and 1920s, where sumptuous theatre aesthetics were part of the overall spectacle audiences paid to experience, the modernist theatre was meant to reflect cinema's maturation into a dominant entertainment medium. No longer one amusement among many, cinema was becoming the primary attraction, the focal point of the show. The theatre's role, then, would also need to change, facilitating the spectator's immersion in (rather than rounding out or distracting from) the film presentation. As such, movie theatres shifted from an "architecture of distraction" to an "architecture of attention," adopting a "self-effacing"

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[210]Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece. "In the House, In the Picture: Distance and Proximity in the American Mid-Century Neutralized Theatre." *World Picture* 7 (Autumn 2012): 1-18. *World Picture Journal*. Web. 14 Aug. 2014. 1. <http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_7/Szczepaniak-Gillece.html>

[211] Ibid.

aesthetic to ensure that audiences remain focused on the screen.[212] Under this model, spectators were meant to forget about the surrounding auditorium as well as his/her embodied experience of the space, creating an experience of total filmic absorption.

Acoustical Revisions

Absent from Szczepaniak-Gillece's discussion is the role that sound would play in the reconfiguration of movie theatre design; instead she is describing gestures by which "film and its house were becoming […] feats of visual concentration."[213] The arrival of sound cinema in fact generated a number of problems for existing movie theatres, originally designed to accommodate a mixed bill of silent cinema and live performance. Emily Thompson points out that, before the coming of sound film in the late 1920s, exhibitors and film producers gave little consideration to theatre acoustics.[214] After wiring silent movie theatres for sound, however, such venues were widely discovered to be "acoustically deficient."[215] In 1931, S.K. Wolf, a leading acoustics engineer writing for *Motion Picture Herald*, addressed the problems new sound technology represented for older movie theatres in need of acoustical revisions. Early issues with sound cinema, then a rough technology in its infancy, were aggravated by the vast size and uneven surfaces of movie-palace auditoria, often festooned with plaster trimmings. Sound reverberation, echo, uneven volume and noise interference from both outside and inside the space were among

[212] Ibid 7.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Emily Thompson. *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002. Print. 258.
[215] Ibid. 259.

the issues plaguing older theatres.[216] A few of the largest urban movie palaces, despite their cavernous halls, were buffered against some of these problems. Though not immune, their "drapes, carpets and well-stuffed upholstery" provided some absorptive materials that were missing from most other theatres consisting of "barren halls with plaster walls and ceiling, wood or concrete floors, and bare wood seats."[217]

The most common problem afflicting older theatres was excessive reverberation.[218] Thompson points out that before the advent of sound cinema, "theatre-generated reverberation" actually improved the quality of live performance-- for instance, augmenting the "total volume of sound in the room" while creating a richer sonic experience, mixing "the elements of sound present at any given moment," such as an orchestra's various instruments.[219] Later acoustical assessments, however, determined that for sound reproduced on film the ideal "reverberation time" in theatres was significantly lower than what was required for live performance.[220] Wolf concluded that the "electrical amplification" of sound technology together with "studio reverberation of the recording itself" reduced the need for theater-generated reverberation.[221] The goal, then, became to decrease reverberation in theatre halls that were already "overreverberant."[222]

Addressing this ongoing issue in the early 1930s, Wolf proposes that existing theatres be assessed and treated by an acoustics expert, that surfaces be covered in "sound-

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[216] S.K. Wolf. "Sound in the Theatre: Acoustical Treatment During Remodeling." *Motion Picture Herald* 11 Apr. 1931: 49. Print.
[217] Thompson 260-261.
[218] Ibid. 260.
[219] Ibid. 261.
[220] Ibid. 262.
[221] Qtd. in Thomson 262
[222] Ibid.

absorbing materials."[223] Indeed, assorted materials were added to theatre houses across the 1930s, in what was becoming a standard practice to reduce problems related to sound cinema. Thompson lists, for example, the addition of upholstered seats, drapes, tapestries to all theatres, as well as the use of "acoustical plasters" and "sound-absorbing materials like Celotex" to cover auditorium walls and ceilings."[224] It was possible to camouflage insulating and sound-absorbing materials, merging them with the design of the space. Wolf suggests that absorbent materials, including acoustical "plaster, building boards, felt, material wool, and tiles," could be painted over and blended into decorative schemes. [225]

While there would appear to be a correlation between the expansion of sound cinema and changes to theatre design, this relationship has been largely overlooked by scholars and historians. Amir Ameri, for instance, indicates that despite our knowledge of the significant impact made by sound technology, "movie theatre historians have found no apparent connection between the widespread adoption of sound and the advent of a new movie theater design" in the 1930s.[226] While some have intuited a connection between the two phenomena, the precise link remains elusive since the impact of sound cinema is often characterized exclusively as a "technological and/or acoustic" issue rather than a stylistic or architectural one.[227] Yet in addition to Wolf's aforementioned concerns, there is further evidence to suggest that sound directly impacted theatre design.

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[223] Wolf. " Sound in the Theatre" 49.
[224] Thompson 262.
[225] Wolf. "Sound in Theatre" 49.
[226] Ameri argues that the redesign of theatres in the 1930s was not a response to sound technology, per se, but rather to significant changes in film reception. In particular, he notes that sound collapsed the "distance" between the audience and the film, between the "real" and the "imaginary," due to its powerful sense of immediacy. The modernist theatre , he contends, sought to restore this distance by re-concentrating the spectator's attention on the screen and re-locating the "imaginary" of the filmic event in an "illusive destination." See: "The Architecture of Illusive Distance." *Screen* 54. 4 (2013): 1-25. Print. 1; 29.
[227] Ibid. 1.

Toward the end of the decade, Schlanger and C.C. Potwin published an article encouraging a shift away from the "corrective" approach to theatre architecture espoused by Wolf, adding sound-absorbing materials to the space once it had been built.[228] Instead, they propose a "constructive" approach, which would take into account the specific sonic requirements of the space in the initial design phase, thereby eliminating the need for remedial acoustical treatments. Sound distribution could be partially controlled by an auditorium's form if the width, length and height of the space were held in greater proportion to one another. Moreover, if the overall volume of the space were measured in relationship to its seating capacity, this would engender a theatre that is "acoustically functional in design."[229] Many theatres, for example, bore interior halls that were prone to excessively high ceilings.[230] Lower ceilings, they explained, would reduce the overall volume of the space relative to the number of seats (and patrons) it contained, thereby lessening reverberation time.[231] Other theatres, they found, were excessively long: "When the length becomes greater than twice the width, difficulties arise from a multiplicity of sound reflections occurring between the side wall surfaces."[232] Schlanger, in particular, was motivated by a desire to create a more functional, utilitarian movie theatre, in opposition to its more ornamental precursor, one that he felt would more adequately meet the needs of the film medium and its audience. One might see then how the complications of retrofitting

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[228] C.C. Potwin and Ben Schlanger. "Coordinating Acoustics and Architecture in the Design of the Motion Picture Theatre."*J.S. M.P.E.* (Feb. 1939): 156-168. Print. 157.
[229] Potwin and Schlanger. "Coordinating Acoustics" 157; 160.
[230] Ibid. 164.
[231] The overall volume of an auditorium, they suggest, ought to be measured relative to its "fixed" (e.g. seats) and "variable" (e.g. the audience) absorptive qualities. They recommend that these factors be taken into consideration when designing the dimensions of a space and assessing its acoustical potential. Ibid. 160.
[232] By the same token, they indicate that theatres that are too short, having a width-to-length ratio that is less than 1:1.14, is not ideal from a visual or sonic standpoint. This, they suggest, "creates an unusually large rear wall, which is often a source of objectionable sound reflections." Ibid 159.

a theatre with sound-absorbing materials would have encouraged architects to alter their designs in the planning stage to create, from the outset, a more sonically controlled environment.

Schlanger's article above also indicates that most theatres, by 1939, bore a standard of 900 seats, significantly less than the massive movie palaces of the late 1920s, but still more sizeable than the smaller halls that would appear in the postwar era. Movie theatres constructed in the 1930s, informed by a spirit of Depression-era austerity as well as the rise of modernist architecture, nonetheless displayed a continued penchant for ornamentation and grandeur. We see this, for example, in the large Art Deco theatres of the period, a melding of the novel "machine age" style with the opulence of the movie palace.[233] David Naylor indicates that Art Deco theatres "assimilated mass produced elements into their ornamentation" while combining modernist materials, such as aluminum and chrome, with the movie palace's "old standby, plaster."[234] Many large Art Deco theatres, with their heavy embellishment, continued the movie palace "golden age" into the 1930s until tendencies toward "smallness and simplicity" gained prominence.[235]

The Postwar Movie Theatre

Following the Second World War, it was the modernist approach to design that would increasingly inform new theatre constructions. By the early 1950s, many new theatres in Canada were not built in large urban cores, which already bore an established

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[233] David Naylor. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy.* New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981. Print. 162. The term "machine age" captures the influence of the industrialism on the modernist style of architecture. For an analysis of the Art Deco movie theatre, see Lary May. "Utopia on Main Street: Modern Theatres and 'New' Audiences." *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the America Way*. University of Chicago Press, 2000. 101-138. Print.
[234] Naylor. *American Picture Palaces* 162.
[235] Ibid. 172.

roster of cinemas, but in peripheral neighborhoods, smaller cities and towns-- areas as yet without a theatre.[236] Film exhibitors, meanwhile, continued to show respect for the time-honored, single-screen movie palace, which remained highly patronized. In 1953, *Canadian Film Weekly* chronicled the history of the movie theatre, praising "the splendid type of picture palace we know today."[237] These structures, it states, are known for their "comfort and luxurious trappings" and are "resplendent edifices," deserving of their global proliferation.[238] Likewise, in the same issue, a historic account of the Ouimetoscope in Montreal, "the first deluxe movie house in North America," is noteworthy for its affectionate tone. The Ouimetoscope, it suggests, is valuable for being the first of its kind, ushering in "all cinema cathedrals and lavish auditoriums that dot this continent today."[239]

Amid the surge of new theatre constructions and consistently high admissions were signs of uncertainty among film exhibitors regarding the future of their industry. While trade magazines reported on the rash of new theatres appearing across Canada, they also underlined the high rate at which many venues changed owners across this period. Indeed, while Canada had vastly expanded its movie theatre repertoire, 400 theatres had changed hands over a three-year period, many of them "sold by old-timers to brand-new-timers."[240] *Canadian Film Weekly* speculated that such instability might be attributed to lingering concerns about television, which had yet to make a sizeable impact, domestically. Further,

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[236] In 1954, *Canadian Film Weekly* indicates that the postwar construction of new urban movie theatres had, for the most part, ended "several years ago." See: "Auditorium Cinemas Still Going Up." *Canadian Film Weekly* (31 Mar. 1954): 1+. Print. 4.
[237] Will McLaughlin. "Shopfront to Palace- Will McLaughlin of the Ottawa Journal Recalls the Great Days of Yesteryear." *Canadian Film Weekly 1952-53 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1953. 51-52. Print. 51.
[238] Ibid. 51.
[239] Hye Bossin."The Story of L. Ernest Ouimet, Pioneer." *Canadian Film Weekly 1952-53 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd, 1953. 23-43. Print. 37.
[240] "Industry Title." 3.

it suggested, some conservative theatre owners were likely reluctant to modernize their venues, to invest in "badly-needed renovations" or to install 3-D and wide-screen technology, both of which were promoted to maintain a competitive edge in the changing marketplace.[241]

After the peak year of 1953, movie theatre attendance in Canada began to wane.[242] Admissions plummeted, falling from 248 million in 1952 to 88 million in 1963.[243] In 1960, *Canadian Film Weekly* reported a 25 percent drop in the number of theaters in operation since 1955.[244] Further, 31 percent of the theatres open in the mid 1950s had not only closed down, but had also "disappeared."[245] By this point, moreover, the "flood" of new theatre constructions that had defined the industry at the start of the decade had tapered off, now reduced "to a trickle."[246] The drop in audience turnout, and the corresponding loss of theatres, was felt across the film industry. Film exhibitors were invested in recapturing a once devoted following for cinema, but wholly uncertain how to do so.

Reinventing Film Exhibition

One of the most notable commentators of the period, responding to collective uncertainties about the future of film exhibition, was Nat Taylor. Head of the theatrical

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[241] Ibid. 1. Trade journals and magazines regularly advertised new technologies, fixtures and strategies by which to "modernize" theatres. In 1953, Dominion Sound Equipment, for example, urges exhibitors to accommodate widescreen projection technology, to install new screens and acquire Cinemascope, stereophonic sound and 3-D projection equipment. This form of "modernization," the ad states, is "essential" in order to "keep pace with new developments and capitalize on box office potentials." See: Dominion Sound Equipment Ltd. Advertisement. *Canadian Film Weekly* (21 Oct. 1953): 4. Print.
[242] "Facts About Exhibition." *Canadian Film Weekly 1960-61 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry.* Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1961. 25. Print.
[243] For a list of annual admissions, provided by Statistics Canada, covering the period 1948 to 1977 in, refer to: "Box Office Statistics" (1979), 3-4.
[244] 1955 was reportedly the peak year with regard to the number of theatres in operation at one time. See: "Facts About Exhibition."
[245] Ibid.
[246] "Theatre Building: Flood to Trickle." *Canadian Film Weekly* (8 Apr. 1959): 1. Print.

chain Twentieth Century Theatres, Taylor was an outspoken arbiter of film exhibition standards and practices, his early articles often accompanied by a distinguished portrait of the author, pipe-in-mouth.[247] Speaking out via *Canadian Film Weekly* and its successor, *Canadian Film Digest*, Taylor attempted to make sense of social and industrial-commercial changes for a readership of bewildered exhibitors and theatre owners.[248] Taylor was heavily invested in what Charles Acland has described as film exhibition's ongoing project of "stabilization."[249] From the moment cinema first entered the public sphere, ever-shifting social, cultural, technological and economic conditions have in turn made film exhibition an unpredictable affair. Audiences, in particular, have remained changeable. As a result, the business of film exhibition has never been a "static enterprise" as those in the industry have had to continually revise and adjust their practices to maintain contemporary viability.[250] Taylor, a veteran of the business, expounded on the shifting state of the film industry, delineating key issues afflicting modern-day exhibitors while offering adaptive strategies to move forward.

Reports of widespread theatre closings, beginning in the mid-1950s, had created an atmosphere of uncertainty among film exhibitors. Reframing this period of instability in positive terms, Taylor offered an alternate view of this development. Film exhibition, he

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[247] Twentieth Century Theatres was an Ontario-based subsidiary of Famous Players Corporation. For Taylor's accompanying photographic portrait, which would be replaced by a different image beginning in 1959, see, for example: *Canadian Film Weekly 1956-57 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry.* Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications Canada, Ltd. 1957. 21. Print; and *Canadian Film Weekly 1957-58 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications Canada, Ltd. 1958. 23. Print.
[248] Taylor founded *Canadian Film Weekly* in 1941. He would later go on to co-found Cineplex with Garth Drabinsky in 1979. This company would eventually become Cineplex Odeon in the early 1980s, after purchasing Odeon Canada.
[249] Charles Acland. *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. 50.
[250] Acland. 49.

suggested, was undergoing necessary reform, a "shake-down and shake-out period."[251] In 1956, he confirmed that theatres were closing down on an increasing basis and that such trends were expected to continue. However, those unable to capture audiences were unavoidable casualties, "the losers and borderline theatres."[252] Many had persisted too long on "borrowed time" amid the postwar boom in moviegoing.[253] Furthermore, given the rash of new theatres built in the immediate postwar era, the problem now was "overseating," a saturation of theatres-- and thus, an undue number of seats-- servicing a given city.[254] By eliminating some theatres, he suggests, exhibitors and theatre owners could redistribute profits to those venues left standing. This, in the long run, would ensure a strong future.[255]

A year later, 1957, Taylor assured his readers that theatres constructed more recently, the "new and modern" theatres, have been largely unaffected by declining admissions. Only a small number of the modern theatres, he asserted, had "failed to live with the new set of conditions under which we now operate […]."[256] The vast majority of closed theatres were not to be missed; they were "old and antiquated."[257] Gesturing toward a preference for newer theatres, Taylor not only reassures those who might have invested in movie houses constructed more recently, but suggests a turn away from older holdovers

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[251] Taylor. "Our Business" (1956) 21.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] In order to have a substantial impact on the business of remaining theatres, Taylor suggest that an exhibitor would need to close a theatre that holds significant economic appeal for the distributor, a location that captures a "larger or better supply of product." See: Taylor. "Our Business" (1956) 21.
[256] Taylor. "Our Business" (1957) 21.
[257] Taylor. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis." (20 Mar. 1970) 1-2.

of the pre-war era: "The further elimination of obsolete and uneconomic theatres," he asserts, "will serve to improve the health of the motion picture industry."[258]

What is important to note, at this point, is an absence of direct condemnation of the movie palace. At this stage, the late 1950s, many downtown movie palaces in Canada continued to operate as first-run cinemas, given that this was the industry norm. Film exhibition had yet to see a type of movie theatre that would radically depart from the traditional movie palace, accommodating a shifting cultural and economic landscape. As Taylor affirmed in 1957: "There is not yet a sufficiently clear picture to indicate what kind of theatres are practical for the future […]."[259] To denounce the movie palace would have left many exhibitors unmoored, unable to imagine an alternative. What is significant, however, is Taylor's characterization of theatres closings, generally, as an inevitable, even productive, phenomenon. While he predicts that the next theatres to go would be the "sub-run" locations, those showing films long after screening at the first-run houses, together with smaller, peripheral theatres yielding negligible profits, he leaves much to the discretion of the exhibitor.

Causal Factors

By the late 1950s, the confident tone that had defined film exhibition discourse at the beginning of the decade had given way to sober pragmatism. In Canada, the impact of television was becoming more pronounced.[260] Taylor, in fact, confirmed in 1957 that the

[258] N.A. Taylor. "Our Business," *Canadian Film Weekly 1958-59 Year Book of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications Canada, Ltd., 1959. 23. Print.
[259] Taylor. "Our Business" (1957) 23.
[260] Taylor. "Our Business" (1956) 21.

movies had "ceased to be the entertainment 'time waster' of choice."[261] Cinema, he contended, had not only been usurped by television**,** but by a growing number of affordable goods on offer-- automobiles, washing machines, radios and other "hard goods."[262] Additionally, new forms of leisure activity were competing for the public's attention: bowling alleys, night baseball, stockcar racing and a rash of bingo halls which, he lamented, "no one seems to want to stop or knows how to."[263] Bingo halls, in particular, were seen as the scourge of the film industry, having reached "monstrous proportions" by the mid-1950s.[264] To the film exhibitor, "big bingos" represented unfair competition, using expensive door prizes, including automobiles, to lure patrons.[265] Bingo halls, together with a rash of other new activities and products, resulted in an entire reorganization of consumer habits as the public's interests diversified and cultural life expanded beyond the urban movie house.[266] In light of these changes, Taylor urged film exhibitors to likewise shift direction, to adopt a "new set of rules and new type of thinking" in order to survive.[267]

Taylor here draws attention to an important point: that television was neither the sole factor, nor the primary catalyst in the decline of theatrical moviegoing. Historians have a tendency to reduce this development to a case of one medium simply replacing another-- television unseating the movies, or, the home taking the place of the movie theatre. Alternatively, television is often named as the most significant cause among a series of causes instigating the movie palace's downfall. Jocelyne Martineau, for instance, likens

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[261] Ibid. 21.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Taylor. "Our Business." (1957) 23.
[265] The Criminal Code of Canada prohibited movie theatres from employing similar tactics– that is, offering expensive door prizes to attract patrons. See references to this in: Taylor. "Our Business." (1957) 23.
[266] Ibid. 21.
[267] Ibid.

television's emergence in the 1950s to an exploding "bomb," given its detrimental effect on the movie theatre.[268] To be sure, television played a major role in this history, but its *initial* influence has often been overstated. Television had to negotiate its rise to prominence. As Lynn Spigel and Anna McCarthy have shown, its integration in both domestic and public spheres was not immediate or unchallenged.[269] In fact, cinema's declining audiences, we might say, occurred as a result of multiple forces converging across this period.

Douglas Gomery has shed some light on this argument, suggesting that television did not initiate but rather "exacerbated" the decline in theatrical moviegoing, joining a network of changes already underway.[270] Focusing on the American situation, which was similar in Canada, Gomery contends that such changes included population expansion wrought by the Baby Boom, together with the migration of urban populations out to the suburbs in search of affordable housing. Suburban families, moreover, increasingly invested capital in domestic life and child rearing, while also searching for leisure activities closer to and/or rooted in the home.[271] By the time television broadcasting and production had evolved into a rationalized business, the decline in theatrical moviegoing in the United

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[268] Jocelyne Martineau. *Cinémas et Patrimoine à L'Affiche*. Montreal: Ville de Montréal and Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. 1988. Print. 30.

[269] Spigel offers a study of television's initial emergence in everyday life and culture, with a focus on the installation of television sets in the domestic family home. Post-WWII representations of television in popular media, she argues, instructed the public on how to integrate television into daily life. This, she shows, often spoke of wider cultural anxieties concerning the arrival of the new medium. Like Spigel, McCarthy considers television's emergence during an "instructional" period in the history of the medium, but she shifts focus to spaces outside the home. Of particular relevance to this study are McCarthy's analyses of two spaces in the public sphere: the tavern and the department store. McCarthy explores how these environments negotiated television's initial presence, and how particular ideas about TV spectatorship in these domains were formulated and circulated by institutional and social discourse. See: Lynn Spigel. *Making Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America*. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992. Print.; and Anna McCarthy. *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. Print.

[270] Gomery. *Shared Pleasures* 83

[271] Ibid. 88.

States was already in progress.[272] When television eventually assumed its role as the dominant entertainment medium, integrated in the suburban household, it did so by adapting to an already-reconfigured socio-cultural landscape.

In Canada, the decline in moviegoing and the rise of television bore a greater degree of overlap. Canada's decrease in theatrical admissions occurred from 1953 onward, while domestic television production and broadcasting began in 1952, under the stewardship of the CBC.[273] Yet, as in the U.S., it would take time for television to flood the marketplace, with television sets reaching high saturation levels in the home only at the end of the 1950s. Take Quebec, for example, which by the end of the decade yielded the highest proportion of television sets in the nation. As of 1955, two years after moviegoing began its decline in Canada, only 38.6 percent of Quebec homes had a television set.[274] By 1960, this figure had risen to 88.8 percent.[275] This lends further credence to Gomery's argument that television did not cause, but rather contributed to the decline in moviegoing. [276]

One of the ways in which the film industry responded to widespread post-war social and demographic changes was by expanding the number of drive-in theatres in both the United States and Canada. Although drive-ins had existed in small numbers since the 1930s, film exhibitors began catering specifically to suburban audiences, responding to the

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[272] Gomery's research has uncovered that, prior to 1955, when movie theatre attendance experienced its first and most dramatic decline in numbers, not enough people in the United States owned television sets for this medium to be considered real competition for the movies. Only after 1954 did the industry see a more-than-50% "penetration rate" of television sets in the home. Moreover, from 1955 onward, the number of television stations expanded and the television industry saw its first major rise in both audiences and profits. Ibid. 84-85.

[273] Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert and François Ricardo. "Chapter 28: The Coming of Television." *Quebec Since 1930*. Trans. Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmaise. Toronto: James Lorimier & Company, Publishers, 1991. 284-293. Print. 287.

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid.

[276] Gomery, *Shared Pleasures* 83.

"huge demand for auto-convenient movie exhibition" during this period.[277] The growth of drive-ins in the United States was so large that by the early 1960s, "drive-ins accommodated one out of every five movie viewers."[278] During one peak moment in the summer of 1956, Gomery found that more people attended drive-ins than went to traditional 'hard-top' theatres."[279] The popularity of drive-ins in the United States peaked in the mid-1950s and thereafter began to decline. This was exasperated by the continued expansion of suburban housing, which eventually encroached upon the drive-in's territory as well.[280]

With the exception of Quebec, where drive-ins were prohibited until the early 1970s, Canada also saw widespread expansion of drive-ins across this period. In 1956, *Canadian Film Weekly* acknowledged the opening of many new drive-ins, but did not highlight this option as a sound investment for the film exhibitor. Several factors, including the limited operation of many drive-ins during cold winter months and growing competition from suburbia's rising medium of choice, television, meant that many drive-ins were "finding it difficult to stay in the black."[281] Taylor characterized drive-in theatres rather pejoratively, as "generally overrated financial ventures which tie up large sums of cash and yield a comparatively small return."[282] By 1960, Taylor shifts his position slightly, noting that "business in the drive-in theatre seems to hold up comparatively well" amid the wider decline in movie theatre attendance. However, he nonetheless steers the film

[277] Ibid 91.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid. 93.
[281] Taylor. "Our Business "(1956) 23.
[282] Ibid.

exhibitor away from further ventures in the drive-in business, as "most suitable locations" for outdoor film exhibition had "already been covered."[283]

Perhaps more so than television or drive-in cinemas, one of the major commercial developments to impact the urban movie palace was the shopping mall.[284] As populations expanded to outlying areas, we now know, shopping malls were often constructed nearby. Film exhibitors, taking note of the migration of social and commercial activity out to the suburbs, began building new movie theatres close to and eventually in conjunction with shopping complexes. This would have significant impact on the urban movie palace, particularly those located downtown where commercial activity had been formerly concentrated. Initially, the only major effect this had on the downtown movie palace concerned its long-held dominant position, which it now grudgingly shared with its suburban counterparts. William Paul has demonstrated that, at first, these new theatres emulated the downtown theatres. The film industry's "tiered releasing policies," offering the latest cinema at a selection of downtown movie palaces, still represented the industry standard. As such, many new suburban theatres of the 1950s and early 1960s were not radically different from movie palaces. These were usually "freestanding structures with large auditoriums of 500-1500 seat, and most often with single screens."[285] Their initial goal, in fact, was to reproduce "in scaled-down fashion" what the downtown theatre

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[283] "Our Business." *1960-61 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd, 1961. 23. Print. 23.

[284] In the U.S., for example, mass suburbanization led to the rise of the shopping centre, which expanded "from a few hundred in 1950 to nearly three thousand in 1958." These numbers increased exponentially across the 1960s and 1970s. See: Gomery, *Shared Pleasures* 94. For a history of post-WWII suburban expansion in Canada, see Richard Harris. *Creeping Conformity: How Canada Became Suburban, 1900-1960*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004. Print.

[285] William Paul."The K-Mart Audience at the Mall Movies." *Film History* 6.4 (Winter 1994): 487-501. Print. 490.

offered.[286] In this way, early shopping mall theatres wanted to appear analogous to the movie palace. This would allow for the first step in conceiving of the shopping mall cinema as an acceptable proxy for the inveterate movie palace. Over time, as the downtown theatre lost its "exclusivity," it eventually became secondary to the shopping mall theatre, especially once shopping complexes infiltrated downtown areas as well.[287] Downtown movie palaces, after this occurred, either vanished from cities, closed down or were demolished, while those that remained became "an endangered species."[288]

Movie Palace Residues

Rather than focus on the vast number of theatres that closed down or disappeared across the ensuing period, seeing them as proof positive of economic decline, it is important to consider those structures that persisted despite such struggles. Movie palaces, in some instances, lingered beyond their obsolescence, subsisting on the margins of culture. Here, new currents formed around the movie palace, favouring continuity. Even as theatrical admissions declined and a number of movie houses sat empty, some theatre owners seemed reluctant to close or demolish their structures, looking instead for other approaches. *Canadian Film Weekly,* for example, reported as early as 1955 that several million dollars would be spent on the refurbishment of existing theatres that year.[289] In 1957, it indicated that while many old theatres were disappearing, others were being

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[286] Ibid. 490.
[287] Ibid 489. We see examples of this in Montreal, for example. Across the 1960s and 1970s, the downtown area saw the arrival of dual and multi-cinemas in conjunction with Place Ville Marie, Alexis Nihon and Place Bonaventure shopping plazas. The *Centre Capitol,* which replaced the Capitol theatre, also contained a multi-auditoria movie theatre, though this building was primarily an office complex.
[288] Paul 491.
[289] This data, regarding spending activity in 1955, was published in 1956. See: "Construction." *Canadian Film Weekly 1955-56 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1956. 50. Print.

repurposed.[290] Several old theatres in Ontario, for example, were being converted to "mission houses," rented out for church meetings and free movie screenings, sponsored by religious groups. This strategy, one report indicated, was becoming a national trend: "There seems to be an increase in the use of dark theatres by religious organizations and groups across the country and this revenue is welcomed by their owners."[291] By 1960, the magazine suggested that film exhibitors entertain theatre conversion as an option, following the example of many American operators. Some theatre chains were not only investing in other industries, including television, but were surviving by radically transforming the interiors of spaces, turning "profitless theatres into profitable bowling alleys."[292]

In the United States, the movie palace's decline was arguably more pronounced than in Canada. This is, in part, because there were simply more large and medium-sized cities in the U.S. and thus, vastly more theatres. American film exhibition, furthermore, had been strongly impacted by the 1948 Anti-Combine decision. This had forced Hollywood's "Big Five," the largest studios in the United States, to cease their monopolist practices and divest themselves of theatre chains acquired in the 1920s.[293] On the one hand, this created a more competitive marketplace, allowing independents operators and new theatre chains to form

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[290] In Ontario, for instance, 19 existing theatres were either demolished or re-purposed. See: "Seating Down 36,832 in 12 Months." *Canadian Film Weekly* (3 Apr. 1957): 1. Print.
[291] "Cinemas Become Mission Houses." *Canadian Film Weekly* (24 Apr. 1957): 1. Print.
[292] See: "Facts About Exhibition."
[293] Hollywood's vertically integrated system was organized around five major studios: Loew's/MGM, Paramount, Fox (later, Twentieth-Century Fox), RKO and Warner Bros. After gaining control of several large theatre chains across the 1920s, these studios oversaw the majority of first-run movie palaces in the biggest cities in the U.S. This situation remained in effect until after the Second World War when, in 1948, the federal government won its antitrust lawsuit against the "Big Five." This event, often referred to as the "Paramount Decision," forced the studios' divestiture of their theatre chains. For further details on this history, see: Douglas Gomery. *The Hollywood Studio System: A History*. London: BFI, 2005. Print; and Gomery, *Shared Pleasures (57-82;* 89-91). For more on the industrial fallout of the Paramount Decision, see: Michael Conant. *Antitrust in the Motion Picture Industry*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960. Print.

over the following decades. On the other, it meant that the country's established theatre chains now lacked the aegis of powerful studios. Facing an uncertain postwar market for cinema, they subsequently sold off, closed down or demolished hundreds of movie houses.

The loss of American movie palaces was amplified, also, by the sheer size of theatres, often eclipsing their Canadian counterparts in terms of volume, seating capacity and overall extravagance.[294] So substantial was the loss of New York's massive theatres that a tour of Times Square in 1961 wound up centering on the city's demolished movie palaces.[295] The tour asked its attendees to reflect upon the recent passing of these structures: "Leaning over a wooden barrier at the former site of the Roxy […] the group looked nostalgically into the gaping excavation below where once stood the "Cathedral of the Motion Picture."[296]

A 1962 article in *Back Stage,* taking note of these conditions, reflects on the departed pastime of going to the movies. This was once a "weekly habit" wherein the movie palace "was as much a part of life as the corner grocery."[297] At the present moment, it states, **"**less than half the number" of movie palaces of this earlier era "are still standing, and this is true of the entire country."[298] In 1965, *Variety* magazine reported on a spate of theatre closings by Balaban & Katz, one of the largest theatre chains of the period.[299] The

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[294] In the United States, the average number of seats for movie palaces was between 1,800 and 2,500, though some movie palaces contained as many as 6,000 seats. Canada's largest movie palace, the Pantages in Toronto, had 3,626 seats. See: Charlotte Herzog. "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style." *Cinema Journal* 20.2 (Spring 1981): 15-37. Print. 15; and John Lindsay. *Palaces of the Night: Canada's Grand Theatres*. Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 1999. Print. 116.

[295] Incidentally, Ben Hall, who would later pen the first detailed history of the American movie palace, led this tour of Times Square. See: "Tour Into Nostalgia Recalls Splendors of Movie Palaces." *New York Times* 25 Sep. 1961: 35. Print; and Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats*.

[296] Ibid. 35.

[297] "New Movie Theatre Districts Blossoming All Around Town." *Back Stage* 3. 47 (28 Dec. 1962): 16-17. Print.

[298] Ibid. 16-17.

[299] Balaban & Katz, based in Chicago, had earlier merged with Paramount, thus becoming one of the largest national theatre chains in the U.S. For a history of Balaban & Katz, see Gomery, *Shared Pleasures* 40-56.

company's "old biggies," three massive movie palaces collectively accounting for 10,000 seats, had been closed down, a sure sign of their obsolescence.[300] These colossal theatres, the article explained, were residues of the "picture palace era."[301] Oversized and excessively seated, movie palaces were "so large as to be inefficient" today, untenable under modern conditions.[302]

Yet, amid the disappearance of movie palaces as well as discursive references to their obsolescence, were some opposing trends. In 1965, *Box Office Magazine* reported that some American theatre owners, rather than close, demolish or gut their theatres, were choosing to restore and reinvigorate them. They were doing so, in some measure, to challenge modern developments. Movie palaces, some theatre owners believed, stood as a foil to the "massive new giants of glass and steel," office towers and skyscrapers overtaking downtown centres, as well as the "sprawling, cement-girded shopping centres" constructed in outlying areas.[303] Rather than renounce older movie theatres, these individuals bore an interest in conservation, wanting to maintain "the rococo grandeur of movie palaces of an earlier day."[304] In 1966, *Box Office Magazine* followed-up this report with a detailed article outlining a national trend wherein theatre owners were remodeling and reopening old theatres, many of which were movie palaces already closed for several years.[305] In 1965, the magazine indicated, 465 indoor theatres had been renovated. Theatres in small towns and larger urban centres were installing new screens, seats, carpeting, projection and

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[300] The three movies palaces closing, in this instance, were large neighborhood theatres. See: "Pull Down Ginger Palaces: B& K Folds 3D of Old Biggies." *Variety* 8 (16 Oct. 1963): 7. Print.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Joan Baer. "Turning 'White Elephants' Into Gold: Exhibitors Restore and Renew the Old Movie Palaces of an Earlier Era.'" *Boxoffice* (6 Sep. 1965): 16-17. Print.
[304] Ibid.
[305] "547 Theatres Are Renovated During 1965." *Boxoffice* (31 Jan. 1966): 11. Print.

sound equipment, while 142 formerly closed theatres had reopened for business, suggesting a "stabilization in the shuttering of marginal theatres."[306]

While Canadian examples of such counter-approaches were comparatively sparse, there is evidence to suggest that here, too, the turn away from "outdated" theatres was not a wholesale affair. In 1968, for example, Barry Allen, president of Theatre Holding of Toronto, a chain of theatres encompassing venues in Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba, purchased two antiquated theatres to join the collection: the 1,200-seat Amherst, a movie palace in East-end Montreal, and the smaller, 750-seat Fox theatre in downtown Kitchener, Ontario. Allen invested $100,000 in refurbishing the interior of the Amherst, while another $50,000 was allocated to "improvements" to the Fox.[307] A year later, 1969, the owners of the Marks theatre in Oshawa, Ontario, similarly restored and re-launched this movie theatre to strong profits.[308] The Marks, smaller than the average movie palace but no less ornate, was returned to its original condition, recovering much of the early twentieth-century "charm and elegance" it had lost over time.[309]

By the early 1970s, the trend toward theatre preservation was gaining momentum. Taylor noted in 1971 that the film exhibition industry had, in recent years, invested heavily in the "remodeling and rehabilitation" of some older theatres "which were deemed worthy of saving."[310] A year later, 1972, *Canadian Film Weekly* shone a spotlight on the Yonge and Winter Garden theatre in Toronto. Originally opened in 1913 as a combination vaudeville and moving picture house, the theatre featured two auditoria built one on top of the other,

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[306] Ibid.
[307] The Amherst was opened in 1926 while the Fox opened later, in 1941. See: "Theatre Holding Corp Buys Two New Theatres." *Canadian Film Weekly* (23 Oct. 1968): 15. Print.
[308] See: "Now It's the 'New Marks' in Oshawa-- $100,000 Later." *Canadian Film Weekly* (6 Aug. 1969): 4. Print.
[309] Ibid.
[310] N.A. Taylor. "Our Business in the 70's." *Canadian Film and TV Weekly 1970-71 Yearbook of the Canadian Entertainment Industry*. Ed. Ed Hocura. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd, 1971. 23-27. Print. 25.

together accommodating approximately 1,600 people.[311] Its continued presence, the magazine suggests, stands as a direct challenge to an "age of demolish and destroy."[312] Rather than frame the structure as an outmoded relic, the journal highlights the theatre's enduring appeal. To "wander through" the old theatre, it suggests, is "sheer magic, " discovering a place to "let one's imagination run riot."[313] The "dusty but still-beautiful" structure moreover showcased the work of Canadian architect Jay English who had designed an entire collection of "thrilling movie-palaces."[314] Looking to the future, the article proposes the theatre be fixed up and reopened. It could, for instance, serve as "a supper-club, with live entertainers," while possibly featuring silent film screenings.[315] This was a place where the original ambiance of the space "could easily be re-created," offering a unique feeling of "intimacy, which the "'new' theatres never seem to possess."[316]

The "new" theatres to which this journalist alludes likely referred to those structures emerging from a second wave of construction in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In keeping with the rise of shopping mall cinemas, the majority of these new theatres were built away from downtown centres in suburban neighborhoods, often in tandem with shopping centres.[317] By this point, moreover, movie theatres constructed in both the United States and Canada began adopting a novel format: the "dual" or "twin" theatre, which over time evolved into the "multi" cinema, now commonly referred to as the multiplex.

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[311] The upper level was designed to look like an exterior garden. See: "The Winter Garden Revisited" *Canadian Film Digest* (6 Apr. 1972): 24-25. Print. 24.
[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid. 25.
[314] Ibid.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid. 24.
[317] For example, 1968 saw the addition of a new 650-seat theatre in Scarborough, near Toronto, a 1,200-seat dual auditorium in a Burlington shopping mall, near Hamilton, and an 825-seat theatre in the town of Vaughan. See: "Theatre Building Busy At End of Year." *Canadian Film Weekly* (3 Jan. 1968): 1-2. Print.

Space and Selection

Duals, which preceded multis, were originally designed in a variety of formats: "side by side," "back to back," "at right angles" or in the "piggyback" form—that is, one auditorium on top of another.[318] Yet, all duals shared the basic format of two auditoria under one roof, each showing a different feature. Two screens now shared one box office, and sometimes a single projector.[319] The dual cinema offered a number of advantages to the exhibitor. In particular, it offset the economic risk that attended the single-screen theatre, which hung the bulk of its revenue on one auditorium or the one film it could project during a given time slot. The financial stakes of a film's performance were particularly high at the movie palace, where the building's vast size often entailed massive overhead. Movie palaces located on downtown main streets were the most expensive to maintain, heavily taxed as commercial properties and occupying sought-after real estate.[320]

The dual cinema format alleviated some of the financial burden shouldered by the traditional single-screen movie theatre, providing what Acland describes as "economies of scale," wherein a building's overarching costs are spread across more than one profit-generating unit.[321] Once the building's operating costs were paid, this made the adjoining

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[318] Ibid.

[319] In the early multiplexes, particularly shopping mall cinemas, two or more halls would sometimes share the same projector. For this reason, projection booths did not always align with the screen and thus one half of the image might appear larger than the other half, a result known as "key-stoning." See: Gomery, *Shared Pleasures* 100.

[320] Gabeline et al. note that Montreal's zoning and tax laws in the early 1970s were geared primarily toward demolition and new construction rather than conservation and restoration. This is largely why the Capitol theatre, which was taxed as "prime downtown land," was demolished for redevelopment. See: Gabeline et al. 97. In 1973, Lanken, via the local press, similary highlights zoning and taxation as a major problem for movie palaces given that such buldings are taxed as "commercial properties" as opposed to "cultural centres." See: "The Reign of the 'Queens' Draws to a Close." *Gazette* [Montreal] 13 Oct. 1973: 27. Print.

[321] Charles Acland. *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. Print. 103.

theatre "that much less expensive to run."[322] Further, the extra auditorium made film programming more fluid, freeing the exhibitor to offer more than one film at a time. This, in turn, lowered the pressure placed on a single film, asked to maintain strong box office returns over long theatrical runs. Rather, "the moment a film's business slows, it can be moved to a smaller theatre next door," replaced with a newer feature on the "main screen."[323]

Employing more than one screen not only meant exhibitors had more than one product for sale, or more than one source of revenue; they could also appeal to more than one audience. In fact, the multi-auditoria concept spoke to changing notions about the role movie theatres were meant to play, which corresponded to shifting ideas about audiences. Taylor, one of the pioneers of the dual format in Canada, was one of the strongest advocates of this new model.[324] "Showing two different attractions simultaneously," he explained, "the exhibitor could now cater to the entertainment desires of two segments of the public, rather than one."[325] This seems like a simple premise, but in principle it pointed toward a fundamental shift in how exhibitors imagined, and therefore catered to, audiences. Film exhibition, it seemed, was moving away from the movie palace's original vision of a singular mass audience, stemming from early efforts to generate a more "democratic" mode

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[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid.
[324] In 1937, Taylor opened the single-screen Elgin theatre in Ottawa, Ontario, which he followed, roughly a decade later, with the opening of a smaller theatre next door. These neighboring structures came to be known as the Elgin's "Big" and "Little" theatres, respectively. After a period of experimentation, Taylor began, in the late 1950s, regularly showing older releases in the second, smaller theatre, prefiguring an exhibition practice that would be adopted by many duals to follow. For a timeline of the Elgin's two auditoria, see: Taylor. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis." (20 Mar. 1970) 1-2.
[325] N.A. Taylor. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis (Part III)" *Canadian Film Weekly* (27 Mar. 1970): 1. Print.

of reception.[326] The modern movie theatre was "no longer all things to all people," and this corresponded to a revised concept of the audience itself. [327] The dual and the multi, with its selection of programming, appealed to a public that was, in theory, segmented. To achieve wide appeal, Taylor argued, a contemporary theatre must appeal to its "fragmented audiences." [328] Taylor attributed part of this change in consumption patterns to television, which likewise offered a choice of programming to viewers: "After almost two decades of television, we find ourselves with a far more sophisticated and selective public."[329]

William Paul has similarly connected the multiplex to changing patterns of production and consumption popularized by television, arguing that multiplex theaters, particularly from the 1980s onward, were "more in the mode of a television set than older film theatres" insofar as they featured "at least six to ten different films, and in more extravagant outbursts, as many as twenty."[330] Following this strategy, film exhibitors were essentially emulating the tactics of retailers and department stores that similarly offered a variety of goods at one location, containing "everything to please a range of interests and tastes, in theory at least, available under one roof."[331] Consumption patterns, broadly speaking, were moving toward an emphasis on and an expectation of variety. For Taylor, this change necessitated a revision of exhibition practices: "We are now operating in an entirely different kind of enterprise—one based on greater selectivity on the part of our

[326] Lary May has argued that while the movie palace's luxury environment sought to welcome different socio-economic and cultural classes, it only provided a "mask" for such divisions. May (2000) 103.
[327] "Multi Theatres and Automation Mesh." *Canadian Film Digest* (Aug. 1971): 9-10. Print. 10.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Taylor. "Our Business in the 70's" 23.
[330] Paul 491.
[331] Ibid.

potential patrons."[332] By understanding the audience in this way, as groups of people with differentiated interests, film exhibition might achieve a measure of stability.

A Time for "Minis " and "Multis"

While programming was becoming more varied and audiences (in theory) more fragmented, this was mirrored in the spatial divisions of theatres themselves. The dual furthered the project of rationalization first introduced by the modernist theatres of the 1930s. This extended to the designs of individual auditoria, displaying a minimalist aesthetic. Ben Hall, in 1961, likened the newer theatres constructed in the postwar era to early twentieth-century nickelodeons. Like these older storefront theatres, recently constructed theatres were often "places with seats and a screen and little else."[333] For Hall, cinema and its place of exhibition had "come full circle."[334] He acknowledged that modern movie theatres were, in some ways, a vast improvement over their early twentieth-century predecessors. Admittedly, the newer theatres were "cooler, cleaner, smell better and cost more to get into" than nickelodeons, but he insisted that most new theatres bore a similar lack of character. Disavowing the movie palace's foray into architectural fantasy, they were "drab, antiseptic and earth-bound."[335] Gomery contends that modern multi-auditoria theatres, in particular the shopping mall cinemas, took the modernist style to an extreme, representing a "new low of literalness" where "only function should dictate building form."[336] This stylistic choice, for Gomery, was a self-conscious expression of industrial defeat of which the movie palace had become a known symbol. In light of this "failure," he

[332] Taylor. "Our Business in the 70's" 25.
[333] Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats* 254.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Gomery. *Shared Pleasures* 100.

argues, the modern movie theatre had retreated into understatement: "It was as if, having realized they had 'lost' the battle with television and the living room, the movie theatre gave up all pretense of struggle at the level of architectural fantasy and the viewing experience and actually produced interiors with *less* to offer than at home."[337]

Remarking on the rise of the multiplex, which continued this trend toward smaller, simpler auditoria, Taylor echoed Hall's claim made a decade earlier, that film exhibition was returning to its origins: "And so we seem have come full circle—back to the infant days of our industry when little theatres were set in converted stores (with changes, of course)."[338] Taylor frames this return to smaller, plainer cinemas as a positive development, however, sidestepping critiques of these spaces. Shopping mall multi-cinemas, we now know, were often criticized for compromises in comfort and quality. The cramped quarters of small "shoebox" theatres and the interference of sound from poorly insulated, neighboring auditoria were among the issues afflicting new theatres.[339]

Despite these compromises in quality, exhibitors nonetheless promoted spectatorship at the smaller dual and multi-auditoria as superior to that at the movie palace. Movie palaces typically provided one large auditorium with abundant seating, once an essential component of their business model, providing bountiful places for the mass audiences they sought. With poor patronage in more recent years, however, the movie palace's enormous scale had made the decline in theatrical moviegoing that much more

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[337] Ibid.
[338] Taylor. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis." (20 Mar. 1970) 1.
[339] The practice of "shoehorning" mulitiple auditoria into shopping plazas resulted in smaller halls with no more than 250 seats. Further, theatre owners, to cut down on expenses, often did not provide sufficient sound insulation between adjoining auditoria. The problem of noise interference from adjacent theatres was exasperated by the installation of Dolby surround sound systems, which were too strong for the small rooms they serviced. See: Gomery, *Shared Pleasures* 100.

glaring, with "acres" of empty seats amplified by a cavernous hall.[340] Movie palace spectatorship was, in turn, repositioned by film exhibition discourse as an atomizing experience, lacking the vibrant sociality it once promised. Vacant seats at the movie palace no longer signaled an industrial crisis, however, a widespread decline in theatrical moviegoing. Rather, they underlined the waning popularity of this genre of movie theatre and the older mode of reception it offered. In other words, for the exhibitor, the public was not averse to cinema, but to consuming cinema in this type of space. Taylor, as a case in point, reasoned that the new dual and multi-auditoria cinemas held greater appeal for the public precisely because of their compact size. Smaller, cramped auditoria were, by the exhibitor's account, preferable to the spacious movie palace, as contemporary audiences would "rather sit in a small crowded auditorium than in a comparatively large empty one."[341] By mid-decade, Harry Blumson, the president of Odeon Theatres, would characterize the rise of the multi-cinema model as film exhibition's response to audience demands, giving patrons exactly "what they wanted": a "more intimate" space than the "'Palace' type."[342]

This characterization of audience preferences, however, was less rooted in the everyday reality of film spectators and more so in an industrial turn toward an alternative model of film exhibition. Indeed, the rise of the dual and multi cinema, with its smaller, minimalist auditoria, may be seen in correlation with the film exhibitor's more explicit denunciation of the movie palace, positioned as a major deterrent to business. By 1970, Nat Taylor declared that large single-screen movie palaces or, "maxis," have been "outdated

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[340] One of the chapters in Ben Hall's book is titled "An Acre of Seats In a Garden of Dreams." 93.
[341] "Multi Theatres and Automation Mesh" 10.
[342] Harry T. Blumson. "The Prophets of Doom." *Canadian Film Digest 1976 Yearbook*. Toronto: Film Publications Canada Ltd., 1976. 25. Print.

and, in many cases, uneconomic for many years."[343] The "huge motion picture palaces, now, betimes, termed 'chair factories,'" were obsolete, "generally conceded to belong to another era—the past."[344] Exhibitors needed to accept that times had changed: they were now "in the era of the minis and the multis."[345] While the old-fashioned "chair factory" had reportedly lost its economic viability and continued to "fade from the scene," its decline was counterbalanced by the rise of modern theatres often in "spanking new shopping centres, built on the multi-auditorium plan."[346] Such theatres, bearing "a good chance of being quite profitable" offered a beacon of hope to the cash-strapped exhibitor.[347] Exhibitors merely needed to operate the "right type" of theatres in "suitable locations" to ensure reasonable business.[348]

Theatre Conversions: Subdivision

Alongside the growth of the dual and multi-auditoria cinema was a separate, yet closely related development impacting existing single-screen theatres and their owners. Both newly constructed single-screen cinemas and older, single-screen movie palaces began to mimic the new multi-auditoria format. By the early 1970s, *Canadian Film Weekly* highlighted a "growing trend toward converting large theatres into a number of smaller units**."**[349] The next stage in the expansion of dual and multi cinemas, then, was the conversion of single-screen theatres to multi-auditoria venues. Movie palaces, unable to attract large enough audiences to fill their massive halls were transformed into makeshift

[343] Taylor. "Maxis…Minis…and Multis." (20 Mar. 1970) 1.
[344] Ibid. 1-2.
[345] Ibid. 1.
[346] Taylor. "Our Business in the 70's" 25.
[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid.
[349] "Multi Theatres and Automation Mesh." 9.

multiplexes. Aping their successors, theatre owners erected partitions inside giant halls to create two or more smaller rooms. At one extreme were subdivided movie palaces stripped of their interior décor. At the other were those theatres that underwent a mode of "sympathetic division," maintaining varying degrees of their original design. All subdivided movie palaces, regardless of their place along this spectrum, were hybridized forms, merging past and present modes of film exhibition.

David Naylor describes theatre subdivision as yet "another curse" of the struggling movie palace, with owners resorting to "desperate measures" to keep venues open across this period.[350] Yet, when single-screen movie palaces began emulating their dual- and multi-room counterparts, subdividing into smaller auditoria, they also betrayed an impulse toward continuity. Vincent Canby, writing for the *New York Times* in 1968, in fact highlighted theatre subdivision as a boon to the threatened movie palace. Following the demolition of a number of New York City's old movie palaces, Canby notes that remaining theatres were no longer "condemned to die to make way for a glass-and-steel monolith"[351] Rather, many movie palaces were becoming "amoeba-like," dividing into two or more theatres, while retaining their unique "luxurious appointments."[352] Through subdivision, the movie palace could emulate the business model of the contemporary multiplex while potentially retaining its distinct epochal style.

[350] Naylor. *American Picture Palaces* 181.
[351] Canby. "Old Movie Palaces Don't Die."
[352] Ibid.

Part II: Adapting Montreal's Movie Palaces

Montreal and the Multi-Cinema Trend

Theatre subdivision caught on in cities across North America. In Montreal, however, it became commonplace. The city had proven to be fertile ground for multi-auditoria cinemas, joining in the "contemporary trend for twins" that had spread nationwide.[353] By the early 1970s, Montreal had several dual cinemas in operation, embracing the industrial turn toward the new format. Among the theatres containing dual auditoria were the Élysée theatre, at the corner of Milton and Clark, the Place Versailles cinema in the East-end borough of St. Leonard, the Greenfield Park shopping mall cinema on the South Shore, Cinema Laval in the suburb of Laval, the Côte-des-Neiges twin, the Alexis Nihon cinema, the Place Ville Marie cinema, and the Dauphin theatre.

Given this trend toward dual cinemas, there was increasing uncertainty as to what would become of Montreal's remaining single-screen movie palaces. These structures, it seemed, were on their way out, particularly given the recent elimination of several old theatres. In addition to the Capitol theatre, whose closing gala opened this chapter, two neighborhood movie palaces, the Belmont and the Orpheum, had been razed. The Capitol's neighbor, The Strand, was also removed as part of the same development project, along with His/Her Majesty's, a theatre for live performance, which screened cinema toward the end of its operation.[354]

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[353] "FP Opens Cinema Polo Park." *Canadian Film Weekly* 34. 2 (29 Jan. 1969): 1. Print.

[354] The Strand, which opened in 1912, became Le Pigalle in the 1960s when it began featuring French-language pornographic cinema. It was demolished shortly after the Capitol. The Orpheum, formerly Bennett's theatre, was built in 1907 and located on the northeast corner of Ste Catherine Street and City Councilors. It was torn down in the mid-1960s. His/Her Majesty's, which opened in 1898 on Guy Street between Sherbooke and de Maisonneuve, was removed in 1963. The Belmont, which opened in 1920 at the intersection of Mount

In 1973 Dane Lanken, then a film critic for the local press, attempted to drum up concern for the city's remaining movie palaces. In view of the Capitol's demolition that year, Lanken proposed that these structures be given new significance. Movie palaces were not simply economic "white elephants," he reasoned, but unique works of architecture and design, buildings with untapped heritage value. The problem, he argued, was that it had "never occurred to the authorities entrusted with preserving our heritage that movie palaces are even worth studying."[355] This marks an important moment in Montreal's history, one of the earliest attempts by a local figure to publicly advocate the value of the city's old movie palaces. Lanken, furthermore, suggested a paradigmatic shift in how they be perceived—namely, as a collection of historic artifacts meriting protection.[356] Actively participating in an emergent grassroots heritage movement in Montreal, he set out to connect the movie palace to a wider issue: the city's management of its material history. In fact, the Capitol theatre was one of the first buildings that *Sauvons Montréal*, a newly formed coalition of local heritage groups, would campaign to protect.[357] While the theatre was ultimately demolished, this public crusade to save the theatre was a watershed in the history of local movie palaces.

Without intervention, Lanken predicted an unpleasant fate for Montreal's surviving theatres. They would either be demolished or subject to an equally undesirable outcome:

Royal and Clark, was razed in the mid-1950s. For an in-depth historical account of each of these theatres, see: Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces.*

[355] Lanken contrasts Canada's situation with the United States, where, he notes, eight theatres had already been designated historic sites. See: "The Reign of the 'Queens'".

[356] Ibid.

[357] "Le Cinéma Capitol Sera-t-il Démoli?" *La Presse* 13 Oct .1973. n. pag. Print. Several local heritage groups consolidated their efforts into a collective called *Sauvons Montréal* [Save Montreal] in September 1973. For a history of heritage activism in Montreal across this period, see: Martin Drouin. *Le Combat du Patrimoine a Montréal (1973-2003).* Sainte-Foy: Presses de L'Université du Québec, 2007. Print.

subdivision into "multi-mini-cinemas."[358] Most vulnerable among the city's theatres were the remaining downtown locations (the Loew's, Palace, Parisien [formerly the Princess] and Imperial), which were heavily taxed as commercial properties. Each one would "likely disappear or undergo disfiguring transformations."[359] In 1974, Lanken's concerns were echoed in an edition of *Perspectives-Dimanches* in which Jacques Coulon likewise notes the disappearance of Montreal's old movie palaces. Given that they were "no longer rentable," these theatres were becoming endangered artifacts, seemingly on the verge of extinction.[360]

Rather than be extinguished, however, many of Montreal's local movie palaces did follow in the example of new duals and multis, dividing their spaces into smaller auditoria.[361] The Empress, Rivoli, Plaza, Imperial, Chateau, Parisien, Loews and Palace theatres were all single-screen movie palaces chopped up into multi-theatre units. A number of theatres were twinned by erecting a dividing wall down the middle of their halls.[362] Others sealed off their balconies to create a separate upper-level auditorium, the "piggyback" mode of conversion.[363]

The Imperial theatre, for instance, employed the "piggyback" approach when it was

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[358] Lanken. "Capitol Theatre Closing Doors."
[359] Lanken. "The Reign of the 'Queens'." Lanken worked as a film critic for the *Gazette* from 1967 to 1977.
[360] Coulon, Jacques. *Perspectives-Dimanches* (20 Jan. 1974): n. pag. Print.
[361] Taylor, for instance, cites the conversion of the single-screen Uptown theatre in Toronto, which had been recently subdivided into five auditoria. See: "Maxis…Minis…and Multis" (20 Mar. 1970) 1. For a full report on the Uptown's subdivision, see: "First 5-theatre Complex Marks New Era for 20th" *Canadian Film Weekly* (20 Mar. 1970): 1. Print.
[362] The Rivoli, for example, erected a wall down the middle of its 1,600-seat auditorium to create two separate halls. See: "Lost But Not Forgotten- Theatres of Montreal and Quebec." *Marquee* 28. 1 (1996): 24-28. Print. 26.
[363] The Chateau, Imperial, Empress, Plaza and Papineau theatres, for example, were divided into two auditoria using this method. Vincent Canby, in 1968, discusses the upcoming "piggyback conversion" of the Orpheum theatre in New York, where one theatre sits at the orchestra level and the other at the balcony level. See: Canby. "Old Movie Palaces Don't Die."

twinned in the early 1970s.[364] Located on de Bleury, just east of Saint Catherine Street, this downtown movie palace had already undergone a number of changes across its history. Opened in 1913, the Imperial began as a high-class venue with a mixed bill of vaudeville and moving pictures. By the 1930s, its live entertainment policy was beginning to peter out, losing favour among local audiences. In the 1940s, it shifted exclusively to film screenings, and after the Second World War, the space was fitted for widescreen cinema, becoming the "Cinerama Theatre Imperial."[365]

In the early 1970s, the company that owned the Imperial, Cinema International, added a wall to the balcony, separating it from the larger auditorium. This, in effect, created a smaller 580-seat auditorium on the upper balcony level, and a larger 650-seat theatre on the lower level."[366] Re-named Ciné-Centre, the theatre was leased in 1976 by local theater magnate Roland Smith who launched the twinned space as an English-language repertory cinema. The Ciné-Centre was meant to complement its successful French-language counterpart, the Outremont, also a converted movie palace showcasing repertory fare. [367]

The twinning of the Imperial was overseen by Mandel Sprachman, a Canadian architect responsible for the subdivision of many movie palaces in Montreal, including the Château, Rivoli, Papineau, Parisien and Loew's, as well as approximately fifty theatres across Canada.[368] Theatre subdivision, Sprachman believed, was necessary to operate a movie palace in the current era, when, by his own admission, there "isn't a hope in hell of

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[364] Julia Maskoulis. "Montreal's 'Rep' Cinemas: Most of Them Are Doing Fine." *Gazette* [Montreal] 19 Mar. 1977: 39. Print.
[365] Cinerama Theatre Imperial. Advertisement. *La Patrie*. 14 Mar. 1971: 52. Print.
[366] Maskoulis.
[367] Dane Lanken. "Broken Up by the Times, 'Queen' is Still Gracious." *Gazette* [Montreal] 9 Dec. 1976: 26. Print.
[368] Ibid.

filling a 2200-seat theatre anymore."[369] Known for his tendency toward "sympathetic division," Sprachman set out to respect the original design of theatres, to save as much of the "old stuff" as possible, while giving the appearance that "nothing was done."[370]

Sprachman's approach to subdivision, typified by his treatment of the Imperial, not only served as a form of preservation, it enacted a modern aversion to pure functionalism, a style to which many new duals and multis adhered. In this way, the subdivided theatre acted out a dialectic between the movie palace and the multiplex, negotiating a balance between old and new modes of film exhibition. At the level of style, the Imperial's retention of its lush interior décor represented an alternate experience to the one offered at the newer cinemas. It also expressed a cultural preference for the heavy ornamentation of the movie palace over the bare uniformity of the modern multiplex.

Not all subdivided theatres followed a sympathetic approach, however. Others erred on the side of renewal and material overhaul. For instance, while Sprachman converted the Parisien into a five-auditorium complex, this was only after the owner stripped the theatre of its interior decor.[371] The new Parisien was designed to look more like a modern multiplex, doing away with its ornamental trappings. The Egyptian-style Empress, re-named Cinema V, was likewise twinned while a portion of its original décor was removed--its ornate "scarabs and Nile scenes."[372] The Chateau and the Rivoli, when they were twinned, gave up some of their interior décor. Having been split into two rooms, the "total

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[369] Ibid.
[370] Some of the touch-ups and interventions at the Loew's—among them, a repainted ceiling dome and a refurbished marble balustrade in the lobby—reportedly improved the theatre's previously run-down appearance. Ibid.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces* 129.

impression was lost."[373] The Palace, a downtown theatre equal in size and grandeur to the demolished Capitol, is perhaps the most notorious among Montreal's subdivided movie palaces. To separate the theatre into six auditoria, the space was completely gutted, transformed into "a pile of plain, boxy cinemas."[374] Such dramatic physical mutations explain, in part, the movie palace's enduring associations with decline. Even as many venues remained open for business, some theatres underwent the "disfiguring transformations" Lanken had forecast years earlier. Among conservationists, moreover, there is a tendency to view irreversible physical changes, retrospectively, in terms of loss: a sad case of mismanaged heritage, a spoiled opportunity. However, this view tends to overlook what we can learn about a movie palace as it adopts a new form.

Consider, for example, the implications of subdivision from a spatial perspective. There is, one might argue, something counterintuitive about a large movie palace chopped up into smaller spaces. The later reversal of some theatre subdivisions would testify to this fact.[375] Could the rationalized style, worn by the showy movie palace, have been anything other than awkward and ill fitting? Like cutting up and viewing fragments of a painting, subdivision gives only partial impressions of the whole. Partitions, for example, would have obscured areas of a movie palace's auditorium, a space designed to be holistic and encompassing, enshrining the spectatorial experience. Rather, modern spectators in the subdivided theatre would have consumed cinema amid the movie palace's traces and vestiges. In this way, subdivision privileged new modes of film consumption over older ones, no longer foregrounding the surrounding space. Yet, the movie palace was not effaced

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[373] Gabeline et al. 100
[374] Dane Lanken. "Grand Old Movie Theatres on the Brink of Extinction." *Gazette* [Montreal] 25 Feb. 1984: I8. Print.
[375] The Imperial, for instance, was returned to its single-auditorium format in the 1980s.

entirely, it was carried forward in recessed form. By simultaneously breaking with and holding onto the past, the movie palace adopted a fraught identity, one defined by contradiction.

In this way, the subdivided movie palace became what we might call a "heterotopic" space, to borrow Michel Foucault's oft-cited term. Foucault's "heterotopias" are sites of social experience, places "from which we are drawn out of ourselves," and that bear witness to and contain "the erosion of our lives, our time, our history."[376] A heterotopia may be connected to and part of the surrounding environment, yet it is also set apart from it, often forming its own internal logic of space and time, expressing or containing contradictory impulses. In bearing its own logic, it departs from conventional orderings of space and time, thus becoming a space of alterity and difference. In this way, it is part of the environment, yet also "absolutely other."[377]

The movie theatre, for Foucault, is always already heterotopic in so far as it has the ability to create its own spatio-temporal experience for audiences. The structure itself exists inside the real world and is thus connected to conventional rules of space and time. Yet, it simultaneously thwarts such conventions. The movie theatre, he suggests, has "the power of juxtaposing in a single real place several different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other."[378] The cinema auditorium, for example, "appears as a very curious rectangular hall, at the back of which a three-dimensional space is projected onto a two-dimensional screen."[379] Thus, there are different types of "space" contained by the

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[376] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. London: Routledge, 1997. 350-356. Print. 351.
[377] Ibid. 352.
[378] Ibid. 354.
[379] Ibid.

cinema auditorium, both real and imagined, three-dimensional and flat. This is, of course, further complicated by the multi-auditoria format, which positions several auditoria, numerous heterotopias of space, alongside one another.

The subdivided movie palace, too, is full of such "incompatibilities," though perhaps of a different register. It adheres to a spatial order, an arrangement of partitions, yet this order is complicated by the movie palace's inherent pull toward excess. Order, then, coexists with "the essential strangeness of the space."[380] The concept of "heterotopia" captures the uncanny quality of the subdivided movie palace, obscured by some new order, yet still present. Even once assigned new logic, the movie palace maintains an elusive quality that cannot be fully contained or repressed, its "essential strangeness."

Thus, the subdivided movie palace-- or, for that matter, any movie palace preserved beyond its decline-- contains several conflicting spatialities. But its heterotopic quality also extends to time. Like a museum or library, it wants to "enclose" different eras, containing "bits and pieces" of history, thereby "making all times into one place."[381] And yet, through preservation, it also wants to be "outside time"-- that is, "inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place."[382] Foucault argues that this urge to transcend time, betraying a "bias toward the eternal," is a decidedly modern impulse, a response to the material remnants of history, the vestiges of prior cultures.[383] While Foucault was referring to a nineteenth-century fascination with history, we might transpose this argument to a late twentieth-

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[380] Fran Tonkiss provides a cogent interpretation of Foucault's essay, arguing that disparate heterotopias such as the "quarantined quarter, the brothel, the cinema, the library, the public bath, the sauna, [and] the motel room used for illicit sex" all share a "touch of the uncanny." See: Fran Tonkiss. *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. Print. 133.
[381] Foucault 354.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid.

century framework. A number of theorists have argued that the late-modern condition is defined by an obsession with heritage.[384] Heritage practices, across the latter half of the twentieth century, have increasingly sought to transcend time by restoring and embalming older objects for posterity. While the subdivided movie palace was not routinely promoted as a formal route toward preservation, advanced more as an ad hoc "quasi-essential" survival strategy, it did invariably gesture toward continuity.[385] In this way, it conveyed a modern sensibility that would privilege the endurance of historic forms, which, incidentally, began to hold considerable sway over urban matters in Montreal around this time.

Theatre Conversions: Adult Cinemas

Other important factors made possible the continuity of Montreal's movie palaces—in particular, new types of programming exhibited at theatres. As the spatial order of the multi-cinema was grafted onto the movie palace, theatre owners were able to adapt to new modes of consumption, providing a selection of programming to audiences. Programming was more diverse than it had ever been, varying considerably by individual location. For instance, Montreal's Imperial theatre, when it became the twinned Ciné-Centre, offered two different kinds of programming in each of its halls. In its lower level auditorium, it featured "recent movies" at a cheap admission price, together with afternoon triple-bills structured around a weekly theme, for example, films by Woody Allen, Jacques Tati, Sergio Leone,

[384] David Lowenthal offers an insightful exploration of what he sees as a widespread cultural fixation on the past and its preservation emerging over the latter half of the twentieth century. See: David Lowenthal. "The Heritage Crusade and Its Contradictions." *Giving Preservation a History*. Ed. Max Page and Randall Mason. New York: Routledge. 2004. 19-44. Print.
[385] Martineau. *Cinémas et Patrimoine à L'Affiche* 30.

Elvis Presley, the Beatles or W.C. Fields.[386] The smaller upstairs hall offered a separate policy at a slightly lower price, specializing in nightly triple-bills of "classics," also organized by theme: a series dedicated to Humphrey Bogart, the Marx brothers, Orson Welles, Greta Garbo or Marlene Dietrich, for example.[387] The Ciné-Centre, despite this selection, struggled to attract audiences. Its owner, after less than a year, was forced to sublease the theatre to France-Films, which took over programming. What the subdivided space could offer, at this point, was flexibility, as the Ciné-Centre began including sexploitation films among its line-up.[388]

The rise of sexually permissive content across this period has often been linked to a widespread draught in mainstream film production. Eric Schaefer, for instance, indicates that by the early 1960s, a deficit of "Hollywood movies and foreign 'art' films had forced exhibitors to turn to sexploitation" cinema.[389] While films with wide appeal were produced and did often garner strong profits, this happened unevenly. William Paul indicates that the economics of film exhibition were "lopsided," meaning that the majority of films produced low returns while the occasional hit generated exceedingly high grosses.[390] Taylor, too, highlighted this problem, citing the "multi-million dollar" profits of *The Sound of Music*

[386] The upper level charged $1.50 as opposed to the $2.00 rate of the lower level. The owner attributed the cheaper rate of the upper level to the stairs attendees were required to climb. See: Dane Lanken. "Humphrey Bogart: One of Film's Favorite Tough Guys Fills the Bill as a New Repertory Cinema Makes its Debut." *Gazette* [Montreal] 3 Dec. 1976: 31. Print.
[387] Ibid.
[388] Maskoulis.
[389] Eric Schaefer. "Gauging a Revolution: 16 mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature." *Cinema Journal* 41.3 (Spring 2002): 3-26. Print. 5.
[390] Paul 488.

*(*1965) and the numerous copycat musicals it "spawned" over the next few years, which all "flopped" at the box office.[391]

Thus, exhibitors, grappling with an industry dependent upon fickle audiences and a shortage of quality productions, wondered how to achieve a measure of economic stability, to cultivate more predictable patterns of reception. One solution was to cater to niche audiences, offering specialized programming. The rise of the art house and repertory cinemas across this period, catering to a growing audience of cinephiles, is one example of this strategy of specialization. Another was the rise of the adult movie theatre, specializing in pornography.

Various types of pornography had been moving out of underground and private spheres and into the public arena since the 1950s.[392] Sexploitation films were evolving, becoming longer, story-based films, and also more explicit. For Taylor, this evolution betrayed a form of one-upmanship, with film producers "attempting to top each other in daring."[393] Schaefer argues that the turn toward more explicit feature-length content was further encouraged by the expansion of 16mm film, which was less expensive than its 35mm predecessor. Attracted by the "high return on minimal investment" that 16mm film

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[391] In addition to box office disappointments, exhibitors sometimes had to contend with distribution companies delaying the release of films. This left many exhibitors, reliant on a steady film supply, in search of affordable replacements. Taylor, in 1971, remarked that one of the major sources of "anxiety" for the film exhibitor was the delay of expected releases. At the time, he stated, "the major distribution companies are purported to have a sum in excess of $1 billion tied up in unreleased negatives […] Included in this sum are many negatives in high-budget brackets, and huge losses and further write-offs appear to be in store for some of the companies concerned." Taylor. "Our Business In the 70's" 23.

[392] Schaefer. "Gauging a Revolution" 5-6. For other contributions to the otherwise under-researched history of pornography, see: Kenneth Turan and Stephen F. Zito. *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them*. New York: Praeger, 1974. Eric Schaefer. *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* Durham: Duke University Press, 1999. Print; Linda Williams. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy" of the Visible*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Print.

[393] N.A. Taylor. "Cause for panic?" *Canadian Film Weekly* (28 Jan. 1970): 1. Print.

represented, producers and exhibitors were further impelled to "cross the line from 'simulation features' into hardcore features."[394]

By the 1970s, film exhibitors, lacking consistently high audience turnout, were everywhere turning to this content, what were "loosely termed 'sex' films," for the most favourable returns.[395] Quebec, in particular, was known for having the most porous borders in Canada, after the province's formerly strict censorship laws loosened in the late 1960s. In contrast to other areas of Canada, pornography travelled into the country, via Quebec's borders, with relative ease.[396] In 1973, Montreal hosted a film festival for "erotic" cinema, most of which had originated in New York and San Francisco. The festival's organizer stated at the time that the market for pornography was "really opening up, " given the popular reception of *Deep Throat* (1972).[397] Indeed, by the 1970s, Montreal had developed a solid market for pornographic cinema, with numerous theatres advertising content with an "18 Years Adults" classification.[398]

Both newer multiplexes and subdivided theatres in Montreal featured mixed programming, sometimes showing pornography and mainstream content in adjoining auditoria. For example, in January 1976, the Bonaventure twin cinema was screening *Lucky Lady* (1975), starring Liza Minnelli, Gene Hackman and Burt Reynolds, in one hall with a "14 Years" classification. In its other hall, it was offering two films with "18 Years Adults"

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394 Schaefer. "Gauging a Revolution" 18.
395 Taylor. "Cause for panic?"
396 In 1967, Quebec passed a law, which converted the province's strict censorship board into the *Bureau de surveillance du cinema* [Cinema Advisory Board](BSCQ). The BSCQ's policy would be to classify rather than censor films. For a history of censorship in Canada, which includes a focused discussion of Quebec across this period, see: Pierre Véronneau. "When Cinema Faces Social Values: One Hundred Years of Film Censorship in Canada." *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World*. Eds. Daniel Biltereyst and Roel Vande Winkel. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013. 49-62. Print.
397 Dane Lanken. "Screen Erotica Here." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 24 May 1973: 26. Print.
398 See, for example, advertisements for the Beaver, Eros, Loews, Eve, Guy, Pussycat and Bonaventure theatres in *The Gazette* [Montreal] 11 Mar. 1977: 30-31. Print.

disclaimers: *On the Game* (n.d.) and *Abigail Lesley is Back in Town* (1975).[399] Likewise, the Côte-des-Neiges twin cinema was screening *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), starring Robert Redford, with a "14 Years" classification in one hall. Meanwhile, its neighboring hall was showing *Pussytalk* (1975), which earned an "18 Years Adults" classification.[400]

Older movie palaces, too, profited from this development. In addition to the Ciné-Centre, several twinned movie palaces including the Chateau, the Papineau and Cinema V featured pornographic fare.[401] A few movie palaces took this one step further, retaining their single-screen halls in lieu of subdividing their spaces. Instead, these theatres were devoted wholly to satiating the "public appetite for smut."[402] In 1969, Cinema D'Orsay (formerly the Globe), a 900-seat movie palace originally opened in 1914, became an adult movie theatre called "Le Pussycat," which was re-dubbed "Cinéma L'Amour" in the early 1980s.[403] In 1972, the Regent, a 1,200-seat movie palace built in 1916, likewise switched its programming policy to adult content and became "Le Beaver." Prior to its demolition in 1973, the Strand, then renamed "Le Pigalle," was also featuring adult cinema. Other local theatres which began offering pornographic content at various points across the 1970s were the Eros (formerly the Français), the Eve (formerly the Midway), the Crystal, the Eden (open for one year only), the Cinéma du Vieux Montréal (renamed Encore 2 in 1974, becoming the first gay porn theatre in Montreal), Ciné 539 (formerly the Gaiety/London/

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[399] Bonaventure 1 and Bonaventure 2. Advertisement. *The Gazette*. 31 Jan. 1976: 45. Print.
[400] Côte-des-Neiges 1 and Côte-des-Neiges 2. Advertisement. *The Gazette*. 31 Jan 1976: 45. Print.
[401] The Papineau screened pornography until the late 1980s. After briefly operating as a repertory cinema in 1988, it closed down. It was then converted to a bingo hall, which it remained until 2009. More recently, it was converted again to *Zéro Gravité*, a climbing centre and yoga studio. See: Robert Thériault. "Silence Sur le Plateau: Les Cinémas Disparu du Quartier." *Bulletin* 8.3 (Fall 2013): 24-25 (25). Société d'histoire du Plateau Mont-Royal. Web. 3 Jul. 2014. <http://shgp.plateau.webfactional.com/>
[402] Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces* 166.
[403] The theatre, under its new adult cinema policy was co-launched in 1969 by Roland Smith and André Pepin. See: Nathalie Petrowski. "La Pornographie ou le Privilège du Roi." *Le Devoir* 21 Nov. 1981: 21. Print.

Holman/System), Pont Mercier Drive-in (Quebec's only drive-in showing pornography which closed the same year it opened), and the Snowdon.[404]

Wanting to maintain high grosses amid the shortage of "regular" film productions, film exhibitors regularly screened "sex films." Some of the owners of duals and multis were concerned that objectionable content might be alienating cinema's "regular" audiences.[405] Was the whiff of disreputable cinema, limited to audiences 18 years or older, drifting into neighboring auditoria, undermining the appeal of films "For All"?[406] Taylor, for instance, maligned pornography not just for its permissiveness, but also for its low production values. Exhibitors and audiences, by his account, had to wade through a slew of "really bad" films, offering too much sex or violence.[407] The standards of film production, he argued, had lowered to such an extent that film exhibition, too, found itself in a state of moral decline.[408] Even "highly respected and respectable theatres" across North America were screening this type of content.[409] Inside theatres, audiences were widely partaking of a genre of cinema "which would have been disdained, not very long ago."[410]

Indeed, film exhibition in the 1970s was a long way from the movie palace's 1920s campaign for bourgeois respectability, where prestige had been one of its main selling

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[404] These details regarding the rise of adult cinemas in Montreal emerged from previous research I conducted in collaboration with my colleague Sanja Obradovic. In 2008, we presented our preliminary findings in an unpublished paper titled "Mapping the Rise and Fall of Adult Cinemas in Montreal" at the PCA/ACA Conference in San Francisco.
[405] N.A. Taylor. "Is 'Way Out Sex' On the Way Out?" *Canadian Film Weekly* (13 Mar. 1970): 1-2. Print.
[406] The BSCQ divided films into three classifications: '"for all til 14 years", "for teens and adults til 18" and "adults only." See: Véronneau 57. In the Montreal press, however, I noted four separate classifications: "For All,""14+", "18 Years" and "18 Years Adults."
[407] Taylor in fact posits that a number of "fine films" were losing out on their potential for high grosses as audiences increasingly associated cinemagoing with objectionable content. See: Taylor "Cause for panic?" This concern echoes those of Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) who, in 1970, launched a campaign against exhibitors of sexploitation films, concerned that they were "clogging the outlets for quality films." See: Schafer. "Gauging a Revolution" 19.
[408] Taylor. "Is 'Way Out Sex' On the Way Out?" 1-2.
[409] Ibid.
[410] Ibid.

points. Rather, theatres specializing in sexually explicit content had further realigned themselves with film exhibition's disreputable roots. Unable to "bank 'prestige,'" the porn palace enticed its audiences via the allure of racy content, largely inaccessible outside of the theatre.[411] It also capitalized on the movie palace's lush interiors, drawing on ornament's intrinsic associations with erotic symbolism.[412] In so doing, it cultivated regular niche audiences, which resolved economic concerns for a number of venues, namely the "constant and expensive matter" of a theatre's overhead.[413]

The End of an Era

The porn theatre, however, was a fleeting form of film exhibition, fading into obscurity in the 1980s with the rise of home video. Increasingly, consumers of adult cinema no longer needed sanctioned zones within public space to overcome the stigma of viewing pornography. Over the next few decades, pornography, for the most part, disappeared altogether from the movie theatre. Movie palaces that had once relied on this type of cinema to stay open were forced to find new solutions. Le Beaver, for instance, ended its adult cinema policy in the mid-1980s and became the Laurier, joining in the city's repertory cinema scene. In 1987, after it was formally named one of the best-preserved structures in the city, developers gutted its auditorium. As of 2015, the theatre houses a Renaud-Bray bookstore.

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[411] Ibid,
[412] Architect Adolf Loos has written about this association. Loos sees ornamentation in architecture as a corollary of human nature in its most untamed, degenerate form. He therefore rejects the use of ornament, viewing it as fundamentally regressive. See: Adolf Loos."Ornament and Crime." *Programs and Manifestos on 20th Century Architecture*. Ed. Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971. 19-24. Print.
[413] Taylor. "Is 'Way Out Sex' On the Way Out?" 1-2.

Le Pussycat, which became Cinéma L'Amour, represents an anomaly among local adult cinemas. The theatre continued to feature adult cinema for the next three decades, eventually emerging as the last-remaining porn cinema in the city. By virtue of its unchanged policy and a loyal niche audience, it was able to conserve much of its interior décor. When a group of visiting theatre historians toured Quebec's cinemas in the early 1990s, one member marveled at Cinema L'Amour's untouched auditorium and admitted that "porn palaces are better than no palaces."[414] This comment speaks as much to pejorative associations with pornography as it does to the movie palace's longstanding entrenchment in a narrative of decline. Many adaptive strategies of the 1960s and 1970s, which may be seen as damaging or disreputable episodes in a movie palace's history, made possible the endurance of these venues.

Famous Players, in a complete reversal of its demolition of the old Capitol theatre in 1973, purchased the Ciné-Centre, by then called the Imperial I and II, in the early 1980s. Reverting the theatre to a single-screen space, the company restored the theatre to its original condition and made the venue its flagship location. The Imperial operated once more as a downtown, first-run cinema during the 1980s. In the 1990s, Famous Players donated the theatre to Montreal's World Film Festival and it has since continued to host festival screenings and live events.

Not all subdivided movie palaces were as fortunate as the Imperial. Many theatres have since been gutted or removed entirely.[415] For a time, however, theatre conversions

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[414] Monique Beaudin. "Curtain Call: Visiting Group Loves Our Old Cinemas." *Gazette* [Montreal] 3 Jul. 1996: A3. Print.

[415] The Loews, for example, was acquired in the 1990s by Club Med World and, after undergoing renovations, reopened as an entertainment complex in 2001. After this enterprise was unsuccessful, it housed a Footlocker shoe store. In 2004, Leonard Schlemm purchased the property and turned it into the Mansfield Athletic Club, which officially opened in 2005. The theatre's façade no longer exists, but some of the original interior details,

provided a stopgap between the movie palace's decline and its later revaluation by the heritage community. This collection of movie palaces expressed a capacity to endure, to prosper within the cultural interstices. Assuming temporary forms and interim modes of film exhibition, the movie palace, by virtue of its "decline" was able to assume new guises, re-asserting its modern potential.

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including a mural and some ceiling plasterwork, have been preserved. See Linda Gyulai. "Little Trace Remains of Montreal's Glamorous Theatre Era." *The Montreal Gazette* 27 Feb. 2015: n. pag. Web. *Montreal Gazette*. Feb. 28. 2015.

Chapter 5- The Rialto

Introduction

An old movie palace in Montreal's Mile End neighborhood today stands as a monument to local history.[416] A vestige of early twentieth-century culture, the Rialto theatre first emerged when large, luxurious movie houses were central to everyday life. Today, the theatre is the subject of a long-term restoration project and boasts a contemporary occupation, functioning as a commercial *salle de spectacle*.[417] To arrive at this confident stage in its trajectory, however, the Rialto first had to weather a precarious existence. Wedged between diverging opinions over how to preserve this neighborhood venue, the theatre was for a long time the source of discord. To persist, it had to negotiate a dual identity: at once a public site of collective memory, designated a historic building by municipal, provincial and federal governments, and a private property with its own development plan.[418]

Much of the vitriol surrounding the Rialto has stemmed from an effort to find a modern vocation for the theatre, one that would transform an architectural relic into a *useful* historic site. This antiquated theatre is what Alois Riegl would describe as a "usable monument," a structure closely associated with social practice and thus invariably

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[416] To be clear, "today" in this instance refers to 2015, the year in which this study was concluded.
[417] Ezio Carosielli, Sabrina Painchaud and Chantal Grise. "Le Project de Restauration du Théâtre Rialto." The Rialto, Montreal, QC. 1 Oct 2011. Presentation.
[418] The Rialto was cited by the City of Montreal in 1988, classified as a historic monument by the provincial Ministry of Culture in 1990, and declared a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1993.

perceived as "impaired or disturbed" when it stands empty.[419] The question of the Rialto's contemporary re-use, however, has regularly intersected with a widespread concern for maintaining the original identity of this structure. For many, plans to convert the Rialto to a new function, and any physical changes incurred to this end, threatened to undercut this building's relationship to history. The retention of the theatre's original identity, from this perspective, has been linked to its cultural authority, its ability to serve as a record of Montreal's past, to carry urban memory forward in time. For some, material changes, in particular, threatened to erode the Rialto's state of authenticity, undermining its claims to local heritage.

In this chapter, I trace the late-modern trajectory of the Rialto, homing in on a key segment in its history—1987 to 2001, specifically— when opposing forces vied for dominion over the theatre. As a public good, steered by a collective desire for permanence, the preserved Rialto was on the one hand expected to uphold history, heritage and memory. On the other hand, as a private property in search of a new, commercial vocation, the structure was pulled toward renovation and change. The Rialto's identity was not forged on one side of the public-private divide, however, but in the murky space between these two poles. Over time it has come to embody an amalgam of entangled values: cultural and economic, formal and functional, past and present.

The Multi-Functional Rialto

While the Rialto has often been singled out for its well-preserved interior and exterior features, in actual fact change and variability have been defining features of this

[419] Alois Riegl. "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Essence and Its Development." *Historical and Philosophical Issues in the Conservation of Cultural Heritage*. Eds. Nicholas Stanley Price, Mansfield Kirby Talley, and Alessandra Melucco Vaccaro. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute, 1996. 69-83. Print. 80.

historic theatre. Indeed, the Rialto has been repurposed a number of times over its history, a factor of its original multipurpose design. Sitting three stories high, the building initially contained a 1,300-seat cinema auditorium, commercial boutiques, office space, a dance hall, a bowling alley and a rooftop garden terrace. Its assorted spaces were included to "ensure maximum financial return" in terms of the building's rentability.[420] Subsequently, the building has been linked to a diverse set of vocations over its history. The main auditorium, for instance, has served at different points as a combination vaudeville-movie house, a theatre for Hollywood double bills, a Greek cinema, a repertory cinema, a venue for live theatre and, briefly, a steakhouse. The remaining rooms and floors have housed everything from a Masonic meeting hall, a reception space, a dance studio, a gymnasium, a boxing club, a mini golf course, and a billiard hall.[421] The Rialto's changeable identity has been inflected by a number of factors, in particular: the theatre's location within the culturally vibrant, multiethnic Mile End neighborhood, its position on an idiosyncratic streetscape, Park Avenue, and its relationship to the shifting economics and culture of film exhibition in Montreal.

When the Rialto first emerged in 1924, Montreal had already witnessed a proliferation of "scopes," the colloquial term for the city's early movie houses.[422] By the 1920s, the downtown core was dotted with "superpalaces," huge luxury theatres built specifically for film exhibition, while the rest of the city saw an increasing number of

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[420] Madeleine Forget. "Cinéma Rialto." *Les Chemins de la Mémoire: Monuments et Sites Historiques du Québec*. Tome II. Québec: Les Publications du Québec. Commission des Biens Culturels, 1990. Print. 136.
[421] Susan Bronson, a local Montreal historian, outlines some of these early functions in a lengthy editorial for the local press. See: Susan Bronson."Rialto Future Still Far From Certain: Disco-Bar License Was Refused, But Owner of Historic Theatre Still Has Several Options Open." *Gazette* [Montreal] 26 May 2001: J6. Print.
[422] Forget 136.

neighborhood picture palaces.[423] Moviegoing was by this time a popular local practice. When the Rialto opened for business, it was intended to service Montreal's North end, a rapidly expanding area "without any movie house in its immediate neighborhood."[424] From the beginning, the Rialto's opulent auditorium—the centerpiece of the theatre—operated primarily as a venue for cinema, though often including live musical performances, promising "a spectacle of every up-to-date theatrical features at popular prices."[425] Bearing in mind Montreal's bilingual community, the managers also promised that ninety percent of its English-language films would feature French subtitles.[426] The Rialto, from the outset, was associated with neighborhood activity. Its main reception hall, for example, hosted regular social events for the surrounding Jewish community.[427]

The Rialto changed hands a number of times across its early history. It was initially the property of Lawand Amusement, from 1923 to 1930, and leased by the United Amusement Corporation. United Amusement then acquired the theatre and retained control of the space even after a business merger with Famous Players at the end of the 1930s.[428] Maintaining ownership of the Rialto for the next few decades, screening the latest

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[423] The Regent, a neighborhood movie palace that opened in 1916, was located three blocks south of the Rialto on Park Avenue. This would have been the closest theatre to the Rialto at the time.
[424] "The Rialto Theatre to be Opened Tonight; New Luxurious Movie House." *Montreal Daily Star* 27 Dec. 1924. Print.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Nathalie Clerk. Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. Parks Canada. "Théâtre Rialto, 5711, Avenue du Parc, Montréal, Québec." *Agenda Papers, Ottawa, Ontario, November 20 and 21, 1993. Vol. 1*. Ottawa, Ontario: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1993. 225-259. Print. 229.
[427] See, for example: "Representatives Pay Tribute to Jewish Daily Eagle at Dinner." *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* 16 Sept. 1927: 12. Print; and "Rabbi Loukstein on Young Israel's Deal." *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* 1 Feb. 1929. Print.
[428] In 1924, United Amusement, a Montreal-based theatre chain founded by George Ganetakos, entered into an agreement with Famous Players Corp. This agreement gave Famous Players shares in and partial control of United Amusement's theatre holdings. It also allowed United to maintain dominion over the city's second-run theatres, while Famous oversaw the downtown, first-run locations. United managed to maintain local control of its theatres' operations until 1959, at which point Famous took over the Montreal-based chain. Gradually, Famous would merge United with Consolidated Theatres, the company running Famous' downtown theatres. In 1970, United Amusement was renamed Cinéma Unis [United Theatres], which became

imports from Hollywood, United was by the early 1960s fully controlled by Famous Players. Famous then dropped the Rialto from its chain in the mid-1960s when movie palaces everywhere went into decline.[429] Even after the Rialto slid out of its comfortable place within an established exhibition circuit, however, it remained a locus of film exhibition. In the 1970s, the Rialto was acquired by an independent owner and became a Greek cinema, catering to an influx of Hellenic immigrants in the neighborhood.[430] Over time, the Rialto established itself as a "real neighbourhood theatre," a familiar haunt for the growing "souvlaki district."[431]

Due to an increasing number of Greek citizens speaking English, the owner of the theatre would eventually struggle to maintain the "Greek Rialto," gradually incorporating English-Language films into the daily program to meet changing audience demands.[432]

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the Quebec branch of Famous Players in 1987. See: Louis Pelletier. "The Fellows Who Dress the Pictures: Montreal Film Exhibition in the Days of Vertical Integration (1912-1952)." PhD Thesis. Concordia University, 2012. Print. (126-136; and 364-365).

[429] Quebec's Cultural Heritage Directory indicates that Famous Players maintained control of the Rialto until 1970 at which point it sold the theatre to Cosmos Production Limited (owned by Cosmos Spillios). However, theatre data published by *Canadian Film and TV Bi-Weekly* and *Canadian Film Digest* indicate that as late as 1971, the Rialto remained the property of United Amusement (by then owned by Famous Players). Further, between 1972-73 and 1974 the Rialto was not linked to any owner. Only in 1975 does the Rialto finally list Costa Spillios as its owner. See: "Cinéma Rialto." *Répertoire du Patrimoine Culturel du Québec*. La Direction du Patrimoine du Ministère de Culture, Communications et Condition Féminine. N.d. Web. 22 Aug. 2012; *Canadian Film and TV Bi-Weekly 1970-71 Yearbook of the Canadian Entertainment Industry*. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd, 1971. Print. 55; *Canadian Film Digest 1972-73 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1973. Print. 93; *The Canadian Film Digest 1974 Yearbook*. Toronto: Garth Drabinksy, 1974. Print. 92; and *Canadian Film Digest 1975 Yearbook*. Toronto: Garth Drabinksy, 1975. Print. 77.

[430] For further details on the Rialto's operation across this period, see: "Cinéma Rialto," *Répertoire.*

[431] Francine Larendeau. "Documentaires/De L'Avenue au Rialto." *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 26 Apr. 1980: 28. Print. The local press would later frame the Rialto as a vestige of Montreal's Greek heritage. Refer, for example, to: Lévesque, Robert. "Au Coin de Parc et de Bernard : Le Rialto Sur les Traces de l'Outremont." *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 26 Sept. 1988: 5. Print; and Luc Perreault. "Le Rialto, Cinéma de Répertoire." *La Presse* [Montreal] Sept 16, 1988: C1. Print.

[432] The owner of the Rialto noted that, upon originally opening the theatre as a Greek cinema, he had been catering to an older generation of Greek immigrants who had arrived in Montreal ten-to-twenty years earlier. The Greek community, he explained, had wanted to see cinema in their native language. By the late 1970s, however, circumstances had changed. Montreal's Greek community could now speak English or French, particularly the younger generation, and so the demand for Greek cinema had declined. The Rialto's owner also points to a drop in film productions coming out of Greece, which had forced him to screen "English-

When a new owner purchased the space in the early 1980s he attempted, without success, to continue the Rialto's Greek operation. Unable to secure a consistent renter after this, the theatre gradually fell into obscurity.[433] Yet it remained an imposing presence. Occupying a large plot of real estate on Park Avenue, the Rialto stood in stark relief to the smaller, stockier merchants lining the street, a sight which one journalist likened to "a wedding cake in the middle of a row of cardboard boxes."[434] (HG transl.)

Park Avenue, one of the most heterogeneous streetscapes in Montreal, eludes easy description. Early on, in the 1930s, city officials envisioned transforming the street into the "Fifth Avenue" of Montreal, a reputable commercial strip with high property values.[435] Such dreams were never realized, however. Over time, the street was transformed into a mixed commercial-residential strip, known for its economic fits and starts.[436] Juxtaposing timeworn buildings and newer structures, residences and storefronts, Park Avenue also doubles as a heavy circulation route, both a pedestrian street with wide sidewalks and a busy north-south traffic artery. With a major bus line heading downtown, the street is traversed daily by masses of commuters. Apart from the issue of traffic congestion, parking on Park Avenue is a well-known challenge, "at a premium by day, [and] largely restricted to

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language action or suspense films such as Dracula [...]" as replacements. See: "Business is Poor for Ethnic Movie Theatres." *Leader-Post* [Saskatchewan] 6 Mar. 1979: 31. Print.

[433] For a brief period in 1983, the Rialto was rented out to local comedian Robert Toupin for the production of Sam Shepard's *True West*, to be directed by Francis Mankiewicz. For reasons that remain unclear, the play was pulled from production after only a few days. The Rialto was reportedly not used for a long time after this. See: Lévesque.

[434] Levesque. "Le Rialto Sur les Traces de l'Outremont."

[435] Park Avenue was undergoing redevelopment in the early 1930s, which included the installation of a new street lighting system. In 1933, city aldermen met at the Rialto to discuss potential plans to remove residents' exterior stairwells in order to widen Park Avenue so that it might be transformed into a high-end commercial strip. See: "Proprietors Shy at Probably Costs." *Gazette* [Montreal] 11 Aug. 1933: 15. Print.

[436] For a discussion of some of the issues afflicting Park Avenue in the 1990s, including a history of failed commercial ventures, see: Pascal Boret. "Du Parc, l'Avenue à Part." *St-Louis/Mile-End* 20 May 1995. n. pag. Print.

residents at night."[437] Thus, except for those citizens residing near the Rialto, the theatre is best accessed via public transit. This is part of the reason why the Rialto has remained, principally, a neighborhood theatre. Some would later attribute the Rialto's eventual struggles to its location on Park Avenue. By this account, the theatre has been largely a "victim of its location," hobbled by the street's financial defeats and overall lack of coherence.[438]

Formal Properties

Like most movie palaces of the 1920s and 1930s, the Rialto was originally constructed to stand out from its environs, to wrest the attention of passersby. A factor of its grand size and heavy ornamentation, this jarring effect was the movie palace's *raison d'être*. Designed by Montreal architect Joseph-Raoul Gariépy, in the Beaux-Arts style, and decorated by local interior designer Emmanuel Briffa, the Rialto invoked in its beholders a sense of exaltation.[439] Gariépy's architectural vision for the Rialto was distinct among Montreal's movie palaces, noteworthy for its long, elaborate façade. The building, to this day, remains distinguished by a series of grand columns and oval windows modeled after the Neo-baroque, late nineteenth-century Paris Opera House.[440]

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[437] Peggy Curran. "Street's Theatre: Council has Good Reason to Delay Rialto Decision." *Gazette* [Montreal] 29 Nov. 1999: A3. Print.
[438] Ibid.
[439] Both Gariépy and Briffa are important figures with respect to the history of Montreal's theatres. Gariépy designed or worked on several other local theatres including: Théâtre Verdun (1912-1915), the System (1909; remodeled by Gariépy in 1917), Théâtre Lune Rousse (renamed La Veillée, 1913) and Théâtre Maisonneuve (1921). Briffa decorated the interiors of many local theatres including, but not limited to: the Outremont (1929), the Corona (1912; redecorated by Briffa in 1923), The Empress (1927), the Papineau (1921), the Rivoli (1926), the Seville (1929), the Chateau (1931), the Monkland (1930) and the Snowdon (1937). For further details on Gariépy and Briffa, see: Forget 136.
[440] French architect Charles Garnier designed the late nineteenth-century Paris Opera House, sometimes referred to as the *Palais Garnier*.

The interior of the Rialto, upon opening, was no less impressive. The main auditorium's 1,300 wooden seats, divided between the main level and upper balcony, faced a white and gold proscenium arch framing the stage and screen. Reportedly the "handsomest in the city," the arch was illuminated by "concealed lights and hung with pale coral velvet draperies."[441] Other distinctive features of the auditorium, then decorated in a light colour palette, were pillars decorated with comedy/tragedy masks, intricate garlands and detailed paintings.[442] Patrons of the Rialto moved through heavy oak doors and up marble staircases, gazing upon ornate frescoes and illuminated stained glass ceilings.

Appropriating classical European or neo-baroque designs, emulating the look of legitimate, high-class theatres, was a common strategy among movie theatre designers of this era. Part of a conscious strategy to boost the cultural capital of cinema architecture, by extension this approach helped solidify film's place as a permanent, mass entertainment. As extravagant symbols, movie palaces spoke of the vitality of the film industry, both on a local and national scale, an outward "declaration of faith in the future of the motion picture."[443] The Rialto is an emblematic movie palace, in this sense. Local cinemagoing was endowed with an air of prestige by virtue of the Rialto's opulent aesthetics, offering audiences an upscale experience at inexpensive prices.

The Rialto's sheen of prosperity spoke of a vibrant culture in Montreal, one that valued entertainment and leisure as it transported patrons to a fantasy of wealth. In short, the Rialto was as much an aesthetic object, sensed and experienced, as it was a functional

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[441] "The Rialto Theatre," *Montreal Daily Star*.
[442] The Rialto was inspired by the Beaux-Arts style of architecture, which reportedly influenced the design of a number of other early twentieth-century theatres in Canada, including Le Capitole in Quebec (1903) and the Royal Alexandra in Toronto (1907). For a detailed account of the Rialto's architectural and design features, see: Nathalie Clerk 229-234.
[443] Dane Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938*. Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993. Print. 10.

building. Indeed, its particular brand of expression, a foray into style and ornament, was part and parcel of its function. Its aesthetics, the meaning they evoked, in this way, were "no less 'useful' than their 'functional' capacities."[444] Social practices in and around the Rialto were inflected by its formal properties just as the structure's more practical utility gave meaning to this structure.

Change and Decay

By the end of the 1970s, the Rialto remained a prominent visual feature on Park Avenue. Praised by the local press for preserving many of its original features, the theatre had largely escaped the "throes of renovation" to which a number of other local movie palaces had succumbed. [445] The theatre was not without its adjustments, however. At a certain point while operating as a Greek cinema, its owner reportedly whitewashed some of the theatre's interior walls, murals and painted plasterwork.[446] The number of auditorium seats was also reduced.[447] For the most part, though, it would seem that the Rialto emerged from this nearly sixty-year period relatively unscathed.

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[444] With respect to architecture, I would argue for an expanded notion of the term "function," encompassing but also looking beyond a structure's practical role to include the mental and emotional associations it (often intentionally) generates. Umberto Eco makes a similar case, suggesting that the "function" of architecture should include, first of all, its "denoted" meaning—that is, the primarily utilitarian function it conveys. In the second instance, however, function might also extend to the connotative realm. Connotative or "symbolic" meaning emerges from the "complex of conventions" that a structure embodies. For a fuller discussion of this topic, see: Umberto Eco. "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture." *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. Ed. Neil Leach. London: Routledge, 1997. 182-202. Print. 187.

[445] Larendeau, for instance, praises the Rialto for conserving its "old fashioned perfume" and "kitsch décor." See: Larendeau, "Documentaires."

[446] Dane Lanken. "Rialto Coming Back, Two Other Theatres in Dire Straits; Live Shows Give Park Ave Landmark a Fighting Chance." *Gazette* [Montreal] 8 Oct. 1994: I4. Print

[447] *Canadian Film Digest* indicates that, as of 1973, the Rialto had a total of 1,174 seats, which means that some of its original 1,300 seats had been removed in the intervening years. By 1975, the number of seats had been reduced again to 1,019. See *Canadian Film Digest 1972-73 Yearbook*. 93; and *The Canadian Film Digest 1975 Yearbook*. 77.

By the mid-1980s, however, the Park Avenue landmark had become arresting for different reasons: an aging giant, eye-catching not just for its size and ornamentation but compelling in its decline. Reportedly showing signs of neglect, it was a space where "dust and the rancid were at home."[448] (HG transl.) While the Rialto had been, in most recent memory, a neighborhood movie house, its vacant status and decaying condition undermined its ties to cinema exhibition, giving rise to a more nebulous identity. The building, at this stage, was open to reinterpretation.

Civil Unrest

As the Rialto became an uncertain object, public commotion rose up around the city's remaining movie palaces. This was spurred, in part, by recent changes made to these venues. In 1985, a developer purchased the Spanish-style Monkland theatre in Notre-dame-de Grace from the development arm of Famous Players Corporation.[449] Prior to this, a local entrepreneur had been leasing the venue from Famous Players, operating the space as a repertory cinema.[450] City councilors challenged the developer's plans, suggesting the municipality instead lease or purchase the structure to use it as a community centre. In the end the theatre's interior, designed to look like a Spanish courtyard, was gutted and the space was reopened as a commercial complex. Parts of its exterior façade were retained, including concrete "gargoyles and columns," while the theatre's marquee was replaced by "signs touting a pharmacy, medical-dental clinic, offices and a restaurant."[451] Together with the Monkland, the Rivoli, another neighborhood movie palace located at the intersection of

[448] Lévesque. "Au Coin de Parc et de Bernard."
[449] Baron Byng Construction Inc. was the name of the development company.
[450] "Curtain Rises on Converted Theatre." *Gazette* [Montreal] 9 Jul. 1986: D1. Print.
[451] Ibid.

St. Denis and Bélanger, was by this point also gutted on the inside in order to house office space and a drugstore.[452]

The same developer that had transformed the Monkland next forged ahead with plans for two other local movie palaces it had purchased: the Outremont, just west of the Rialto in the upscale borough of Outremont, and the Laurier (formerly the Regent/ Beaver), a few blocks south of the Rialto on Park Avenue. Prior to this, the Outremont had functioned as a popular French-language repertory cinema for 16 years, operated by Roland Smith. In March 1987, Smith closed the theatre, reporting that he had been "losing money" over the preceding 6-months.[453] Reportedly, before selling the theatre, Smith hired an architect to evaluate the structure's potential for preservation. This he had done, in part, to justify his decision to sell or, more specifically, to gain favour from the municipality of Outremont. The architect concluded that the Outremont was a "very ordinary and banal" theatre of the 1920s that was in no way an "an exceptional work worthy of preservation."[454] (HG transl.).

Once the Outremont was sold, the developer announced plans to demolish the interior and transform the space into a series of commercial boutiques. The local community, however, expressed a desire to conserve what they considered both a historic property and cultural hub on Bernard Street.[455] Plans to transform the theatre into a commercial complex not unlike the converted Monkland were ultimately overturned by

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[452] The Rivoli was subdivided in the 1970s before it was gutted and transformed into office space in the early 1980s. See: Dane Lanken. "City's Old Movie Houses Deserve a Happier Ending." *Gazette* [Montreal] 28 Mar. 1987: J10.
[453] "Outremont Theatre Owners Plan Addition, But Won't Alter Interior." *Gazette* [Montreal] 20 June 1987: A3. Print.
[454] Guillaume Gagnon was the architect hired by Smith. In effect, Smith wanted to demonstrate that the theatre lacked potential for preservation. See: Gauthier, Louise. "Le Théâtre Outremont Toujours Sur La Sellette?" *Le Journal D'Outremont* Nov. 1991. n. pag. Print.
[455] Angèle Dagenais. "On Sauve la Salle!" *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 19 June 1987. n. pag. Print.

vociferous protest from the surrounding community. The Outremont Citizens Association compiled a 3,000-signature petition to halt the developer's plans, while both Heritage Montreal and *Sauvons Montréal* lent their support to the cause, arguing that the theatre was a an object of "architectural and cultural value."[456] This event drew unprecedented local attention to the case of Montreal's historic theatres.

The developer's other theatre, the Laurier, would soon become the subject of further controversy. In 1987, the Quebec Cultural Affairs department commissioned a formal study to evaluate the heritage potential of the city's remaining theatres. The initial findings of the study concluded that the Laurier, together with the Outremont and the Rialto, were among the 11 best preserved heritage theatres in the city, selected from an inventory of 52 possible candidates.[457] Between the team's first visit to the theatre in the summer of 1987 and the conclusion of the study in January 1988, however, the interior of the theatre was demolished.[458] Reportedly, in the interim, the city had approved the developer's permit to gut the auditorium.[459] The Laurier nonetheless appeared on the final list of heritage theatres, though its rating was downgraded, its value now resting on the exterior facade.[460]

Along with the heritage activism and formal measures cited above, Montreal's theatres gained further visibility from the local press. Reporting on the loss of the city's theatres, and the risk to remaining structures, the press contrasted these circumstances to

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[456] Lanken, "City's Old Movie Houses."
[457] Jocelyne Martineau. *Les Salles de Cinéma Construites Avant 1940 Sur Le Territoire de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal*. Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Direction du Patrimoine de Montréal. 1988. Print.
[458] Ibid. 118.
[459] See: "Heritage Movie House is Gutted by Developer." *Gazette* [Montreal] 23 Mar. 1988: A4. Print
[460] Martineau 139. See, also, the synthesis of these findings: Jocelyne Martineau. *Cinémas et Patrimoine à L'Affiche*. Montreal: Ville de Montréal and Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. 1988. Print.

revitalization projects in the United States.[461] It also took note of a trend in theatre preservation that had been catching on across Canada.[462] Dane Lanken, an early supporter of Montreal's movie palaces, argued, via the local press, that the city's remaining theatres, if preserved "could very well turn out to be a financial favour to Montrealers" insofar as they "could easily be preserved and sympathetically re-used as libraries, museums, meeting halls, galleries, studios, restaurants, even gyms, maybe even movie theatres—at clear savings over new construction."[463]

The point I wish to make here is that, from the mid- to late-1980s, the local focus on Montreal's movie palaces intensified considerably. For the first time in the city's history, local grassroots activism had succeeded in overcoming theatre redevelopment plans, in the case of the Outremont. Much of the public sentiment in Montreal, it seemed, was in favour of theatre preservation. All of this activity would have direct implications for the Rialto, whose future remained unclear.

Bringing Back the Rialto

As a cultural castaway, the Rialto became an indeterminate object, somewhere between the states of expulsion and erasure. However, this object's "unfinished disposal" was arguably a source of continued appeal, insofar as it remained open to possibilities of re-use.[464] For passersby, the shuttered appearance of the massive Rialto was both a visual

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[461] Lanken reports on various old movie palaces already converted to "concert, ballet or opera halls" in cities across the United States. He also highlights the conversion of the Loews Valencia in Queens to an evangelical church, and the conversion of the Paramount in Brooklyn to a gymnasium and basketball court. See: Lanken, "City's Old Theatres."

[462] See: "Restoration of Classic Theatres Becomes a National Trend." *Gazette* [Montreal] 11 Sep. 1989: C6.

[463] Ibid.

[464] Tim Edensor discusses the appeal of uncertain objects poised between disposal and re-use in his discussion of industrial ruins. See: "Waste Matter: The Debris of Industrial Ruins and The Disordering of the Material World." *Journal of Material Culture* 10.3 (2005): 311-332. Print. 317.

curiosity and a troubling reminder of the theatre's uncertain future. A tipping point arrived in 1987 when its owner set out to raze its interior, intent on transforming the space into what one activist pejoratively dubbed a "mini Eaton centre."[465] For the owner, this project was a last resort, a means to generate some economic viability for a building he found beautiful, but otherwise "useless" in its current form.[466] These plans were foiled by a campaign initiated by the Mile-End Citizens Committee, together with the YMCA du Parc. Together, they formulated a proposal, which they presented to Montreal City Hall, advocating for the protection of the Rialto.[467] This led to a vote by Montreal City Council in December 1987 to begin the process of citing the Rialto for its historical and architectural value.[468] The owner's plans to redevelop the theatre were subsequently halted and in 1988, the Rialto would be cited by the city of Montreal— one of the first movie palaces to be classified by the city under new provincial legislation.[469] This development is significant for it would put an end to the Rialto's status as a lapsed movie theatre, giving it new meaning. No longer an outdated structure, empty and woeful, the Rialto was recast as a valued heritage object with renewed "symbolic capital."[470]

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[465] Bronson, "Rialto Future."
[466] "City Launches Plan to Preserve 63-year-old Rialto Movie Theatre." *Gazette* [Montreal] 18 Dec. 1987: B13. Print.
[467] The Mile End Citizens Committee's late 1980s activism on behalf of the Rialto is briefly described in a 1999 memo from the Committee to Mile End residents. See: Comité des Citoyens du Mile-End. *Memo to Residents of Mile End*. 1999. TS. Historic Theatres' Trust Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.
[468] "City Launches Plan," *Gazette.*
[469] Historically speaking, and relative to other Canadian provinces, Quebec has been progressive in terms of its heritage legislation. In 1922, Quebec enacted *la Loi relative a la conservation des monuments et des objets d'art ayant un intérêt historique et artistique* [Law on the Conservation of Monuments and Works of Art with Historical and Artistic Interest], and created the advisory board, *Commission des Monuments Historiques* [Historical Monuments Commission]. As such, it became the first Canadian province to create its own legislation in the field of heritage preservation. In 1952-53, the 1922 law was amended to expand its scope, and in 1972 it was replaced by the *Loi sur les Biens Culturels* (The Cultural Property Act), and the *Commission des Monuments Historiques* was replaced with a new advisory board, the *Commission des Biens Culturels du Québec*. The same law and advisory board remain in place today.
[470] The term "symbolic capital" is here meant as it is defined by Pierre Bourdieu, as "a degree of accumulated prestige, celebrity, consecration or honour" which, unlike economic capital, is "founded on a dialectic of

Even with its formal designation as a heritage object, the Rialto retained firm ties to the cultural practice of moviegoing. In light of the building's municipal citation, the owner of the Rialto was forced to seek out an alternative plan for the space, abandoning his commercial redevelopment project. As a solution, he turned over management of the theatre to three intrepid members of the community who set about re-launching the space as a repertory cinema. In the fall of 1988, the Rialto's new vocation as a repertory movie house was greeted optimistically. First, it seemed like the answer to Montreal's dwindling repertory cinema scene. Second, it offered an empty theatre an opportunity to thrive again. Promising "eclectic" films-- independent features, international movies and art films in English and French-- the managers of the theatre were confident that this new undertaking would be buoyed by the Rialto itself.[471] Montreal cinemagoers, they argued, did not just want an alternative to first-run cinema, an opportunity to see quality films unavailable through large commercial theatre chains, but to have this viewing experience "in a real theatre"[472] This notion of the Rialto as a "real theatre" plays on a concept of "authenticity" that would be central to public discourse on the theatre in the late 1990s-- a point I return to later in this chapter.

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knowledge [*connaissance*] and recognition [*reconnaissance*]." See: Randal Johnson. "Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture." Introduction. *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. By Pierre Bourdieu. Ed. Randal Johnson. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993. 1-25. Print. 7. For the different forms of capital and their interrelationships, see: Pierre Bourdieu. "The Forms of Capital." (1986) *Cultural Theory: An Anthology.* Chichester: Wiley, Blackwell, 2011. 81-93. Print.

[471] The management stipulated that 60% of the programming would consist of English-language cinema while 40% would be French-language cinema. It also indicated that, where possible, English-language and foreign films would be presented with French subtitles. See: Lévesque.

[472] "Repertories Are Back With the Opening of the Rialto." *Gazette* [Montreal] 30 Sep. 1988: C1. Print.

The Disappearing Repertory Cinema

The Rialto's path coincides with cinema's own uneasy development. In particular, it must be situated within the shifting culture and economics of film exhibition and reception in Montreal across the late 1980s and early 1990s. By most accounts, repertory cinema, once the basis of a vibrant cultural scene in Montreal, had all but disappeared by 1988. The terms "repertory" and "art house" are here employed interchangeably to describe similar types of cinemas in Montreal. I apply the terms loosely in part to reflect the plurality of content available at local venues. The programming at theatres belonging to the repertory circuit varied by location, often crossing genres, subgenres, historic periods and national cinemas. The same theatre, for example, might have featured more classical "art cinema" often associated with the post-WWII European New Wave-- films by Jean Luc-Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman-- as well as more low-brow B-movies and midnight-movie cult classics such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).[473]

A number of factors contributed to the decline of repertory cinema across the 1980s, most notably the popularity of home video and the rising costs of film distribution rights.[474] The arrival of home video, in particular, had dissolved the former exclusivity of the repertory theatre. As Douglas Gomery indicates, quite simply: "Home video made it too

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[473] The programming at the Rialto, for example, is emblematic of this tendency. To gain a sense of the variety of programming on offer at this theatre in the early 1990s, I consulted editions of its monthly magazine. Specifically, I sampled those published between May 1990 and February 1994. This bilingual magazine contains both feature articles on films and filmmakers, usually as a tie-in to monthly screenings, and lists the programming schedule. The editions I consulted are housed at the Canadian Centre for Architecture. See: Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 1.2 (May 1990). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 2.4 (Jul 1991). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 2.6 (Sept. 1991). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 2.8 (Nov. 1991). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 2.12 (Apr. 1992). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 3.9 (Nov. 1992). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 3.11 (Jan. 1993). Print; Rialto Theatre. *Rialto* 1.4 (Feb. 1994). Print.

[474] Thierry Horguelin. "La Cinéphilie à Montreal: La Ferveur Entamée." *24 images* 39-40 (1988): 81-83. Print. 82.

easy to see foreign films at home, " a conclusion we might extend to all types of cinema no longer limited to the public sphere of the movie theatre.[475]

The Rialto theatre reopened as a repertory cinema, rather boldly, on the heels of a spate of repertory theatre closings in Montreal. Several of these closed repertory movie theatres in Montreal were converted movie palaces. The Seville, for instance, an historic movie palace operating as a repertory house since 1976, closed its doors for the last time in 1985, beginning a lengthy period of neglect for this theatre.[476] In 1987, the aforementioned Outremont theatre, another movie palace-turned-repertory cinema, ended its 16-year tenure showing mostly French-language films.[477] Other movie palaces that closed that same year, with shorter runs in the art house circuit, included the Laurier, after a year in business, and the Papineau after less than four months.[478] The following year, in the spring of 1988, a number of other repertory cinemas shut down—among them, Cinema V, an Egyptian-style movie palace formerly called The Empress.[479] This occurred after Famous Players acquired the theater, transferring the programming from second- to first-run cinema. Cinema V drew considerable attention as a group of local cinephiles, residents and politicians assembled in front of the theatre and marched to Famous Players' offices. There

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[475] Douglas Gomery. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Exhibition in America*. London: BFI, 1992. Print. 195.
[476] Elizabeth Thompson. "Patrons Dance in Aisles at Seville Farewell Party." *Gazette* [Montreal] 1 Nov. 1985: C1. Print. The Seville theatre was for a long time known as the main host in Montreal for annual screenings of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975).
[477] See: "Outremont Theatre Owners Plan Addition."
[478] The Laurier (formerly the Regent/Beaver) started showing repertory cinema in August 1986 and closed a year later, in August 1987. The Papineau reopened as a repertory cinema in September 1987 and closed shortly thereafter, in December 1987. L'Autre Cinéma, another repertory house (though not a converted movie palace) also closed in August 1987. Cinéma de Paris, a repertory cinema acquired by Famous Players, converted from second to first-run cinema that same year. For an account of the decline of repertory cinema in Montreal, see: Horguelin, "La Cinéphilie à Montréal."
[479] Other repertory cinemas that closed in 1988 included the Milieu and Université theatres. By May 1988, the McGill Screening Society and Concordia University's *Conservatoire D'Art Cinématographique* were the only remaining venues offering repertory cinema in Montreal.

they presented the company with a petition to protest the change in programming.[480] After Famous Players rejected the protesters' demands, a group of roughly 100 local demonstrators staged a memorial in front of Cinema V. At the site of this neighborhood haunt, mourners bemoaned the "death" of repertory cinema in Montreal, signaled by the loss of its theatres.[481] The occasion included a candlelight vigil, a eulogy delivered by Cinema V's former projectionist, and the distribution of celluloid fragments to attendees.[482]

The wider decline of repertory cinema in Montreal became deeply connected to the loss of venues that had sustained this cinephilic tradition since the 1970s. The fading popularity of repertory cinema pointed to both an industrial and cultural turn, which sat uncomfortably with some members of the local community. Demonstrations outside Cinema V, for example, testified to the premium placed on a certain type of programming offered at a certain type of venue. Indeed, the expression of loss that emerged at the site of the movie palace seems to corroborate Giuliana Bruno's characterization of cinema consumption, as it unfolds inside the urban movie theatre, as both a social and spatial experience. It is through the public architecture of the movie house, Bruno argues, that "film turns into cinema."[483] Take away the structure that "houses" a particular social experience of cinema, one that has come to be intertwined with this experience, and one begins to understand the degree to which a community "yearns for, craves, projects, and fabricates" this experience "both inside and outside the theatre."[484] What Bruno is highlighting here is not just the social value of a movie theatre, cultivated within and by the

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[480] Bruce Bailey. "Repertory Protests Futile: Theatre Chain." *Gazette* [Montreal] 1 Jun. 1988: F5. Print.
[481] "Movie-lovers Mourn Closing." *Gazette* [Montreal] 13 Jun. 1988: A3. Print.
[482] "Film Buffs Plan March For Repertory House." *Gazette* [Montreal] *6* Jun. 1988: A3. Print.
[483] Giuliana Bruno. *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*. London & New York: Verso: 2002. Print. 44.
[484] Ibid. 45.

space, but the expression of this value beyond its walls. One might add to this formulation the importance of programming. Together, the particularities of space, programming and audience constitute the "cinema" event. In Montreal, repertory cinema found an ally in the movie palace. Their historic relationship, bridged by an audience of film buffs, was one of close fellowship. But why was this relationship forged in the first place? And how had it changed by the late 1980s?

Barbara Wilinsky posits that art house cinemagoing was always about cultivating "an image of difference" not just by association with the films on offer, but with the venue in which they screened. Art house audiences from the 1940s thru to the 1970s, she contends, sought a form of "distinction" from conventional practices, favouring "films and theater environments different from those offered at mainstream film theaters."[485] Art House cinema-going in the post-WWII era, for instance, was for some audiences a statement of cultural elitism, demonstrating a specialized knowledge of "'offbeat' films such as independent Hollywood, foreign language, and documentary films" in a gesture of cinephilic exclusivity.[486] As such, art house filmgoers could "distinguish themselves from 'ordinary' filmgoers" while art house cinema "shaped itself as an alternative to dominant culture."[487] Wilinksy's assertion strongly evokes Pierre Bourdieu and his classic sociology of taste, in particular his overarching claim that tastes and preferences, the things people consume and how they consume them, position social actors in relation to—generally, inside or outside—dominant practices. Such choices correspondingly mark out their place

[485] For a history of art house cinema from its emergence in the late 1940s up to and including its evolution across the 1970s, see Barbara Wilinsky. *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of the Art House Cinema*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print. 2.
[486] Ibid. 2.
[487] Ibid. 2-3.

in relation to the broader echelons of society.[488] Cultural consumption then, serves as a mode of social "distinction."[489]

While journalists puzzled over the economic rationale of re-opening the Rialto as a repertory cinema at such an unfavourable juncture, the theatre's managers saw an opportunity to restore a cultural niche.[490] A sense of "distinction" remained part of the draw of the Rialto, though perhaps not in the extreme vein of postwar cinephilic elitism that Wilinsky underlines. The theatre would specialize in cinema not otherwise on offer at first-run commercial multiplexes. It promised a mixed bag of programming: retrospectives on *auteur* cinema, programs thematizing historic film movements, midnight movies, new independent features, European art cinema, old classics and cult films.[491] It also offered an architectural alternative to the commercial multiplex theatre, creating a clear line of demarcation between two types of exhibition space. David Bordwell has remarked that the multiplex and the repertory cinema, which have assumed many forms, are fundamentally dissimilar: "'Plexes […] tend to look alike. But art and rep houses have personality, even flair."[492] While one could no doubt make a case for the aesthetic variety of multiplex cinemas, the Rialto offered singular style in the form of its vintage exhibition space, its retrograde model of spectatorship. The Rialto, in this way, represented an opportunity to exercise one's disposition toward older cultural forms and social practices. Trading on

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[488] Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Transl. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.
[489] Ibid.
[490] For signs of skepticism regarding the re-launch of the Rialto, see: Gilbert, Nathalie. "Du Cinéma de Répertoire au Rialto." *Super Hebdo* [Montreal] 16 Oct. 1988. n. pag. Print; and "Repertories are Back."
[491] See the *Rialto* monthly magazines cited above.
[492] David Bordwell. "Pandora's Digital Box: Art House, Smart House." *David Bordwell's Website on Cinema* 30 Jan. 2012. Web. 10 Oct 2013. <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2012/01/30/pandoras-digital-box-art-house-smart-house/>

nostalgia for past styles and disappearing social formations, the Rialto created an enclave for residual cultural practices.

What was different at this juncture from, say, the 1970s emergence of the movie-palace-turned-repertory cinema was both the Rialto's patina of time and changing social perceptions of this attribute. The Rialto's history had been sanctified by its municipal citation, imbuing this structure with an air of prestige. In this way, the consumption of repertory cinema inside the aging movie palace became a value-laden event. To see a movie at the Rialto would also be an act of support for local cultural heritage. The forgotten movie palace and the waning repertory cinema scene thus entered into a symbiotic relationship, shoring up fading cultural traditions in a joint front against modern, dominant practices. If all went well, the managers hoped, the two would pull each other out of obscurity.

An "Authentic" Movie Palace

The Rialto, when it started to gain widespread public attention in the late 1980s, was not just any old building; it was distinguished and revalued for its uncommon state of authenticity. Specifically, the Rialto at this juncture looked and acted much like it had throughout its history. Given its penchant for continuity, it seemed uncorrupted-- a faithful document of local cultural heritage. Though not widely publicized as such, the Rialto's reinvention as a repertory cinema was, effectively, an informal method of preservation. Among heritage circles, this approach is sometimes termed "adaptive re-use," whereby old structures, having outlived their original purpose, are converted to a new function.[493] In

[493] The term "adaptive re-use" is sometimes used in place of architectural "recycling," and thus may be linked to the discourses and practices of environmental sustainability. For examples of this connection, see: Susan Bronson. "The Three R's: Restoration, Renovation and Recycling." *Grassroots, Greystones & Glass Towers: Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture.* Ed. Bryan Demchinksy. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1989. 154-167.

this instance, the value placed on the Rialto's "authentic" character was evident as few alterations were made to its appearance upon reopening. The auditorium was fitted with a new projection system and screen, together with an improved Dolby sound system, bringing the theatre up to modern technological standards. Apart from these changes, the theatre was cleaned and its paint minimally retouched.[494] Hence, the Rialto's distinctive physical properties—Gariépy's long exterior facade and Briffa's sumptuous interior décor— remained intact.[495]

The decision to maintain much of the Rialto's original material character, keeping the modern updates to a minimum, would appease members of the local community who had advocated for the theatre's conservation. The Rialto's venture as a repertory cinema in many ways represented an ideal solution for the theatre. This occupation posed no threat to the physical integrity of the building and better still, maintained one aspect of the theatre's original function: the public projection of cinema. Moreover, in positioning the Rialto as a "real theatre," maintaining much of its original identity, its managers were also reinforcing an idea of authenticity that has long been central to debates over the preservation of historic architecture.

Underscoring traditional polarities between conservation and restoration is a distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" forms of architecture. The roots of this longstanding binary are often traced back to conflicting nineteenth-century schools of thought. On one side of this binary was the "anti-scrape" ideology, espoused by John Ruskin and William Morris who sought to protect the original condition of historic sites.

Print; and Martin Drouin. "Le Recyclage: Assurer la Survie du Patrimoine." *Le Combat du Patrimoine a Montréal (1973-2003).* Sainte-Foy: Presses de L'Université du Québec, 2007. Print. 200-204.

[494] Perreault.

[495] Gilbert. "Du Cinéma de Répertoire."

Conservation purists, in the vein of Ruskin and Morris, often see forms of material intervention as inherently disingenuous. Ruskin, for instance, argued that any restorative gesture among architects and designers could never be anything more than an imitation or "parody" of the original structure, a reproduction and therefore "the most loathsome manner of falsehood."[496] Aesthetic modification thus represents a kind of sacrilege, depleting the "aura" of the original object.[497] Change, under this scheme, invariably corrupts a building's state of authenticity and therefore ought to be avoided.

Members of the restoration camp would argue that the conservator's unyielding belief in the authenticity of unaltered historic buildings, the notion that they embody an objective truth, is intrinsically flawed. While an anti-restoration ethos works for historic objects requiring little upkeep, it does not account for those artifacts necessitating more than a patch-and-mend approach. Buildings falling into disrepair or on the precipice of demolition, for example, might otherwise be lost without some restorative intervention. If conservation is predicated on the continuity of cultural heritage, then "anti-scrape purism" becomes a limiting, narrow-minded, even contradictory framework. It does not make sense, in other words, to "banish restoration as a lie, and embrace decay and dilapidation in

[496] For Ruskin, restoration is equivalent to the "most total destruction" of a building. Thus, in his view, restoration and its goals of recovery are fundamentally unattainable. As he states: "it is impossible, as impossible to raise the dead, to restore anything that has ever been great or beautiful in architecture." See: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. 6th ed. Sunnyside, Orpington, Kent, England: George Allen, 1889. Print. 194.
[497] In the early twentieth century, Walter Benjamin would similarly ruminate on technologies of reproduction and their implications for the "authentic" original. For Benjamin, the reproduction of an artwork via technological means—photography, for example—results in the destruction of an artwork's "aura," a quality unique to the original. Benjamin's discussion, however, is much more ambivalent than Ruskin's. For him, the destruction of aura and auratic experience may nonetheless carry emancipatory potential, opening up new experiential and perceptual possibilities. See: Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

the name of honesty and truth."[498]

Retaining a building's "authentic" identity is problematic for other reasons. For Jonathan Kemp, such an approach "pushes along an essentialist model of cultural production," framing a building's original state as its only true identity, its sacrosanct essence. What is rarely acknowledged, however, is that "authenticity" is a socially constructed concept, not an innate quality. Any emphasis on preserving a building as an authentic whole is always a product of the "current epistemological landscape" advanced by the community that has absorbed its beliefs.[499] From this viewpoint, the treatment of a historic building is arguably less about respecting the inherent "truth" of a structure than it is about honouring the principles of a belief system. Whatever "original" form a building embodies is actually "a particular version of its authenticity instantiated by the dominant zeitgeist."[500]

It is possible to locate evidence in Montreal of a preservation ideology and a corresponding concept of authenticity that materialized in relation the Rialto. Formalizing this belief system happened, in part, by way of government policy-making and intervention. The aforementioned report, which had named the Rialto, Outremont and Laurier theatres among those offering the most "significant heritage potential" in the city, offers a case in point. Commissioned by a branch of the province's Ministry of Culture and

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[498] Jonathan Rée underlines the dilemma of transforming old objects into "Auto-Icons," a concept he borrows from Jeremy Bentham. "Auto-icon" was Bentham's term for describing embalmed corpses put on public display in order to serve as "permanent monuments" to their previous lives. Rée uses this concept to illustrate some of the practical problems of preservation purism. See: Jonathan Rée. "Auto-Icons." in *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths*. Eds. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker. London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 2009. 1-5. Print. 3

[499] For an exploration of how philosophies of preservation come into being, particularly their often-polarized "either/or" ethical frameworks around ideas authenticity and truth, see: Jonathan Kemp. "Practical Ethics v2.0." *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths.* Eds. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker. London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. 2009. 60-71. Print. 63.

[500] Kemp 62.

headed by its municipal arm, *La Direction du Patrimoine de Montréal*, the report set out to identify those theatres that continued to offer value to both present and future generations. As a preliminary appraisal, the report takes stock of the city's old movie palaces while familiarizing the reader with the particularity of this type of artifact. Its main function, though, was to edify the provincial government so that it could determine how to manage these aging structures, which had recently captured public attention.

All of the buildings, including the Rialto, were assessed and grouped according to a set of variables united by a single criterion: a structure's overall state of authenticity.[501] Due to the well-maintained condition of both its interior and exterior architecture, the Rialto was the second-highest ranking theater in the city, with its neighbor, the Outremont, claiming the top spot. It helped, also, that the Rialto's new repertory cinema vocation fell in line with the theatre's original disposition toward film exhibition, posing no threat to its physical form.

Authenticity, as per the report, was a hierarchical concept. A theatre's standing on the authenticity scale was determined relatively, by comparison to other theatres in the city. Balanced against those theatres missing an original façade or gutted on the inside, for instance, the Rialto fared reasonably well. Authenticity in this instance was measured by gradations: the higher the proportion of original features, the higher a theatre's position on the scale. This report is noteworthy, first of all, for its participation in a growing discourse on the modern role of these uncertain structures. Second of all, and perhaps most significantly, it formalized the standard by which Montreal movie palaces would be revalued. A specific idea of authenticity was epitomized by the mostly intact Rialto. The

[501] Jocelyne Martineau. *Les Salles de Cinéma Construites Avant 1940 Sur le Territoire de la Communauté Urbaine de Montréal.* Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Direction du Patrimoine de Montréal, 1988. Print. 5.

theatre, in this way, served as a benchmark for local heritage, the best-case scenario for conserving local history and urban memory. Theatres with gutted interiors or absent facades, by contrast, became negative examples.

In light of its formal rating, the Rialto was classified as a valued heritage object by the provincial government in 1990. Once more lauded for its outstanding "state of authenticity," the theatre was praised by the Quebec government for the overall maintenance of original interior and exterior features.[502] As a building classified by the provincial government, the Rialto's treatment would hereafter be subject to the discretion of the *Comité Consultatif de Montréal sur la Protection des Biens Culturels*, a municipal advisory board comprised of experts in the heritage field, which counsels elected officials, the decision-makers, on specific sites and buildings.[503] Among the principles guiding the *Comité Consultatif* is the idea that historic buildings should work to conserve, wherever and whenever possible, a structure's original function and appearance. Moreover, any modifications that might create a "false impression" of the historic period to which the structure bore witness should not be permitted.[504]

That authenticity is measured by the relative intactness of a movie palace's original identity is telling. A theatre, in this way, doubles as both a witness to history and as an authenticating document, corroborating its own testimony. As a document of history, it

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[502] The Rialto was classified as a national historic site on additional grounds including, but not limited to: its role as a witness to and symbol of the history of cinema architecture in its "golden age"; its unique architecture and design; and its well-preserved yet threatened status. See: Québec. Commission des Biens Culturels. *Rapport Annuel 1989-1990*. Québec: Les Publications du Québec, 1990. N. Pag. Print.
[503] The *Comité Consultatif* was a municipal advisory board made up of seven members of the community known for their expertise in areas of architectural conservation and restoration. Its job was to evaluate individual buildings and sites to determine their importance with regard to local cultural heritage, and then to advise elected officials (the decision-makers) on such cases. Montreal. Comité Consultatif de Montréal sur la Protection des Biens Culturels. *Rapport Annuel 1994*. Montreal: Ville de Montreal, 1995. Print. 12.
[504] Ibid. 13. These principles were derived from the cultural arm of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

carries hallowed truth claims about the past. As such, changes to this document would undermine its credibility. The Rialto's function, its operation as a repertory cinema, allowed for some modicum of change: specialized programming and updated screening technology. But most of all it allowed for cultural continuity. The theatre could go on shaping the local film scene, maintaining age-old ties to the neighbourhood and keeping up a familiar sense of place. Furthermore, this vocation ensured that the Rialto would remain relatively unchanged, substantiating its authenticity.

While the Rialto's formalized status as a heritage object would go unchallenged across its operation as a repertory cinema, the theatre would soon be afflicted with financial hardship. Incidentally, the same year that the theatre received its third heritage designation— 1993—this time from the federal government, it would cease operating as a cinema. The inclination to maintain this structure in a state of authenticity was now buttressed by three levels of government legislation. However, it would prove increasingly difficult to reconcile the Rialto's uncorrupted state of authenticity with the exigencies of the contemporary moment.

Becoming Useful

Alois Riegl, in his early 20th-century discussion of architectural preservation argues that, in assessing built heritage, we not only make distinctions between older and newer structures, we also differentiate between "monuments that can and cannot be used."[505] Riegl suggests that unlike architectural ruins, long-abandoned structures wherein "we do not miss human activity," a "usable" building remains closely associated with social

[505] Riegl 80.

practice. Having serviced human activity not that long ago, a usable structure, when it is vacant, seems deficient or unsettled. And until such time that it is enlivened via social practice, a usable monument will lack "present-day value."[506]

This holds true for an old movie palace like the Rialto. Any discussion concerning the contemporary meaning of the theatre necessarily extends beyond aesthetic considerations—maintaining the theatre's original façade or interior décor—to a question of use. Indeed, a prevailing issue across the 1980s and 1990s concerned what function the Rialto would serve for the surrounding community, specifically, and for Montreal's public sphere, broadly. To revalue the Rialto with an eye toward its continuation would entail moving beyond its characterization as a heritage object to its social reanimation. This approach is significant for it presupposes that a space like the Rialto is itself a living, changeable force as opposed to a fixed, static entity-- that heritage buildings cannot rest solely on their historic laurels. Finding a use for the Rialto would set Montreal apart from a tendency in some urban centres to embalm historic architecture in "pure façadism," wherein buildings are deprived of life and "functionality." [507] Given a practical role in the contemporary city, the Rialto would be invigorated rather than reduced to "mere decoration."[508]

Closely related to Riegl's conception of a "usable monument" is Van Wyck Brooks' idea of a "usable past." In his oft-cited 1918 article, Brooks describes the cultural landscape as an incoherent "void" wrought by a giant gulf between past, present and future

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[506] Ibid.
[507] Martín-Hernández names Italy, Spain and Greece as examples of cities where this phenomenon has occurred as a result of preservation legislation. Manuel J. Martín-Hernández. "Architecture from Architecture: Encounters between Conservation and Restoration." *Future Anterior* 4.2 (Winter 2007): 63-69. Print. 66.
[508] Christine Boyer. *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994. Print. 373.

generations. This state of affairs he attributes to an inadequate engagement with past cultural productions, namely literature and the arts.[509] While people are aware of the past, he contends, they are not using it to cultivate a more enriching present: "The past that survives in the common mind of the present," for Brooks, "is a past without living value."[510] Brooks calls for a changed relationship to history, one that will nurture the present while also being "placed at the service of the future."[511] To this end, he implores his readers to cultivate a "usable past."[512]

The terms "usable monument" and "usable past" are provocative for they marry stable notions of "utility" and "functionality" with more fluid ideas of "culture," "heritage" and "memory." These concepts also share a creative, mobilizing impulse: to construct a more active relationship with history. Brooks, in particular, emphasizes that past cultural creations ought to be managed in such a way as to lend greater coherence to the present and future. In this way, the past is made *useful*. With respect to a movie palace like the Rialto, Brooks' notion of a "usable past" also resonates across a more literal register. This artifact of the past must be used—occupied, inhabited, exploited—to generate both monetary and social support for its continuation.

If there exists a collective expectation to use a historic building like the Rialto, it follows that one must account for a measure of change. Unlike artefacts in a museum, embalmed for posterity and encased behind glass, a heritage building exploited for social activity will incur traces wear and tear. A movie palace, furthermore, is an old building that demands regular maintenance. The preservation of architecture, slowing down a building's

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[509] Van Wyck Brooks. "On Creating a Usable Past." *The Dial* 64.7 (1918): 337-341. Print. 339.
[510] Ibid.
[511] Ibid. 340.
[512] Ibid. 339.

natural cycle of decay, means keeping a structure "weatherproof and watertight" to prevent decomposition.[513] Such provisions can be expensive and thus, in many cases a space must be employed at the service of commerce to offset such costs. This point is critical in the case of the Rialto, a theatre exposed year after year to Montreal's unforgiving winter climate.

To meet contemporary sensibilities, tastes and demands, a building may be asked to modernize its facilities. Addressing the North American trend toward theatre revitalization beginning in the 1970s and spreading widely by the 1980s, Anna Kowalski suggests that a theatre's first priority ought to be long-term economic feasibility. As such, "a refurbished facility must be a first class working instrument equal in quality to anything newly constructed."[514] Theatres have evolved considerably since the early twentieth century and frequently offer more spacious, comfortable seating, better sightlines to the stage or screen, updated screening and audio systems for cinema, as well as larger stages and ample backstage areas for live theatre.[515] If a movie palace is to compete in the cultural marketplace, to be an active, viable site for human consumption, it may be asked to incorporate technological and structural upgrades.

How, then, is it possible to reconcile a widespread premium placed on cultural continuity and material permanence, on keeping the Rialto authentically whole, with the contemporary need for change? The production of economic and utilitarian value is rooted in the present, and driven by forward-looking concern. If using a building is by nature

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[513] Chris Caple. "The Aims of Conservation." *Conservation: Principles, Dilemmas and Uncomfortable Truths.* Eds. Alison Richmond and Alison Bracker. London: The Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum. 2009. 25-31.Print. 27.
[514] Anna Kozlowski. "New Life for Old Theatres." *Technote* 9 (Apr 1986): 1-8. Print. 8.
[515] Ibid. 1-8.

impactful, then does this make preservation an antithetical goal? How can a structure like the Rialto be economically viable and socially useful to present-day city dwellers while retaining its "authentic" heritage value? The next stage in the Rialto's history would compel a cross-examination of these very questions.

Shedding the Cinematic

The Rialto's operation as a repertory cinema served as a short-term preservation strategy. Dwindling audiences and mounting debt forced the auditorium to close its doors in 1993, leaving the building's future open-ended.[516] The managers attributed declining audiences to a number of factors: an ongoing economic recession, rising operating costs and competition from larger, multiplex theater chains.[517] By this time, it was becoming clear that the theatre would need to find a new strategy to ensure it continuation over the long term. Establishing a lasting vocation for the Rialto, it seemed, would entail concretizing the space's rupture from its movie palace roots, given that attempts to return the site to film exhibition had proven untenable.[518]

The ensuing period in the Rialto's history was characterized by instability. After experimenting with live theatre and concerts the owner declared, in 1997, that he had been unable to find a consistent renter for the main auditorium. Only the top two floors of the building were regularly occupied—by the dance troupe La La La Human Steps—while the

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[516] John Griffith. "Rialto Cinema to Close its Doors." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 29 Jan 1993: A1. Print.
[517] Ibid.
[518] Although there was some discussion by the owner and managers about returning the Rialto to its repertory cinema vocation down the line, such plans never came to fruition. The managers of the Rialto established a non-profit group, *Société Pour le Sauvegarde du Théâtre Rialto* [Save the Rialto Society]. Using this non-profit platform, they applied for and received a development grant jointly funded by the municipal and provincial governments. The grant, however, would only be issued on the condition that the owner and manager come up with a suitable plan for the Rialto's long-term commercial viability. Over the next few years, the owner struggled to find a consistent use for the auditorium. It served, at various points, as a concert hall, a venue for live theatre and a space for community events.

rest of the building sat mostly vacant. The owner was therefore struggling to generate enough revenue to maintain and operate the enormous complex at a hefty price tag of more than $100,000 a year.[519] As a solution, he embarked on a renovation project with a view to adapting the space to a new purpose. He proceeded, moreover, without seeking permission from the municipal or provincial governments, a requisite step given the Rialto's heritage classifications.

A "Monstrous Metamorphosis"

Controversy around the Rialto reached its apex in 1999 with an impassioned campaign to rescue the theatre from "a monstrous metamorphosis into a mega-discotheque."[520] The crusade to "save the Rialto" was mobilized in 1998 to challenge a series of overhauls performed by its owner, perceived by some locals as an affront to the theatre's historic status.[521] Although the Rialto had by this time been designated a historic site by all three levels of government, heritage titles did not attend to the question of the theatre's vocation—a domain, which fell primarily to the authority of its development-minded owner. Looking to find a lasting commercial occupation for the main auditorium, the Rialto's owner was intent on transforming the space into a combination bar-discothèque re-dubbed "The Rex." Local activists, aiming to thwart these plans, circulated petitions, wrote letters to city officials and marched through the Mile End neighborhood.

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[519] Michelle Lalonde. "Wanted: Starring Role for the Rialto." *Gazette* [Montreal] 18 Mar. 1998: A3. Print.
[520] Helen Fotopulos. Letter to Louise Harel. 3 Nov. 1999. TS. Historic Theatres' Trust Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal. Print.
[521] The movement to save the Rialto was jointly organized by Mile End City Councilor Helen Fotopoulos and the Mile End Citizens Committee. The first official meeting to discuss the fate of the Rialto took place on February 23, 1998, at the YMCA du Parc. It was initiated by Fotopulos, who would serve as one of the primary spokespeople for the campaign. *Procès Verbal de la Réunion du Ralliement des Citoyens du Mile End Pour la Sauvegarde du Rialto, Tenue au YMCA du Parc le 23 Février 1998*. 11 Mar. 1998. TS. Historic Theatres' Trust Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

Together, they called upon the City of Montreal to intervene, to spare the theatre from further "desecration." (HG transl.)[522]

The crux of the argument against the owner's plans for the Rialto in the late 1990s was that this proposal, this discothèque, threatened to depart *too* radically from the structure's original identity. Given the owner's modifications of the theatre, unauthorized by the city or by the provincial ministry of culture, some worried that this would eventually cost the building its heritage cachet.[523] Moreover, advocates for the protection of the Rialto levelled criticism at the owner and his penchant for "savage" renovations, arguing that the theatre would not survive under a development ethos.[524] The owner's work on the theatre to date, in order to make the space more appealing to renters, was akin to "mutilation."[525] The Rialto, they feared, was "dying."[526]

In a move to capture widespread support for the cause, the rhetoric of the movement to safeguard the Rialto shifted from a dominant concern for the physical integrity of the building to one that encompassed maintaining the overall character of the neighborhood. Many residents expressed concern that the Rialto's new enterprise would transform the theatre from an isolated visual problem—an immense building with an indeterminate future —into an insidious social disruption. The Rialto's incarnation as The Rex, they claimed, would reverberate widely, turning "an eyesore into an earache," and

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[522] Helen Fotopulos. *Profanation du Rialto, Prise Deux*… Montreal: n. pag. 11 Mar. 1999. Historic Theatres' Trust Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal. Print.
[523] Marie-Claude Girard. "Encore des Travaux Sans Permis au Rialto." *La Presse* [Montreal] 14 Mar. 1999: A8. Print.
[524] Helen Fotopulos. "SOS Théâtre Rialto." Message to Lorraine Pintal, Dominique Champagne, Pierre Bernard, Marie-Hélène Falcon, Alain Grégoire, Pierre Rousseau, Gabriel Arcand, Dinu Bumbaru, Phyllis Lambert, and Janet MacKinnon. 15 Mar. 1999. E-mail.
[525] Helen Fotopulos. "Theatre Rialto." Letter to Mayor Bourque. 11 Mar. 1999. TS. Historic Theatres' Trust Collection, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.
[526] Fotopoulos. *Profanation du Rialto.*

contaminating an otherwise peaceful area.[527] In the winter of 1999, residents of Mile End, including a bus carrying members of the Hasidic Jewish community, showed up at City Hall, filling the space to capacity. Concerned about the riotous new venue, residents aired their grievances about potential "parking nightmares, noise, bar patrons—many undoubtedly inebriated—flooding the streets at closing time, and the general rowdiness that tends to surround the bar scene."[528]

Such concerns were co-opted by heritage activists who sought to defend the Rialto against future alterations. The alternative plan for the Rialto most commonly advanced by local activists was a conversion to a community resource centre for the multicultural Mile End populace.[529] Seeing in this particular exploit an opportunity to maintain the theatre's ties to socially sanctioned notions of "culture" and "community," advocates argued that this function would uphold the Rialto's rapport with the neighbourhood while ensuring the building's material conservation. The Rialto, under this scheme, might also maintain some approximation of its original vocation: given the right conditions, the theatre could remain a theatre.

Dichotomies

Across this turbulent period, the debate over the Rialto, once distilled, seemed to hinge upon the theatre's dual identity. As a private good, a piece of real estate, an object that is "consumed by individuals and traded on markets," the Rialto was inexorably linked

[527] "Rialto Protests Stonewalled." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 10 Nov. 1999: A6. Print.
[528] Ibid.
[529] *Manifestation Publique! Sauvons le Rialto!.* Montreal: Mile-End Citizens Committee, 1999. Print.

to commerce and therefore valued in monetary terms.[530] But the Rialto was also a public good ascribed with nonmonetary, *cultural* value by community groups, activists, as well as "government or nonprofit institutions."[531] Implicit in the concept of a public good, also, is the assumption that the object in question is of benefit to everyone, that it belongs to the public as a whole; whereas a private good is by contrast, the property of one or a group individuals.

As Randall Mason explains, "cultural" values, which include elusive qualities such as "historical associations, senses of place, cultural symbolism, [and] the aesthetic and artistic qualities of architecture" are among the primary concerns articulated by preservationists. Traditionally, this has created a barrier to mutual understanding between these groups and the official "decision-makers" overseeing cases of built heritage.[532] Appealing to the economic interests of private developers, city officials or urban planners using unquantifiable terms like "culture" and "memory" can be ineffective. This is, in part, why activists have over time adopted the rhetoric of urban planners and developers, focusing preservation campaigns on economic renewal or heritage tourism, for instance. In the Rialto's case, activists framed the theatre as an economic, social and cultural anchor for Park Avenue. Given a vibrant community function, they argued, the Rialto could serve as a potential boon to street-wide revitalization.

While culture and commerce are traditionally seen as antithetical, they are in actuality both constitutive parts of the Rialto's complex ontology. To consider the Rialto

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[530] Randall Mason. "Economics and Historic Preservation: A Guide and Review of the Literature." Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2005: (1-52). 11. The Brookings Institution. Web. 15 Aug. 2014.
[531] Mason 29.
[532] Economic impact studies, Mason explains, have become "useful as rhetorical aids to preservation advocacy." This, he claims, is based on the belief that "officials and decision-makers" are more receptive to "quantitative arguments about how much preservation pays." Mason 13.

principally in terms of its value for local heritage, history and memory, privileging a stanch ethos of preservation, is to delimit the structure's possibilities for modern re-use. Without a practical use, a structure like the Rialto risks slipping back into obscurity. Likewise, framing the Rialto from a resolutely economic or utilitarian standpoint can overshadow its cultural value.

The logical answer, one might surmise, is to apply an evenhanded approach, balancing both sides of the public-private/culture-economy divide. Yet, harmonizing the Rialto's duality also misses an important point. The Rialto's extension over time has rested upon its irresolvable tensions. It tries but never fully succeeds to assume a singular identity. At turns combative and conciliatory, the preservation of the Rialto has been a process of constant negotiation. Such tensions have been productive, encouraging a modern engagement with this ambiguous object. This has shed light on the particularity of the movie palace, a composite of many values.

Reconciliation

Plans to convert the Rialto to a discothèque were temporarily curtailed by the *Régie des Alcools, des Courses et des Jeux du Québec*, which rejected the owner's request for a permit to sell alcohol.[533] The *Régie*, claiming that the project was not in the "public interest," based its decision largely on the owner's unauthorized work on the building.[534] Previous disregard for heritage legislation, for the *Régie*, pointed toward future mismanagement of a licensed, rule-bound establishment. After trying for nearly two years

[533] Raymond Gervais. "Pas de Discothèque dans le Rialto." *La Presse* [Montreal] 4 Nov. 2000. A28. Print.
[534] "Décision 203, 975." *Demande 589938: 1 Bar Avec Danse, Projection de Films et Spectacles Sans Nudité*. 31 Oct. 2000. Québec: Régie des Alcools, des Courses et des Jeux, 2000. 1-16. Print. 15.

to have the *Régie*'s decision reversed, the owner finally succeeded in 2002.[535] The Rialto reopened as a lively nightclub, to the chagrin of many locals, though in the end the venture was fleeting, lasting only eighteen months.[536] The owner followed up this short-lived undertaking with a new venture, reinventing the Rialto as a high-end steakhouse, a business that was similarly short-lived. After this point, the owner became determined to sell the space.

After nearly three decades, the Rialto's owner finally sold the structure in March 2010.[537] Acting as cultural stewards of the theatre, the new owners are curating a return to the Rialto's original state, spearheading a massive restoration project based on meticulous historical research.[538] Negotiations between the private owners and the local community remain ongoing, as evidenced by a public forum wherein the owner, the head architect on the project, and a representative of the *Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition Féminine* jointly presented the restoration plans to the local community. As self-appointed custodians of the community's values, the owners have created an open discourse on plans for the theatre, promoting transparency and public engagement.

The Rialto's most recent operation has assuaged longstanding concerns over how to safeguard this artefact of urban memory. The theatre now functions as a versatile *salle de spectacle* servicing local arts and entertainment culture while it undergoes restoration. As such, the Rialto still stands as material testimony of Montreal's cultural development. Within this antiquated structure lie embedded histories of cinema, architecture and social

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[535] Members of the local community were reportedly unaware that the owner had submitted a second application for a liquor license to the *Régie des Alcools, des Courses et des Jeux* in 2002. The *Régie* indicated that this application was approved largely because it faced no opposition from local residents. See: Harvey Shepherd. "Councillor Rails at Rialto Bar Permit." *Gazette* [Montreal] 2 Oct. 2002: A7. Print.
[536] René Bruemmer. "City Landmark is Owner's Albatross." *Gazette* [Montreal] 16 Dec. 2007: A3. Print.
[537] The Rialto is now co-owned by Ezio Carosielli and Luisa Sassano.
[538] Carosielli et al. "Le Project de Restauration."

practice, conserved for posterity. Preserving its role as a public heritage site, while retaining its private, commercial status, the Rialto has, for the moment, tempered its duality.

One has to wonder, nonetheless, what is lost and what is gained in the current treatment of the Rialto. The long-term success of its latest vocation and the final outcome of its restoration remain to be seen. As a symbol of community vitality and a stand-in for citywide heritage convictions, the Rialto wields expressive power. Yet, in recovering those details that were altered, lost, painted over or damaged over time, one also smoothes away traces of history. The restoration of the Rialto, uncontested by the community, suggests modern viewers want to see an even closer approximation of the original Rialto, even if rendered by reproduction.

This approach, while socially approved, nevertheless forecloses another kind of experience. It merges the stasis of conservation with the artifice of restoration, privileging this model over one that integrates organic cycles of change. Even unwelcome shifts in the Rialto, by virtue of human neglect (or interference) and natural cycles of decay are incontrovertible records of a building's evolution, layers that make up its palimpsestic identity. Buildings that incorporate rather than conceal change remain "haunted by the signs of the past even when the memory of events has faded."[539] It is precisely this opaque space between "physical sign and faded memory" that can reveal nuances of history, becoming a source of "fascination."[540] The Rialto, rather, will come to embody the perspective of this time, re-coated with the gloss of an "authentic" history.

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[539] Daniela Sandler. "Counterpreservation: Between Grimy Buildings and Renovation Rage." *Inventions Adapt Reuse* 1 (Autumn 2009): 68-73. Print. 72.
[540] Ibid.

Chapter 6- The Seville

Introduction

In 2011, *Le Seville Condos* opened on the periphery of downtown Montreal. The commercial-residential tower occupies a once-notorious block on Saint Catherine Street West, seated between Lambert-Closse and Chomedey streets. Formerly home to the Seville theatre, a crumbling 1920s movie palace, the block was for many years mired in urban decay. The new complex is everything the Seville theatre was not: modern, polished, sanitized, bearing all the hallmarks of renewal. At street-level, it houses a Starbucks, Bank of Montreal, Marché Adonis and a high-end sports centre replete with a gym and training pool.[541] Distributed across four separate buildings, the complex holds 450 sleek condominium units. Each building features rooftop terraces offering private swimming pools, green areas and panoramic views of the city. A harbinger of things to come, the complex is part of a $112 million development project seeking to revitalize this section of Saint Catherine Street and the surrounding neighborhood.[542]

Acquiring its namesake from the Seville theatre, *Le Seville Condos* gestures loosely to the site's cultural lineage. Murals of classic film stars Mae West, Clara Bow and Rudolph Valentino adorn the condominium lobby while the complex's website pays lip service to the theatre, once a popular showcase for cinema and live entertainment. The new "restructuring project," it promises, is moving forward with the Seville's illustrious heritage

[541] Marché Adonis is a grocery chain specializing in Middle Eastern, Lebanese and Mediterranean food. Details on the residential units and amenities offered at Le Seville Condos are available on its website: "Le Seville-Condos in Montréal." Montreal: Prével 2010. Web. June 5 2014. <http://www.leseville.ca/en/>.
[542] Catherine Lalonde. "Le 'Vert' Se Veut Abordable: Des Condominiums au Centre-Ville Pour 144 000$!" *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 18 and 19 Sept. 2010: H3. Print.

in mind, proudly "breathing new life into the former theatre."[543] This reference to the theatre's "new life" carefully sidesteps the fact that no physical remains of the structure exist. Demolished in 2010, the Seville has been permanently consigned to memory.

The Seville theatre of most recent memory was, for many Montrealers, characterized by a posthumous transformation. After ending its last-known vocation as a repertory cinema, closing its doors in 1985, the theatre ceased to be a locus of cultural life. The building sat shuttered and unheated for twenty-five years, moving by ruinous increments towards its eventual destruction. As it began to crumble, drifting away from the realm of conceivable re-use, the Seville became an object of opaque meaning. For many locals walking by the empty venue, the Seville was the object of a melancholic gaze. Bearing, for these citizens, fond memories of an irretrievable past, the deserted theatre produced a sense of wistful longing.

For others, the Seville's decline signified the erasure of local history, particularly following its heritage citation by the City of Montreal in 1992. As its marquees were shorn away and its auditorium gutted, the Seville became, primarily, a haven for pigeons and vagabonds. The building's leaking roof, collapsing walls and boarded up façade earned it the reputation of an unsightly blemish, reviled for its toxic effect on the surrounding neighborhood.[544] Residents, neighboring merchants, journalists and city officials routinely framed the Seville as an architectural burden, dead weight on a streetscape struggling to

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[543] "Le Seville- Condos in Montreal." *Historical Overview*. Prével 2014. Web. June 1 2014.
[544] For example, see: "Project Will Halt Decay of Ste. Catherine Street." Editorial. *Gazette* [Montreal] 23 Feb. 2009: A15. Print. In 2010, architect Phyllis Lambert attributes the decline of the Shaughnessy Village, the neighborhood in which the theatre was located, to the effects of the Seville. See: Linda Gyulai. "Joan of Architecture to the Rescue." *Gazette* [Montreal] 2 Apr. 2010: A3. Print.

regain a foothold in the local economy.[545] Despite numerous proposals to have the theatre restored, repurposed or absorbed by a new project, the Seville was in the end effaced from the urban landscape, unsalvageable after years of neglect.

By no means the first movie palace to be abandoned or disused, the Seville's lingering state of neglect represents an uncommon case of urban ruination. Particularly in modern cities, the endurance of a structure-in-decay is increasingly circumscribed by a pressing impetus to generate new capital. Old buildings are refurbished, re-used or demolished to make way for new projects. Andreas Huyssen, who explores this phenomenon in depth, reminds us that more frequently old buildings are torn down or fixed up. They become "either detritus or restored age."[546] The Seville, for a time, challenged this tendency. Caught in limbo for more two decades, the building shifted from a clearly identifiable movie theatre to an amorphous ruin onto which new meanings were projected. As such, the Seville's trajectory can help to illuminate the broader significance of what it means to become a ruin in a late-modern, urban context.

This chapter, while concentrating on the decline of the Seville, contains a historical detour, first examining the period predating the theatre's ruination. Once part of Montreal's urban-cultural *mise-en-scène*, the Seville's history was for many locals the focus of recent memory. This chapter then turns to the Seville's late-stage trajectory— from its closing in 1985 to its demolition in 2010. In particular, the discursive activity attendant to the

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[545] Particularly during the last decade of its existence, the Seville was strongly criticized by members of the local community, including neighboring merchants, real estate agents, journalists and city officials. This was reported on regularly by the local press. See, for example: Bill Brownstein. "Going for a Snip." *Gazette* [Montreal] 12 Apr. 2001: A4. Print; Sidhartha Banerjee. "Not on the Menu: Dilapidated Building Next Door Is a Headache for Restaurateur." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 1 Oct. 2001: A3. Print; Bill Brownstein. "Solving Seville's Fate By Law or By Rot." *Gazette* [Montreal] 20 Oct. 2001: A4. Print; and Linda Gyulai. "A Neighborhood on the Verge...Of Something." *The Gazette* 13 Mar. 13 2010: B1-B4. Print.

[546] Andreas Huyssen. "Authentic Ruins: Products of Modernity." *Ruins of Modernity*. Ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 17-28. Print. 19.

Seville's decline across this period betrays a collective desire to compensate for the structure's growing illegibility, to fill in the void of meaning its ruination left behind. Here we may find answers to questions that have lingered beyond the Seville's disappearance: What significance did the metamorphosis of this historic movie palace hold for the local community? Why did the theatre deteriorate despite widespread efforts to have it restored and re-used? How did its transformation correspond to the shifting economic and material topology of the downtown environment? And how did its progression connect to wider developments around movie palace preservation in Montreal?

The Seville, In Life

Even with limited knowledge of a building's early form and function, one always senses in the ruin some prior iteration, alive and intact. This inkling was particularly acute across the Seville's decline, with memories of its cultural past still resounding across the public sphere. In strong contrast to the theatre's late-stage decline, the Seville was once teeming with life, operating for nearly six decades as a site of urban amusement. Neither the largest nor the grandest of Montreal's movie palaces, the Seville was adaptable and resilient. Flexing in response to Montreal's changing social, cultural and economic spheres, the theatre remained a neighborhood landmark in downtown's Shaughnessy Village.[547] It was also a consistent a hub of social activity, though its popularity waxed and waned over time.

[547] Shaughnessy Village is an historic area of downtown extending from Guy Street in the East to Atwater Avenue in the West, and from Ste. Catherine Street in the North to René-Levesque Boulevard in the South. For the exact parameters of this area, refer to: *Recherche sur L'Histoire et Développement Culturel du Village Shaughnessy Montréal (Québec)*. Montreal: Comité Sur L'Histoire et la Culture L'Association du Village Shaughnessy, 1999. Print. 34.

The Seville was constructed in 1928 on Saint Catherine Street West, by then the main shopping strip in Montreal. At the time, the bulk of the street's commercial activity was clustered near the centre of downtown, between de Bleury and Peel Streets. This section was already lined with large department stores, smaller retail shops and luxurious movie palaces.[548] The Seville was erected in a less commercially developed area west of Peel. Poised to become the first movie palace servicing this end of the street, its construction testified to the primacy of urban capitalist expansion at the time, replacing an old Methodist church.[549] Rather than create a complete *tabula rasa*, the architects kept one of the church's old walls intact, which they incorporated into the masonry at the back of the Seville. [550]

Opening for business in 1929 at the height of Montreal's movie palace construction boom, the Seville spoke to the reigning popularity of such venues. Containing a 1,200-seat auditorium, split between the lower level and upper balcony, the space anticipated large audiences. To accommodate a mixed bill of film and live entertainment, it included a stage for vaudeville, a screen for cinema and an orchestra pit.[551]

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[548] The theatres already open downtown by this time included the Imperial, the Palace (formerly the Allen), the Capitol, the Strand, the Loew's and the Orpheum (formerly Bennett's). With the exception of the Imperial, which was located on de Bleury Street, all of these theatres were located on Saint Catherine Street. Several department stores were also situated on Saint Catherine Street, including Morgan's, Goodwin, Woolworth's, Simpson's and Ogilvy's.

[549] The church it replaced was l'église méthodiste Douglas. See: *Projets De Règlements P-09-013 Et P-04-047-75: Projet De Redéveloppement De L'ilot Séville*. Montreal: Office de Consultation Publique, 2009. Print. 4.

[550] Ibid.

[551] There remains some confusion as to which architect was responsible for the design of the Seville. A likely explanation, posited by Dane Lanken, is that the theatre was a collaborative effort shared by Cajeton Dufort and D.J. Crighton, or that Dufort potentially worked for Crighton as the managing architect on the project. Crighton also designed the Monkland, another Spanish-themed atmospheric movie palace in Montreal, which opened the following year. Dufort was an established local architect who designed the original version of the Corona theatre on Notre Dame street, before it was renovated in 1923, as well as a number of local buildings including the Hotel de Ville de Maisonneuve, the Hôtel de Ville de Sainte Cunégonde and the Vineburg building. For details about the possible collaboration between Dufort and Crighton, see: Dane Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces: Great Theatres of the Golden Era 1884-1938*. Waterloo: Penumbra Press, 1993. Print.

Advertised as a "modern construction" designed "in the very best of taste," the Seville bore a classical brick and faux-stone façade and a central entranceway flanked by two storefronts.[552] The upper part of the façade featured three artificial windows, generating a *trompe l'oeil* effect. Over the entranceway hung an ornate wrought iron and glass canopy, typical of many vaudeville theatres of the era. Announcing the Seville's foray into cinema exhibition was a large, hanging vertical marquee spelling the theatre's name in bold letters. Movie palace marquees much like the Seville's were by this time becoming a familiar sight on downtown main streets across North America. Montreal's Saint Catherine Street was no exception. Several blocks east of the Seville, near the centre of downtown, sat a row of movie palaces with brightly lit vertical marquees, reaching out to pedestrians like "parenthetic arms."[553] The Seville's vertical sign continued this trend further west. Easily spotted from a distance, the marquee beckoned pedestrians inside the theatre.[554]

Inside, the auditorium was decorated in the atmospheric style, a trend in North American movie theatre décor that rose to popularity in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Often associated with American theatre decorator John Eberson, the fanciful atmospheric aesthetic inspired a flight of the imagination.[555] Eberson envisioned a theatre auditorium not as an interior hall, but as "a magnificent amphitheatre under a glorious moonlit sky."[556] This amphitheatre might take the form of "an Italian garden, a Persian court, a Spanish

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131. For a brief discussion of Dufort's contributions to local architecture, see: *The Seville Theatre*. Montreal: Historic Theatres' Trust, 1990. Print. 4.
[552] Janet MacKinnon. "The Seville." *Bulletin* (Winter 1995-1996): 10+. Print. 10.
[553] Charlotte Herzog. "The Movie Palace and the Theatrical Sources of Its Architectural Style." *Cinema Journal* 20.2 (1981): 15-37. Print. 16.
[554] Ibid.
[555] For a focused discussion of John Eberson and the atmospheric approach to theatre design, see: Ben M. Hall. *The Best Remaining Seats: The Golden Age of the Movie Palace*. Rev. ed. New York: De Capo Press, 1988. Print. 95-103.
[556] Ibid. 96.

patio, or a mystic Egyptian temple-yard […] where friendly stars twinkled and wisps of cloud drifted."[557] More fantastical than their Classical, Italian Renaissance or Baroque predecessors inspired by the opera house and legitimate theatre, atmospheric movie palaces also reproduced far-flung or "exotic" destinations: foreign countries or celestial settings.[558]

Named after an Andalusian city, the Seville was one of four atmospheric theatres in Montreal, in this instance simulating a Spanish open-air terrace.[559] Audiences inside the auditorium were surrounded by synthetic masonry with paintings and plasterwork designed to look like antiquated patio walls, "distempered in blended tones."[560] Peeking out above the faux brickwork were paintings of an "illusionary forest."[561] The ceiling, also painted in an elaborate design, replicated a blue sky with twinkling stars.[562] Other flourishes rounding out the theatre's decorative scheme included red velvet tasselled draperies, plaster dragonheads, crests and twisted columns, chiselled wood candelabras and medieval furniture.[563]

Early Programming

Built amid the film industry's transition from silent to sound cinema, the Seville initially featured a mixed bill of vaudeville and film screenings, from the outset showcasing

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[557] Ibid.
[558] The other main approach to movie palace design was the "standard" or "hard-top" style, inspired by the opera house and vaudeville theatre. This style is often associated with American theatre architect Thomas W. Lamb. For a discussion of the evolution of Lamb's style, see: Hall. 93-120.
[559] Emmanuel Briffa, a local interior designer, was responsible for decorating the interior of the Seville. In addition, Briffa designed the interiors of Montreal's other atmospheric theatres including the aforementioned Monkland (1929), the Empress (1928-1929) and the Granada (1929).
[560] Philip Dombowsky. "Emmanuel Briffa: Atmospheric Splendour." *Bulletin* (Spring/Summer 1995): 8-9. Print. 8.
[561] MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.
[562] Dombowsky 8.
[563] See: Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces* 132; and MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.

the new-fangled "talkies."[564] On its inaugural weekend, it presented the premiere of *Man, Woman and Wife (*1929), followed by a line-up of stage shows.[565] The Seville also regularly hosted a live radio quiz show titled "Public Opinion."[566]

As sound cinema rose to prominence across North America, United Amusement, a rapidly expanding local theatre chain that owned the Seville, would over the next few decades concentrate programming on movies, specifically second-run double-bills.[567] The theatre's concentration on second-run cinema was largely a factor of a 1924 agreement between the local chain and Famous Players Corporation.[568] Louis Pelletier explains that these two companies agreed to assign their business activities to designated territories within the city. As Pelletier notes:

> In exchange for a promise by Famous Players not to 'erect, acquire, operate or be interested, directly or indirectly' in any moving picture theatre located outside of a downtown perimeter delineated by St. James (now St. Jacques) in the South, de Bleury Street in the east, Sherbrooke Street in the north, and Guy Street in the west, United Amusement bound itself not to become interested in venues located within this perimeter or outside the island of Montreal.[569]

Famous Players thus maintained dominion over the downtown first-run movie palaces, including the Loews, Palace and Capitol theatres, where film exchanges preferred to concentrate the initial launch of their products. In turn, United Amusement maintained

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[564] The Seville's grand opening on Friday, March 22, 1929 included a film screening and live spectacle, which *La Presse* advertised as "un programme de premier order." See: "Nouveau Cinéma De La United Amusement." *La Presse* [Montreal] 22 Mar. 1929. n. pag. Print.
[565] Le Seville. Advertisement. *La Presse* [Montreal] 23 Mar. 1929: 69. Print.
[566] Public Opinion. Advertisement. *The Gazette* 13 May 1941: 2. Print.
[567] The Seville, before switching policies in the late 1940s, had been operating as a second-run movie house. See: "Seville Changes Policy in Films." *Gazette* [Montreal] 21 Dec. 1949: 12. Print.
[568] As indicated in chapter 4 of this dissertation, United managed to maintain local control of its theatres' operations until 1959, at which point Famous took over the Montreal-based chain. See: Louis Pelletier. "The Fellows Who Dress the Pictures: Montreal Film Exhibition in the Days of Vertical Integration (1912-1952)." PhD Thesis. Concordia University, 2012. Print. (126-136; 364-365).
[569] Pelletier. 133.

authority over its theatres in peripheral neighbourhoods.[570] Another important clause of the agreement was that United Amusement would have guaranteed access to the same films as Famous Players.[571] Thus, after Famous Players' in-demand films had completed their initial launch period at Montreal's downtown movie palaces, United Amusement would be the first to book these same films at its peripheral locations. This gave United a major advantage over Montreal's independent theatres, which were blocked from booking many popular Hollywood films.

The Seville, located just west of Famous Players' downtown perimeter, thus became one of United's second-run theatres. A typical offering at the Seville over the next few decades would include a double-bill of Hollywood fare. In December 1949, toward the end of its period as a second-run cinema, for example, it featured the romantic comedy *For the Love of Mary* (1948), together with the swashbuckling action adventure *The Fighting O'Flynn* (1949), both of which already had their first runs at the downtown picture palaces.[572]

While the Seville's first few decades of operation as a movie theatre are significant, they are unassuming by comparison to the theatre's unexpected return to live entertainment. Beginning in the late 1940s, when the theatre was taken over by Universal

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[570] In addition to the Seville, United Amusement owned a string of neighborhood theatres scattered around Montreal including, but not limited to the Regent, Papineau, Plaza, Rialto, Amherst, Rivoli, Rosemont, Monkland, Granada, York and Snowdon theatres. Other theatres that were eventually acquired by the United chain include the Corona, Allen, Westmount, Belmont and Mont Royal theatres. See: Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces* 25.

[571] This meant that United had a direct line to films offered through Famous Players-Lasky, a vertically integrated company, which encompassed eight different Hollywood studios at the time.

[572] *For the Love of Mary* was released September 1948 while *The Fighting O'Flynn* was released February 1949. The two films were showing at the Seville later that year. See: "Guide to Theatres." *Gazette* [Montreal] 21 Dec. 1949: 12. Print. Later that month, the Seville screened a double-bill of *The Crooked Way* (1949), featuring John Payne and Ellen Dew, and *Let's Live a Little* (1948) starring Hedy Lamarr and Robert Cummings. See: "United Theatres." *Gazette* [Montreal] 31 Dec. 1949: 22.

Theatres Ltd., the Seville underwent a period of reinvention.[573] Most movie palaces had by this point shifted away from live entertainment, leaving their roots in vaudeville behind. Moving against the status quo, Universal Theatres returned the theatre to a variety format— a series of live performances capped off with a film screening.[574] It also switched the Seville's policy from second- to first-run cinema. The new owners, who saw success with similar policies in other cities, believed the Seville's first-run cinema and "'class' art programs" would be supported by the theatre's "well-known and accessible location."[575] The Seville began marketing itself as a high-class entertainment venue: the "Seville Art Theatre."[576] In January 1951, it featured its first show under this new policy with reputable "stars of the stage, radio and the recording world."[577] Headlined by singers Jan August and Eileen Barton, the show was accompanied by an orchestra in the "Seville pit," a series of live supporting acts (replete with a pair of trampolinists, a tap dancing group and comic Bobby Sergent), and culminated in a screening of *Double Confession* (1950), starring Peter Lorre.[578] Members of the local press lauded the Seville's unique programming, offering high-quality, live performance otherwise lacking in the city.[579] Montrealers, one journalist proclaimed, were "hungry for flesh," and the Seville had answered this calling. [580]

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[573] In December 1949, the local press reported that Universal Theatres, Ltd. would be taking over the Seville, effective January 1, 1950. On this day, it would feature the Canadian premier of an Italian film by director Alessandro Blasetti, *The Iron Crown (*1941), following a successful run on Broadway in New York City. Distributed in Canada by Alliance Films, the film would be screened with English subtitles. See: "Seville Changes Policy in Films."

[574] Ibid.

[575] Ibid.

[576] Ibid.

[577] "Seville Art Theatre Offering Stage Show." *Gazette* [Montreal] 11 Jan. 1951: 10 Print.

[578] Ibid.

[579] The Seville's shows that year were reportedly well attended, with audiences drawn in by headlining performers, such as Ethel Smith. See: "Montreal Memos." *The Shawinigan Standard* 18 Apr. 1951: 14. Print. This variety format would be the norm at the Seville over the next few years. In 1952, for instance, shows were headed by internationally renowned saxophonist Jimmy Dorsey, and concluded with a screening of

To complement the change in programming, the Seville was given a new state-of-the-art sound system and fully remodelled, undergoing a "complete face-lifting job."[581] The theatre was fitted with a flashy attraction board: an illuminated, horizontal marquee over the entranceway. Replacing the old wrought-iron canopy, the electric sign announced the theatre's name in glittering lights, shoring up the already existing vertical marquee. Beaming with fresh exuberance, the Seville's revamped façade broadcast a new stage in its cultural history.

Meanwhile, inside the auditorium, all efforts were made to rid the space of its flamboyant atmospheric decor, by this time considered too garish for contemporary tastes. The auditorium was given new seats and assumed a "subdued" modernist design, simple and unembellished.[582] The star-swept sky was covered with muted, pastel-hued paint.[583] The theatre's medieval-style furniture and Spanish sculptures were extricated, relocated to a monastery in Southern Quebec.[584] However, a few traces of the atmospheric décor remained visible, among them "crests, pillars, braided columns," the proscenium over the stage and above this, some original plasterwork.[585]

The Seville changed owners a number of times across this period, eventually returning to the authority of United Amusement.[586] Despite these changes, the theatre

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Danger Zone (1951). See: "Jimmy Dorsey Le Plus Grand Saxophoniste au Monde Dès Demain au Théâtre Séville." *La Patrie* [Montreal] 9 Jan. 1952: R13. Print.

[580] "New Seville Season Off to Good Start." *Gazette* [Montreal] 17 Sep. 1951: 14. Print.

[581] "Seville Changes Policy in Films."

[582] "New Seville Season."

[583] MacKinnon indicates that the management was looking to re-launch the Seville as a "modernized" facility. See: MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.

[584] Ibid. 10.

[585] Oscar Glas, a Belgian decorator, oversaw the postwar conversion of the interior to a "*moderne*" style. See: Lanken. *Montreal Movie Palaces* 131; photo and caption 132.

[586] By 1952, the Seville had changed hands again, switching from Universal Theatres to Theatre Amusement Co., and in 1953, it changed again to National Theatre Services. United Amusement eventually re-acquired the theatre in the mid-1950s. For the Seville's changing licensees between 1951 and 1954, see: "Theatre

found consistency as a site for live entertainment. A host of famous crooners appeared here through the late 1940s and 1950s: Frank Sinatra, Connie Francis, Sammy Davis Jr. Peggy Lee, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Sarah Vaughan, Harry Belafonte, and Nat 'King' Cole.[587] Circumstances would change, however, as the Seville increasingly competed with the nearby Forum, a hockey arena and home rink to the Montreal Canadians, which doubled as one of the city's largest concert venues.[588] Facing stiff competition from the Forum, the Seville would subsequently move its programming back to a focus on cinema in the 1960s. Across this period, it operated as a first-run movie house, specializing in a reserved seating policy.[589] A 1960 ad for a screening of *The Alamo (1960*), for instance, gives the Seville's patrons the choice between pre-ordering seats at the box office or via mail order, which, the management promises, will be "filled promptly."[590] The Seville's reserved seating option, wherein patrons could choose between daily matinees or evening shows, was tactical, representing an exclusive alternative to other cinema venues where seating was offered competitively.

Directory." *1951 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1951. Print. 103; "Theatre Directory."*1952-53 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1952. 105. Print. ; "Theatre Directory." *1953-54 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1953. 80. Print; "Theatre Directory." *1955-56 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Ed. Hye Bossin. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd., 1955: 77. Print. As of 1971-72, the Seville's licensee is listed as Famous Players, reflecting the company's takeover of United's holdings in 1959. See *Canadian Film Digest 1971-72 Yearbook of the Canadian Motion Picture Industry*. Toronto: Film Publications of Canada, Ltd. n. pag. Print.

[587] For a list of stars that previously performed at the Seville across the 1940s and 1950s, see: Heritage Montreal. *La Réutilisation des Anciennes Salles de Cinéma a Des Fins Culturelles*. Montreal: Heritage Montreal, 1989. Print. 73; and MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.

[588] An article in the *Gazette* also indicates that the Seville's eventual turn away from vaudeville and live performance was partly attributed to a conflict in 1954 between the American Federation of Musicians and the American Guild of Variety Artists, which prevented the booking of top performers from the United States. This conflict, per the local press, was as a major factor in "driving the Seville Theatre out of vaudeville." See: "On and Off the Record" *Gazette* [Montreal] 17 Nov. 1954: 4. Print.

[589] Heritage Montreal. *La Réutilisation* 73.

[590] *The Alamo*. Advertisement. *The Gazette* [Montreal] 8 Nov. 1960: 12. Print. By 1968, the Seville was advertising the option to reserve seats for large groups at special rates. See, for example: *Half a Sixpence*. Advertisement. *The Gazette* [Montreal] 17 Feb. 1968: 46. Print.

The Seville would undergo another major transition in the mid-1970s when United Amusement announced that it would be divesting itself of the movie palace.[591] At this point, the manager of Cinema V (formerly the Empress), another old movie palace in Montreal's West-End neighborhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grace, assumed ownership of the Seville.[592] Encouraged by the recent success of Cinema V, then operating as a repertory movie house, the owner reopened the Seville with similar programming, showing a "balanced mix" of recent hits, classics and genre films."[593]

Although the Seville was by this point lackluster in appearance, looking rundown and "rather dingy," it nonetheless ascended through the local ranks, becoming one of the most popular repertory houses in Montreal.[594] Every year that it remained open, the Seville screened *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), helping solidify this film's cult status. As an annual tradition, audiences turned out for midnight screenings, sporting costumes of *Rocky Horror* characters and lip-syncing along to the film.[595] The Seville also featured live shows. In 1984, for example, while continuing to operate as a repertory cinema, it provided a year-long run of the Tom Eyen comedy "Women Behind Bars," a stage production that already had successful runs in New York and Los Angeles.[596]

Uncertain Prospects: The Seville Closes for Business

When a new owner purchased the Seville in the mid-1980s, he initially agreed to continue the theatre's operation as a repertory cinema, keeping the existing management

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[591] Between 1971 and 1974, the seating at the Seville was reduced from 1148 to 922 places. See: *Canadian Film Digest 1971-72 Yearbook.* 93.
[592] "Seville to Show 'Rep' Films." Editorial. *Gazette* [Montreal] 16 Jun. 1976: 18. Print.
[593] "Seville Joins Repertory Ranks." Editorial. *Gazette* [Montreal] 29 Oct. 1976: 50. Print.
[594] MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.
[595] Bill Brownstein. "Film." *Gazette* [Montreal] 2 Nov. 1984: D3. Print.
[596] Thomas Schnurmacher. "The Seville to the Rescue." *Gazette* [Montreal] 6 Jun. 1984: B4. Print.

in place.[597] Despite profitable box office returns, however, the management was unable to offset an immense rent increase at four times the rate of the previous lease.[598] Devotees of the repertory cinema rallied together to forestall the theatre's closing, circulating a petition across the local community to "Save the Seville." At the final showing of *Rocky Horror*, one couple threatened to handcuff themselves to the theatre to protest its closing.[599] Despite the public outcry to keep the Seville in operation, the theatre folded. Initially, the owner's plans for the Seville were uncertain: "It may be sub-divided. It may continue as a rep house or may even become a dinner theatre. This area is undergoing a rapid resurgence and we are keeping all our options open."[600]

The Seville's new owner, it was later revealed, had purchased the building together with an old edifice next door. Looking to capitalize on prime downtown real estate, he intended to demolish both structures to develop the site for a new commercial project. Due to a downturn in the real estate market, however, his plans were suspended until such time that economic conditions improved. With no intention of selling or leasing the Seville, the owner left the theatre unused and unheated for the next four years.[601]

By the end of the 1980s, a disparity was forming between the Seville's historic and present-day identities, its erstwhile vitality versus its current disuse. Once a "source of bright lights, music and film," the theatre was now visibly "rotting" at the corner of

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[597] Schnurmacher B4.
[598] Heritage Montreal. *La Réutilisation* 73.
[599] Thomas Schnurmacher. "Call Goes Out to Save the Seville Rep House." *Gazette* [Montreal] 22 Oct. 1985: A13.
[600] David Stein was the name of the Seville's new owner, though the theatre was licensed to a numbered company. See: Schnurmacher, Thomas. "Seville Theatre Future Has Yet to be Decided." *Gazette* [Montreal] 19 Jul. 1985: C1. Print.
[601] The Seville suffered a suspicious fire during this period, after which point the building was more securely sealed to keep arsonists at bay. Otherwise, there was no work done to the building and it remained without heat or electricity. See: Heritage Montreal. *La Réutilisation* 73.

Chomedey and Lambert-Closse Streets.[602] While the façade remained largely intact, the windows were broken, nested with pigeons, and sections of the exterior brick wall were missing.[603] Furthermore, the adjoining sidewalk on Chomedey Street was barricaded. Erected to keep pedestrians at bay, the barrier was meant to protect passersby from the Seville's falling bricks.[604]

Even as the theatre showed signs of decay, recent memories of its former existence still echoed across the public sphere. "If you listen hard," one journalist mused, "you might just hear the sounds of the Rocky Horror Picture Show" upon passing the old theatre.[605] Visions of the Seville as a once-vibrant theatre permeated the urban imaginary. An early 1990s ad in *The Mirror*, for instance, offers readers the opportunity to purchase limited edition hand-painted colour prints of the Seville designed by a local artist (Fig. 2). With the tagline, "Remember the Seville?" the ad and the image it promotes are appealing to local collective memory. Depicting a past version of the theatre, a nocturnal scene, the image shows the Seville in its prime. It foregrounds a swollen mass of spectators stretching across the sidewalk, crowded under the Seville's illuminated marquees. The theatre seen here is materially intact, a robust attraction on Saint Catherine Street. Visualized as a popular social "node," it is portrayed as a known juncture in the city, identifiable by its large "concentrations" of people.[606]

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[602] Mark Lepage. "Let's Kick MSO Out of Place des Arts and Bring in Fine Young Cannibals." *The Gazette* [Montreal] 19 Oct. 1989: B4. Print.
[603] Marian Scott. "Booster of Seville; Use Abandoned Cinema for Live Shows." *Gazette* [Montreal] 6 Jul. 1990: A3. Print.
[604] Ibid.
[605] Ibid.
[606] Kevin Lynch contends that urban nodes "gain their importance from being the condensation of some use or physical character [such] as a street-corner hangout or an enclosed square." The Seville, one might note, also functions as a "landmark," per Lynch's definition, insofar as it offers a "point of reference" visible from a

Fig. 2. Illustrated print of the Seville, for purchase, depicting the theatre's former popularity. Hand Painted Colour Print of the Seville. Advertisement. *The Mirror*. 17 Jan. 1991. N. pag. Print.

This rendition of the theatre and its bustling streetscape is significant for it captures a foreign image of the Seville. Playing on the discrepancy between an idealized Seville of the past and the present-day Seville, it points toward a felt absence and sense of loss emerging at the site of this theatre. Already memorializing the Seville and the vibrant downtown it helped produce, it is tinged with nostalgic longing. Such nostalgic overtones betray a typically modern project, converting history into a shared "mythology."[607] But the kind of nostalgia expressed by this process has a double temporality: it is both "retrospective" and "prospective."[608] Svetlana Boym reminds us that nostalgic "fantasies" of

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distance, such as a building, sign, store, or mountain. See: Kevin Lynch. "The City Image and Its Element." *The City Reader*. Eds. Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout. London: Routledge, 2011. 499-509. Print. 502.

[607] Svetlana Boym argues that nostalgia can be destructive to authentic memory. The "nostalgic" subject, she argues, "desires to obliterate history" and replace it with an ideal mythology. She warns against this tendency, stating that the risk of nostalgia is that it can distort memory, confusing an actual place or experience with an idealized or "imaginary" one. See: Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books, 2001. Print. xv, xvi.

[608] Boym. xvi.

the past are "determined by the needs of the present, [and] have a direct impact on the realities of the future."[609] We cannot overlook that this process-- activating, jostling or crafting memories about a Seville of the past-- was a direct response to the neglected Seville of the present. Further, ideas about a spirited Seville, though cultivated in the present, would have implications for the future of this theatre. We may situate this image and its message within a growing urban discourse on the theatre's unexploited potential.

A Heritage Object

By this point, local preservation activists had started taking note of the Seville's condition as it materialized signs of neglect. Heritage Montreal, a group active in matters of urban conservation since the early 1970s, included the theatre in a formal study evaluating the city's historic movie theatres, rating their potential for re-use.[610] The Seville, the study concluded, represented one of the strongest contenders for rejuvenation.[611] With the addition of more comfortable seats and an expanded stage area, it argued, any impediment to the Seville's re-introduction as a venue for large-scale performing arts would be removed.[612] The report, significantly, also characterized the theatre in pointed terms: not just weary and neglected, the Seville, it claimed, had been "abandoned," even though

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[609] Ibid.
[610] Representatives from Montreal's *Commission d'Initiative et de Développement Culturels* (CUDEC) and the *Service de l'Habitation et du Développement Urbain* (SHDU) supervised the report together with a representative from the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. See: Heritage Montreal, *La Réutilisation*.
[611] Like many old movie palaces, the Seville was limited by a small stage originally built to accommodate vaudeville. While the stage was only 11.5 feet deep, small by modern theatre standards, an empty lot behind the theatre would have accommodated an expansion of the stage and backstage area by roughly 30 feet. In addition to this expansion, the study recommends replacing the auditorium's remaining 900 two-position seats, divided between the main level and balcony, with seating that adheres to modern safety codes and standards of comfort. It also suggests documenting the masonry at the rear of the theatre, embedded with remnants of the Methodist church the Seville had originally replaced. Ibid. 73.
[612] Ibid. 73.

technically, it remained under the authority of a private owner.[613]

In the early 1990s, the newly established Historic Theatres' Trust (hereafter referred to as "HTT"), a Montreal-based, non-profit group promoting the preservation and re-use of old theaters across Canada, set its sights on the ailing Seville. Members of the HTT worried that continued neglect of the structure would ensure its demolition. The group made a case for the recovery of the Seville, which it formalized in a report presented to the *Comité Consultatif de Montréal sur la Protection des Biens Culturels* (hereafter referred to as "CCMPBC"), the municipal advisory board reporting to government officials on issues of local heritage.[614]

As per the HTT, the Seville was a singular movie palace, maintaining its original (albeit rundown) *trompe l'oeil* façade and its old vertical marquee.[615] These features had historically bolstered the Seville's "street presence," which they believed could once again offer a "focal point and vitality to the area."[616] It is not surprising that the report focuses heavily on the Seville's exterior identity, paying little heed to the interior, given that the end goal was to have the theatre cited as a heritage object by the city under Quebec's Cultural Property Act. First, the purview of municipal citation extends only to the exterior of a structure, leaving the interior unprotected. Second, this concern for the Seville's exteriority spoke of the primary means by which anyone at the time could engage with the Seville: namely, from the outside. Having been closed to the public since 1985, the condition of its

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[613] Ibid. 73. MacKinnon, president of the Historic Theatres' Trust, would echo this characterization of the Seville in 1995, noting that it had been "abandoned" since the theatre closed its doors in the mid-1980s. See: MacKinnon. "The Seville."
[614] See: *The Seville Theatre* (1990).
[615] By this point, both the façade and the vertical marquee were the only remaining examples of their type in Montreal. At the time, the Seville was also the last-remaining theatre in the city with a *trompe l'oeil* façade. The Rivoli, the only other theatre that had shared this feature, was stripped of its facade and gutted for retail use. See: *The Seville Theatre (1990)* 1.
[616] Ibid. 1.

interior remained shrouded in mystery, subject to speculation and hearsay. And third, such an emphasis on the exterior value of the Seville intersected with growing concerns about the condition of the downtown area as a whole, then in the midst of economic decline.

Having preserved many of its surface features, the CCMPBC ultimately agreed that the Seville, upon re-use, could resume its historic role of invigorating this end of Saint Catherine Street while contributing to the "coherence of the neighbourhood as a whole" (HG transl.).[617] In 1990, the CCMPBC recommended the municipal citation of Seville, which became official in 1992.[618]

A Ruinous Downtown

Approaching its 350th anniversary, Montreal by the early 1990s had reportedly become a "city of holes."[619] The city was dotted with a large number of empty lots and abandoned construction projects, most of which were concentrated in the downtown area. At the time, Joseph Baker, an architecture professor at Laval University, described Montreal as a city in ruin, looking as though it had recently "escaped from a major war."[620]

A number of variables played a role in the declining downtown. Two economic recessions, first in the early 1980s and then again in the early 1990s, a corresponding

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[617] Montreal. Comité de Montréal sur la Protection des Biens Culturels. *Rapport Annuel.* Montreal: City of Montreal, 1990. Print. 29.
[618] "Montreal's Seville Theatre Threatened." *Bulletin* (June 1994): 2. Print.
[619] The York Cinema Complex and the Overdale Queen's Hotel were among the most notorious development projects abandoned during this period. For references to these activities by the local press, see, for example: Lewis Harris. "The City of Holes; Stalled Projects Disfigure Downtown Core." *Gazette* [Montreal] 24 Feb. 1990: A1. Print; Jeremy Searle. "Hell-Hole Pit." *Mirror* [Montreal] 14 Mar. 1991. n. pag. *Cinémas*, Tome 1. Héritage Montreal, Centre to Documentation, Montreal. Print; Marie-Claude Girard. "Les Cinémas: Une espèce Menacée." *La Presse* [Montreal] 7 Oct. 1995; n. pag. Print; Claude-V. Marsolais. " Le Patrimoine S'en va chez le Diable." *La Presse* [Montreal] 20 May. 1995: n. pag. Print; Peggy Curran. "Mayor Bourque is Taking on a New Role: Demolition Man." *Gazette* [Montreal] 19 May 1995: A3. Print.
[620] Marian Scott. "Conservationists Call on City to Save Perishing Architectural Heritage." *Gazette* [Montreal] 3 Jan. 1991: A3. Print.

slump in the real estate market, a "glut of office space" in the area and the migration of commercial activity out to the suburbs were among the factors reshaping Montreal's downtown core.[621] The surfeit of empty lots was attributable, largely, to overzealous developers who had demolished a number of buildings to make space for new construction projects, many of which remained on hold in the early 1990s. Developers and planners were biding their time, awaiting an upswing in market conditions. As such, more than twenty-five percent of downtown Montreal was riddled with empty lots.[622] These conditions were the subject of much discursive activity across this period, providing fodder for the local press.[623] The *Montreal Mirror* even included an irreverent "Best Vacant Lot" category in its annual "Best of Montreal" readers' poll, highlighting a number of sites downtown on Saint Catherine Street.[624]

With its proliferation of barren lots and building fragments, downtown Montreal was populated with an assortment of "untimely ruins." Rather than form over a long period of time, "untimely ruins," a term deployed by Nick Yablon, materialize and disappear quickly. Such formations occur as a result of "fast-acting" forces: natural disasters, war and, perhaps most relevant to this discussion, the "swift and destructive swings of the capitalist

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[621] Harris A1. Another trend reported on by the local press was the general movement of commercial activity out to the suburbs, evidenced by the emergence of large outlet retailers such as: Toys-R-Us, Wal-Mart, Future Shop and Reno-Depot. See, for example: Francoise Shalom. "Downtown Decay; Montreal's City Core is Looking a Little Shabby in Places These Days. But there are Bright Spots on Our Urban Landscape." *Gazette* [Montreal] 30 Jun. 1995: C1. Print.

[622] Jennifer Feinberg. "City in Decay." *The Downtown Experience* [Westmount] 24 Mar. 1994. Print.

[623] For assorted coverage of the deterioration of this end of Ste. Catherine Street, as well as the Seville's role in relation to this trend, see: Harris. "City of Holes"; Feinberg. "City in Decay"; Lepage. "Let's Kick MSO Out."; Jack Todd. "Sick at Heart: Montreal's Main Artery Rots Slowly in Squalor." *Gazette* [Montreal] 3 May 1991: A3. Print; Jack Todd. "On the Beaten Track; From Atwater to The Main. St. Catherine is a Sorry Sight." *Gazette* [Montreal] 30 May 1991: A3. Print; and Girard. "Les Cinémas."

[624] "Best Vacant Lot." *Mirror* [Montreal] 16 May 1996. n.p. Print. *Cinémas* Tome 4. Heritage Montreal, Documentation Centre, Montreal.

economy."[625] Montreal's downtown ruins were situated at the extreme end of the temporal spectrum, having formed prematurely. Encompassing new projects under construction, which were abandoned or delayed, premature ruins often result from "budget overruns, political controversies, or financial panics."[626] Such ruins are significant insofar as they develop in a manner "proceeding their own completion."[627] Robert Smithson, the first to theorize about premature ruination in his study of an unfinished highway project in Passaic, New Jersey, dubbed this phenomenon "ruins in reverse."[628] Smithson contends that such structures are unique insofar as they do not "fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built."[629] Leaving behind holes and gaps, these "monumental vacancies" function as "memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures."[630] Such forms are often greeted with contempt, breeding malaise as they upend the traditional trajectory whereby ruins form posthumously, after a building has outlived the purpose for which it was originally built.

Saint Catherine Street, across the early 1990s, harbored the bulk of the city's untimely ruins. As such, the street was frequently positioned as both a symptom and symbol of Montreal's ailing economic condition. Historically, Saint Catherine Street had signified the opposite; its flourishing commercial life served as a calling card for the city's booming culture and economy. One of the primary traffic arteries in Montreal's downtown urban core, Saint Catherine Street carries travelers over an 11-km stretch, from west to

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[625] Nick Yablon. *Untimely Ruins: An Archaeology of American Urban Modernity, 1819-1919*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. Print. 10.
[626] Ibid.
[627] Ibid. 12
[628] Robert Smithson. "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey." *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Ed. Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996: 68-74. Print. 72.
[629] Ibid.
[630] Ibid. 72.

east. Among the city's busiest commercial streets, it has, over much of the twentieth century, attracted hordes of commuters, consumers and pedestrians. In the early 1990s, however, anyone traveling along Saint Catherine Street would have noticed not only a profusion of vacant lots and unfinished construction projects, but a string of unoccupied stores, "À *Louer"* signs and shabby buildings.[631] Adding to the growing disreputability of the street was a string of "sex shops, peep-show arcades, strip clubs, video parlors and discount electronic stores" nestled between premature ruins. [632]

The Worst of the Lot

If Saint Catherine Street served as a barometer for the downtown as a whole, then the Seville was among its most telltale indices. Because of its location, the theatre was increasingly implicated in the decline of downtown Montreal. The troubles afflicting Saint Catherine Street seemed most dire in the section inhabited by the Seville, which in the early 1990s remained empty and barricaded.[633] The theatre was, for some locals, becoming an unwelcome blot, taking over the neighborhood. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle remark that this relationship— that is, between a ruin and its proximate environment— is not uncommon. Ruination, they note, often entails a "blurring of boundaries" as collapsing structures begin to "colonize their immediate surroundings."[634] As a result, the ruin is

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[631] One journalist, reporting on the conditions along Saint Catherine Street, describes the "squalid ugliness of the empty storefronts" and the appearance of "bombed-out blocks" that pedestrians would observe while walking from Guy to de Bleury Street. See: Todd. "Sick at Heart."
[632] Ibid.
[633] Todd. "On the Beaten Track."
[634] Ibid. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. "Introduction." *Ruins of Modernity*. Eds. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010: 1-14. Print. 8.

frequently "invoked in a critique of spatial organization of the modern world," sometimes eliciting antipathy. [635]

Linked to the "general deterioration" and financial distress afflicting this end of the street, the Seville rapidly became a scapegoat for those decrying everything wrong with the neighborhood.[636] In 1991, neighboring merchants and businesses complained about the "depressing" effect of the theatre, the deplorable condition it imparted to the area.[637] Together with the York cinema, an old Art Deco theatre sitting boarded up a few blocks east, the Seville was regularly blamed for its noxious effect on the wider streetscape. So grim was the situation, one journalist claimed, Montrealers could "smell the decay" of the Seville and the York, "polluting two entire city blocks."[638] City councilor Jeremy Searle echoed this charge, implicating both theatres in the production of a "St. Catherine Street blight."[639]

Alongside the public condemnation of the Seville were a number of informal proposals to re-use the theatre. The building, no longer envisioned as a potential movie theatre, was propped up as a candidate for alternative exploits. In the late 1980s, Michael Fish, co-founder of the urban preservation group, *Sauvons Montréal,* had informally suggested the old Seville might be integrated with a new plan for the neighboring Forum. Rather than move the Montreal Canadians from their long-time venue over to a new hockey

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[635] Ibid.
[636] Lepage. "Let's Kick MSO Out."
[637] Marian Scott. "Decaying theatre angers downtown merchants; But Status as Historic Monument Prevents its Demolition, Renovation." *The Gazette* {Montreal] 17 Jan. 1991: A8.
[638] Feinberg. "City in Decay."
[639] Ibid.

arena, he proposed the historic Forum be updated. The Seville, under this scheme, could serve an ancillary role, housing a new "Hockey Hall of Fame."[640]

In the early 1990s, another proposal came from an established local promoter, Donald Tarlton of Donald K. Donald Productions, who envisioned converting the Seville to a "showcase entertainment centre," replete with a recording studio and "an entertainment memorabilia display," honouring the theatre's history. [641] Vocal about his desire to purchase the Seville and to maintain what was left of its original architecture, Tarlton found support from heritage activists, city officials and urban planners.[642] Under Tarlton's stewardship, many believed, the Seville would find its best chance for revival. It could, furthermore, have the added effect of supporting the local economy, boosting surrounding businesses, and acting as an "anchor [for] the revitalization of the western end of St Catherine Street."[643]

"Demolition by Neglect"

The Seville, at this juncture, sat on the precipice of two possible outcomes: the theatre would either be re-used as a new commercial venue or it would succumb to dereliction, forcing its removal. Despite proposals to repurpose the theatre and public support in favour of its recovery, its owner had other plans.[644] Even after the theatre

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[640] Peggy Curran. "Is It Worth It? Old Seville Theatre Would Cost a Heap of Cash to Save." *Gazette* [Montreal] 12 May 1994: A3. Print. Fish later rescinded his suggestion, claiming that the theatre ought to be torn down.
[641] James Parry. "Donald K. Donald Wants to Buy Historic Seville on St. Catherine." *The Downtowner*. 15 Aug. 1990. n. pag. Print.
[642] For references to Donald Tarlton's interest in the Seville, see: *The Seville Theatre* (1990). That same year, city councilor Arnold Bennett indicates that the city would consider subsidizing a developer who is interested in reopening the theatre as a venue for live shows. See: Scott. "Booster of Seville."
[643] Scott. "Booster of Seville."
[644] The vice-president of (and spokesperson for) the company that owned the Seville would later cite the building's heritage status as a direct obstacle to development plans: "[…] had we known then [in 1985] that it

became a formally cited heritage object in 1992, it continued to sit unheated and ill-maintained, expediting its decline.

After the Seville's exterior wall on Chomedey Street partially collapsed in 1994, the owner was ordered by the city to conduct a series of repairs. In turn, the owner submitted an application to the city to have the theatre's municipal citation overturned.[645] The Seville, he argued, had become a threat to public safety: it was "dangerous, structurally unsound and beyond repair."[646] Removing the theatre's heritage credentials would give the owner the legal right to raze the Seville, permitting him to go forward with development plans.

The local preservation community protested. Heritage Montreal wrote to André Lavallé, a member of the city's Executive Committee, demanding intervention on behalf of the Seville. The theatre, they argued, was a casualty of "demolition by neglect" (HG transl.).[647] It was no secret, at this point, that the Seville had begun to lapse into ruination at the hands of a neglectful owner. Heritage activists and members of the local press increasingly deployed the term "demolition by neglect" to characterize the treatment of the Seville.[648] Broadly speaking, demolition by neglect is a process whereby proprietors purposefully abstain from maintaining a building, letting nature do the destructive work otherwise prohibited by human means. Ravaged by the effects of weather and attrition, a building becomes so unsightly and/or unsafe that demolition becomes its only option. This strategy may be employed for differing reasons, but is often associated with anxious

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would be declared a heritage site," he stated, "I can guarantee we would have never bought the building." See: Brownstein. "Solving Seville's Fate."

[645] "Montreal's Seville Theatre Protected." *Bulletin* (Fall 1994): 2. Print.

[646] Curran. "Is it Worth it?"

[647] Dinu Bumbaru. Letter to André Lavallée. 11 April 1994. TS. *Cinémas* Tome 3, Documentation Centre, Heritage Montreal.

[648] See, for example: Bumbaru. Letter to André Lavallée; MacKinnon, "The Seville"; Girard, "Les Cinémas"; and Curran, "Mayor Bourque."

developers looking to circumvent municipal by-laws or heritage legislation enforcing the maintenance of a building.

Both Heritage Montreal and the HTT spoke out in defense of the Seville, pointing toward the owner's own negligence as the source of its declining condition. As modern viewers watched the Seville deteriorate, many charged the owner with his complicity in this process, knowingly making himself an "accomplice of nature." [649] The owner had left the Seville unprotected, they asserted. Unable to "ward off rain, cold and pigeons," it had fallen into ruin.[650]

Modern Ruins

It is important to consider the unstable ontology of the Seville at this stage in its history. Can we say, in fairness, that the Seville was a ruin at this point in time, given that it remained both subject to future planning and tied to an owner? This line of inquiry begs a broader question concerning the fluid conceptual parameters of a ruin. What, specifically, is a modern ruin? On what grounds might we characterize the Seville of the early 1990s as such? Alternatively, if the Seville was not a ruin at this point in time, then what exactly was it?

Georg Simmel, in his oft-cited 1911 essay "*Die Ruine*" [The Ruin], once argued that the power of the ruin, the source of its appeal, lies in the balance it holds between conflicting impulses: the "felt counterplay" between nature and human agency. In the ruin, the viewer must sense that while human will has "led the building upward," its present decay is the product of the "brute, downward-dragging, corroding, crumbling power of

[649] Georg Simmel. "The Ruin." Trans. David Kettler. *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918*. Ed. Kurt H. Wolff. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1959. 259-266. Print. 261.
[650] Bumbaru. Letter to André Lavallée.

nature."[651] The same organic forces "which give a mountain its shape," he insisted, must now "do their work on old walls," molding a building to new form.[652] For Simmel, the abandoned ruin, the source of its vitality, is contingent upon this tension wherein organic forces gain the advantage and architecture appears "entirely as a product of nature."[653]

By contrast, when the viewer senses in the structure a degree of "human purposiveness," a building's decay evokes a different meaning. "Inhabited ruins," a term Simmel employs to encompass buildings still subject to human authority, are distinct insofar as they are *permitted* to decay. Thus, while ruination is indeed enacted by nature (we see evidence of "weathering, erosion, faulting, and the growth of vegetation"), the primary agent of destruction is human inaction. If the viewer senses in the ruin "the destruction by man," this deflates the "significance of the ruin as such."[654]

Although one could argue that all ruins are, in essence, a product of human inaction— abandonment presupposes one-time ownership and willful neglect— the distinction Simmel makes here is important. The longer a neglected building remains detached from human authority, the more time that elapses between abandonment and decay, the more it can become an object with autonomous meaning and value. That is, the more it can assume the ontology of a ruin as opposed to a derelict building. This distinction is important for, as Gilda Williams notes, the terms "ruin" and "derelict" while strongly related, elicit conflicting responses—"a ruin inspiring poetry, the other calling for demolition."[655]

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[651] Simmel 262.
[652] Ibid. 261.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Ibid. 260.
[655] Gilda Williams. "It Was What It Was: Modern Ruins." *Ruins: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Ed. Brian Dillon. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011. 94-99. Print. 94.

But the Seville was a particular case. Part of the difficulty with this theatre, as it stood in the early 1990s, was that it lacked historical distance from its past vocations, its human occupancy. Further, attending widespread speculation about its future use was the certainty that it would never "become ancient."[656] The Seville's deterioration was widely perceived as a passing phenomenon, a stopover en route to some other fate.[657] While the theatre looked increasingly like a ruin, it remained tethered to people and practices working to thwart its ruination. Uniting the disparate proposals advanced to preserve, restore or redevelop the Seville was a common stance against its ruination. Finally, as long as the Seville remained linked to a neglectful owner and subject to future planning, it could not be conceived as a ruin, certainly not as the kind that is permitted to stay.

While Simmel's discussion of abandoned and inhabited ruins is applicable here, it is also inflected by an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concept of the ruin, a Romantic view, which the Seville in some ways challenged. Simmel sought to understand the seductive affect, the "profound peace" that ruin-gazers experienced upon viewing classical or Gothic ruins formed by centuries of decay.[658] The Seville, anchored in a late twentieth-century context, may be situated within an entirely new species of ruins that would complicate this classical sensibility.

Many of the ruins that have appeared over the twentieth century have an accelerated temporality— Yablon and Smithson's aforementioned "untimely" ruins are an example of this. Rather than acquire a centuries-old patina of time, modern ruins often form and dissolve with relative swiftness. A frequently cited precursor to this phenomenon

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[656] Yablon 10-11.
[657] Ibid.
[658] Simmel 265.

is the subject of Walter Benjamin's unfinished tome: the nineteenth-century Paris Arcades. Grandiose monuments to consumerism and everyday leisure culture, the Arcades were by the early twentieth century already deserted and falling apart. As material detritus of the recent past, the Arcades, for Benjamin, represented critical potential. Their conspicuous decline, he speculated, might rouse the modern dweller out of complacency, shining a light on the destructive forces of modernity and capitalism, even more potent by the twentieth century.

Over the course of the twentieth century, industrial-commercial developments have produced a range of haunting material remains. To the numerous vacant movie palaces like the Seville we may add abandoned theme parks, drive-ins, shopping centers, office buildings, warehouses, factories, mills, subways and railroad stations. In many cases, contemporary encounters with such ruins are attended by vivid memories of their popular use. Benjamin's critical approach to the Paris Arcades has informed a number of writers and scholars who underline the revelatory potential of modern ruins, making visible the devastating cycles of modernization and so-called historical "progress." As such, modern ruins have become a source of interest not because of their poignant beauty or their "pleasurable decay" (though a case could be made for this as well), but for their potential to jar the modern viewer, forcing a culture's confrontation with its own propensity for waste, its failures and losses.[659] The Seville-in-decay, we might say, produced this discomforting effect, becoming a monument to capitalist destruction. Further, as the building continued to decay, its status as a site of urban memory, advocated by the heritage community, became more precarious.

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[659] Caitlin DeSilvey and Tim Edensor. "Reckoning With Ruins." *Progress in Human Geography 37*. 4 (2012): 465-485. Print. 466.

Entering the Seville

In the end, the owner's application to overturn the Seville's municipal citation was denied.[660] The city ruled to keep the Seville intact, enforcing the repairs necessary to the building's maintenance. The following year, however, the building was seized by the city due to a backlog of unpaid property taxes.[661] This incidentally permitted members of the HTT to gain access to the interior, which had remained hidden from public view since the Seville's closing in 1985.

For a decade, the Seville had been sitting unheated while damage to the roof had permitted water to seep into the building. Each year, liquid from spring-off had soaked the interior, pouring down the walls of the balcony and auditorium. Nonetheless, members of the HTT discovered that many of the old decorative features remained "salvageable."[662] While consistent dampness had over time caused the 1940s pastel paintwork to curl up, this exposed the original 1929 Spanish-themed murals preserved underneath. Other vestiges of Emmanuel Briffa's original atmospheric décor remained intact, including the proscenium arch over the stage area, traces of intricate "gold and silver leaf" paintwork under the balcony and "a delicate row of roses painted" around the balcony trim."[663] Additionally, the plaster "coats-of-arms, scallop shells, [and] twisted columns and urns" were in one piece.[664]

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[660] See: "Montreal's Seville Theatre Protected." The City Planning department had argued in favour of keeping the Seville.
[661] The building was acquired by the city on November 21, 1994. The municipal administration announced in 1995 that it would be allocating $52 066 to the conservation and protection of the theatre. See: "Conservation du Séville." *La Presse* [Montreal] 12 Sept. 1995: A4. Print.
[662] MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.
[663] Ibid. 10
[664] "Montreal's Seville Theatre Protected."

The Seville, by external appearances, had become an inhospitable structure, repelling onlookers and pedestrians. The collapsing exterior wall was now covered in aluminum siding, installed by the city to shield passersby.[665] Moreover, both of the Seville's signs-- the vertical marquee and horizontal attraction board-- were in need of repair.[666] These problems, together with the damaged roof and waterlogged interior, called for extensive restoration work. Regardless, the HTT maintained that the Seville ought to be preserved and re-used. The building, the inspection confirmed, was structurally "sound."[667]

Theatre Marquees and the Urban Night

After the owner settled his debt to the city and resumed ownership of the Seville in 1996, he set about dismantling one of the old marquees, the large horizontal attraction board overhanging the sidewalk. The decision to do so came on the order of the city after it deemed the sign unsafe to pedestrians passing below.[668] Public controversy erupted when Janet MacKinnon, the president of the HTT, intercepted workers removing the sign. By this point, they had already removed some of the panels of the marquee, leaving a gaping hole on one of its sides.[669]

A vocal advocate for the Seville, MacKinnon spoke out publicly against the owner's treatment of the building, contacting French and English media outlets. Without intervention from the city or the community, she asserted, the Seville would be lost, "a

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[665] MacKinnon. "The Seville" 10.
[666] Ibid.
[667] Ibid.
[668] Attributing this incident to miscommunication between municipal branches, Lanken claims that a department not technically responsible for urban heritage matters gave the order to remove the sign. See: "In Defense of the Seville: HTT Foundation Faces Lawsuit Over Efforts to Save the Seville Theatre." *Bulletin* (Summer 1998): 2-3. Print. 3.
[669] Marc Thibodeau. "La Marquise de Séville à été Sauvée de Justesse." *La Presse* 20 Oct. 1996: A3. Print. The photograph accompanying this article shows the partially dismantled horizontal attraction board missing several of its panels on the left hand side.

piece of history slipping quietly into oblivion"[670] (HG transl.). For MacKinnon, the marquee's removal was a direct breach of the building's official heritage status. To be precise, though, neither one of the marquees were considered part of the façade, the only part of the building under municipal jurisdiction. The owner, in turn, sued MacKinnon for public defamation.[671]

This was not the first time that the Seville's signage had come under siege. In the early 1990s, the city had ordered the removal of the vertical marquee on the grounds that it violated a bylaw prohibiting sites from publicizing services they did not provide. At the time, Donald Tarlton, the local promoter interested in purchasing the Seville, had said that he would only do so if the theatre's marquee remained intact. Removing the marquee, he argued, would "destroy the very nature and unique character of the building."[672] Echoing this sentiment, one city councilor stated that the removal of the marquee would be "an act of insanity, directly contradicting any campaign to improve the area and in effect irrevocably losing the fundamentally unique nature of the Seville."[673] The city, in the end, revoked its order, allowing the marquee to stay.

Theatre marquees were originally installed as eye-catching publicity. At an earlier point in the Seville's history, the large horizontal canopy had blazed a trail to the theatre while shielding patrons lined-up outside. Now dark and dilapidated, the canopy functioned mainly as a shelter to panhandlers and a refuge for pigeons. The vertical marquee, formerly declaring the theatre's name in bright, neon letters, was likewise faded and falling apart. Nonetheless, the presence of both marquees retained an important semiotic function,

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[670] Ibid.
[671] Lanken. "In Defense of the Seville." 2-3.
[672] Parry.
[673] Ibid.

rendering an increasingly vague structure intelligible to modern viewers. By virtue of the Seville's old signage, one could still discern an old movie palace amid the barricades and crumbling walls.

Historically, marquees like the Seville's have established themselves as part of the iconography of downtown streets across the United States and Canada. Paul Moore, in his discussion of Canadian movie palaces, suggests that the marquee has become a recognizable "cultural signifier."[674] Once a common sight on downtown main streets, rows of illuminated theatre marquees eventually came to represent the overall "experience of being downtown," particularly during nocturnal hours.[675] Even after the downtown area of many cities lost ground to suburban shopping malls and multiplex cinemas, and many movie palaces closed their doors, this old association persisted.[676]

With the rise of theatre preservation across North America, gaining widespread attention in Canada by the 1980s, theatre marquees were in some cities being exploited for their symbolic power. In 1985, John Grossman of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, discusses how old theatres and their illuminated marquees were serving to revive "moribund" downtowns:

> Rows of sodium-vapor lights are no match for the scintillating glow and cultural promise of a well-lit marquee. And when the show is over and the doors swing open, theatergoers themselves enact a nightly drama as they pour into the street and fan out—proof positive of a vibrant downtown.[677]

In Montreal, this type of "nightly drama" unfolding outside the urban movie palace

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[674] Paul Moore. "Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets." *Urban History Review* 32. 2 (Spring 2004): 3-20. Print. 16.
[675] Ibid.
[676] Ibid.
[677] John Grossman. "Encore for Spectacular Theaters." *Historic Preservation* (April 1985): 34+. Print. 36.

was scarcely seen by the early 1990s. Already by the mid-1970s, the city's downtown streets were appearing "dead at night" as fewer Montrealers were choosing to live, shop and socialize in the area.[678] One of the ways the city chose to offset this "suburban drain" was by investing in office expansion downtown across the 1970s and 1980s.[679] While the development of office space downtown counteracted financial challenges wrought by suburbanization, it also gave rise to a new problem. Gradually, the downtown had been turning into a diurnal zone—that is, an area more conducive to daytime activity than to nighttime activity. This was in part a consequence of many office workers vacating the area after business hours, leaving the downtown bereft of a human presence.[680] Across this period, the decreasing number of people choosing to live downtown further exasperated this issue. The downtown area was missing a sense of security often provided by residents and their "self-policing activities."[681]

The Seville and a Spruced-Up Downtown

While MacKinnon's intervention in 1996 temporarily halted work on the Seville's horizontal marquee, both it and the vertical marquee would eventually come down. In November of 1997, the owner of the Seville announced official plans to gut the theatre with

[678] After the postwar relocation of urban populations out to the suburbs, followed closely by retail and manufacturing activity, fewer people in Montreal were choosing to live or spend time in the downtown core. Subsequently, the area often appeared deserted at night. For an account of this phenomenon, see: Gabeline et al. *Montreal at the Crossroads*. Harvest House: Montreal, 1975. Print. 15
[679] Gunter Gad. "Downtown Montreal and Toronto: Distinct Places with Much in Common." *Canadian Journal of Regional Science* 22.1-2 (Spring-Summer 1999): 143-70. Print. 159.
[680] Norbert Schoenauer asserts that this phenomenon resulted in a "loss of vitality" in the downtown core after business hours. Norbert Schoenauer. "A Skyline for all Seasons." *Grassroots, Greystones & Glass Towers*: *Montreal Urban Issues and Architecture*. Ed. Bryan Demchinsky. Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1989. 19-28. 24.
[681] Ibid. 24.

a view to transforming the space into commercial and office space.[682] Both marquees, by this time, were slated for removal.[683] As a concession, the owner pledged to leave intact the original façade, the only part of the building protected by municipal jurisdiction.[684] The project was fully endorsed by the city, with Mayor Pierre Bourque donating "more than $83,000" to restore the facade.[685] From the perspective of the City, this was not just an investment in a building, but in the street as a whole. A restored façade would help to re-establish "the vitality of this commercial artery."[686]

This plan, it bears mentioning, belonged to a wider revitalization project already underway. The Bourque administration had set out in the mid-1990s to rescue Saint Catherine Street from degeneration. As part of this scheme, the city allocated three million dollars in grants to merchants along the street to spruce up their exteriors.[687] Between 1994 and 1997, the vacancy rate on Sainte Catherine Street, between Saint-Urbain and Guy streets, improved, dropping from nineteen percent to five percent.[688] While much of the street would begin to show signs of recovery, the section occupied by the Seville, west of Guy Street, continued to struggle. Still showing "many holes in the urban fabric," citizens largely avoided the area.[689] (HG transl.) Strewn with a growing number of empty,

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[682] Yann Pineau. "Le Cinéma Séville Abritera Magasins et Bureaux D'Ici Un An." *La Presse* 17 Nov. 1997: A7. Print ; Michelle Lalonde. "Seville to Reopen Doors: Interior to be Gutted to Make Room for Shops, Office Space." *Gazette* [Montreal] 13 Nov. 1997: A3. Print.
[683] A sketch of the new complex provided by the architects shows the upper part of the original façade and *trompe l'œil* windows intact. The old vertical and horizontal marquees are gone. Replacing the horizontal marquee is a new canopy overhanging the sidewalk while the main level is occupied by modern commercial boutiques. See: Pineau, Yann. "L'Ancien Cinéma Séville: Bureaux et Magasins." *La Presse* [Montreal] 21 Apr. 1998: A7. Print.
[684] Odile Tremblay. "La Mémoire en Berne." *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 22 Apr. 1998: B8. Print.
[685] Michael Mainville. "Seville Project Finally Getting Under Way." *Gazette* [Montreal] 5 Jul. 1999: A3.
[686] André Noël. "L'Ancien Cinéma Séville: Bureaux et Magasins. *La Presse* [Montreal] 21 Apr. 1998: A8.
[687] "Ste. Catherine St. Needs a Bigger Fix." Editorial. *Gazette* [Montreal] 22 Jun. 1995: B2.
[688] Marie-Claude Girard. "Des Pistes Pour Préserver les Vestiges du Séville." *La Presse* [Montreal] 16 Dec. 1997: A13. Print.
[689] Ibid.

ramshackle buildings, this phenomenon worsened with the eventual closing in 1996 of the Hockey Forum on Atwater, a behemoth located one block over from the Seville.

For some, commercial redevelopment plans for the Seville seemed like the best solution, ushering in long-awaited improvements to this section of the street.[690] The city administration and the owner of the building believed they had found an ideal compromise between heritage and commerce.[691] The Seville would be gutted, losing many of its historic features, but the restored façade would honour the building's history. To heritage activists, however, the Seville would be losing its singularity. Prior to its removal, the Seville's vertical marquee had been the last one of its kind remaining in Montreal. Further, the Seville was one of the few atmospheric movie palaces left in Canada, still bearing traces of its original interior decor. Stripped of its iconographic signage and distinct auditorium, the building, according to the heritage community, would be made irrelevant.

MacKinnon, at the time, insisted that once the Seville is gutted, "there is no value in its designation as a historic theatre."[692] The façade, she argued, is not enough to legitimize its importance for local heritage.[693] City councilor Helen Fotopulos supported MacKinnon's position, stating that the interior held the "beauty and the originality" of the structure."[694] Without its auditorium, the Seville would merely be "a façade, as opposed to something that is living and breathing."[695] Dinu Bumbaru of Heritage Montreal deemed the new office

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[690] Tremblay.
[691] The owner indicated at the time that the project was receiving widespread support from the community, given that the Seville had been an "eyesore for so long." See: Mainville.
[692] Michelle Lalonde. "Seville to Reopen Doors."
[693] Ibid.
[694] Michelle Lalonde. "A $2-millon Makeover for Seville: Interior of Dilapidated Movie House Will be Gutted for Stores and Office Space." *Gazette* [Montreal] 21 Apr. 1998: A3. Print.
[695] Ibid.

complex a "trivial" alternative to preserving the theatre in its entirety.[696] The local press also weighed in. *Le Devoir,* for example, suggested that developers would, in effect, be "putting memory at half-mast" (HG Transl.) The Seville would cease to be a "living" heritage monument, and instead become a *momento mori*, a mnemonic for the death of urban memory.

No longer conceived as a candidate for restoration, the Seville's story was re-framed by heritage discourse as a cautionary parable-- the theatre now leading by negative example. In 1998, for instance, a number of key players in Montreal's heritage and urban planning community participated in a live televised debate that centered on Montreal's old theatres. The roundtable included: Janet MacKinnon; city councilors Helen Fotopulos and Saulie Zadjel; Julie Gersovitz, an architect and member of Heritage Montreal; Sid Parkinson, the Executive Director of the St. Lawrence Institute; and Francois Lemay of the City's Permits and Inspections Department. The discussion reached a boiling point when MacKinnon positioned the Seville and its abandoned neighbour, the York, as examples of heritage mismanagement and strategic neglect. At this point, the head of the project to redevelop the Seville called in to the show, challenging the theatre's characterization as a neglected structure. He pointed instead to strict municipal regulations previously imposed upon the owners as a roadblock to the theatre's re-use.[697] The Seville's rhetorical power in this context illustrates one of the important functions performed by the theatre in the latter years of its existence, appropriated by preservationists at the service of other local theatres threatened by extinction. The narrative the Seville was now asked to carry was one of failure and loss, generating urgency around remaining cases of built heritage in

[696] Mainville.
[697] *Controversy: Culture of Old Theatres in Montreal*. Videotron Community Television, 1998. Videocassette.

Montreal.[698] It also helped to illuminate the tensions borne out by cases like the Seville while encouraging a public, "dialogic" model of architectural heritage management.[699]

The Seville and Abject Decay

Into the new millennium, many believed that the western end of Saint Catherine Street would be resuscitated with the opening of the AMC Pepsi Forum, a large commercial entertainment complex set to replace the old hockey arena removed in 1996. Prospective tenants for the Seville's new project wavered on their commitment to reserve space in the converted theatre, wanting to see first how the new Forum would fare.[700] After opening in 2001, the complex did not have the commercial success or the widespread revitalizing effect many had anticipated. Some attributed its lackluster debut to its uncomfortable proximity to the Seville and the bedraggled block it occupied.

The new complex also opened following a period of mutli- and megaplex cinema expansion, which had peaked at the end of the 1990s. A number of the city's movie theatres, many of which were multi-auditoria cinemas, were located along or in close

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[698] City Councilor Helen Fotopulos, in her defense of the Rialto theatre, asserted that "if you stand back and do nothing" to save Montreal's old movie theatres, "you wind up with Yorks and Sevilles." See: Michelle Lalonde. "Wanted: Starring Role for the Rialto." *Gazette* [Montreal] 18 Mar. 1998: A3.

[699] I here employ the term "dialogic" to invoke an idea of heritage construction—that is, the construction of heritage ideals, policies and practices—as a collaborative process between a variety of subjects. This, as opposed to a top-down approach where heritage is dictated solely by insitutions, official authorities or appointed experts. Rodney Harrison elsewhere calls for a "dialogic" model of heritage, envisioning a "relational" process forged by encounters between humans, non-humans (i.e. material things, buildings and places) and their surrounding environments. Stuart Hall similarly references a "dialogic" relationship with regard to the "activity of constructing a 'Heritage'" in Britain. Hall observes that, in recent years, heritage practices have given way to more communicative models based on open relationships between "cultural insitutions and their audiences." See: Rodney Harrison. "Dialogic Heritage and Sustainability." *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. 204-224; and Stuart Hall. "Whose Heritage? Unsettling 'The Heritage', Re-Imagining the Post-Nation." *The Heritage Reader*. Eds. Graham Fairclough, Rodney Harrison, John J. Jameson Jnr. and John Schofield. London and New York: 2008. 219-228. Print. 223.

[700] Brownstein. "Going for a Snip."

proximity to Saint Catherine Street.[701] One of the anticipated draws of the new Forum was its twenty-two-screen megaplex cinema, operated by AMC theatres.[702] Yet not far from its location were two more multiplexes on or near Saint Catherine Street: the six-screen Eaton Centre cinema, opened in 1990, and the thirteen-screen Paramount theatre, opened in 1999 in the old Simpson's department store.[703] Increasingly, it looked as though the market for film exhibition in the downtown area was not strong enough to sustain a surplus of screens. In 2000 and 2001, Cineplex Odeon closed a rash of downtown multiplexes, including the four-screen Complex Desjardins cinema, the three-screen Egyptian, the four-screen Faubourg theatre and the three-screen Atwater multiplex.

For reasons that remain murky, plans for the Seville remained suspended across the following decade. Four years after the commercial redevelopment of the Seville was announced, the building was put up for sale. In 2002, Claridge Properties Ltd., owned by Montreal's illustrious Bronfman family, purchased the Seville together with the remaining buildings on the north side of the block for $10 million. Claridge had plans to convert the block into an "environmentally-friendly, mixed use complex featuring retail space, offices, apartments and condominiums."[704] Meanwhile, the building continued to deteriorate, becoming increasingly associated with filth and abject decay. The owner of Marché Al Mizan, a few doors down from the Seville, complained about a swarm of flies that surrounded the "very dirty" theatre. An old barber located next door to the Seville

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[701] For a discussion of the cluster of cinemas on or near Ste Catherine Street that were in operation (or shut down) between 1998 and 2002, see Charles R. Acland. "Haunted Places: Montreal's Rue St. Catherine and its Cinema Spaces." *Screen* 44.2 (Summer 2003): 133-153. Print.
[702] Acland elsewhere offers a history and analysis of the North American expansion of megaplex cinemas from the mid-to late 1990s. See: Charles Acland. "'Here Come the Megaplexes." *Screen Traffic.* 107-129.
[703] Both of these mulitplex cinemas were operated by Famous Players.
[704] Andy Riga. "New Act for Old Seville? Boarded-Up Landmark is Undergoing Work to Reinforce its Façade, Suggesting the Owners Might be Preparing to Sell." *Gazette* [Montreal] 17 Jan. 2008: A3.

attributed his loss of clientele to the "Seville disaster" next door, so grimy that the "rats wouldn't even live there."[705] Wafting an odious smell, passersby allegedly crossed the street to avoid the structure.[706] The building, variously referred to as a "pigeon nest" or "pigeon shrine," was also oozing runoff from its roof. This liquid poured out of what local journalist Bill Brownstein described as a "disgusting, gaping hole" left over from the east wall's collapse in 1994.[707] "Once the venue for the cult epic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*," he lamented, "the Seville has become a horror show unto itself […]"[708]

In the interim, commercial activity continued to drain out of the street. As of March 2010, the section spanning from Atwater Avenue, outside the new Forum, to Chomedey Street where the Seville was located, bore a fifty-percent vacancy rate.[709] Meanwhile, further portions of the Seville were demolished. The building by this point consisted of a freestanding façade, behind which stood a few remaining brick pillars, the rear wall of the theatre and an otherwise bare lot. The façade of the Seville was propped up by steel beams, which slanted over the sidewalk. The beams, moreover, had been boarded over to create a dark tunnel largely bypassed by pedestrians.[710] The local press continued to level criticism at the decaying Seville. One journalist suggested that the theatre "in dying, [had] killed a

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[705] Brownstein. "Going For a Snip."
[706] Ibid.
[707] Ibid.
[708] Brownstein. "Solving Seville's Fate."
[709] There was a noted absence of commercial activity along the north side of Saint Catherine Street between Chomedey and Lambert-Closse Streets. See: Riga. "New Act For Old Seville?" In 2010, the Downtown Merchants Association reported that the stretch between Chomedey Street and Atwater Avenue was "50 percent vacant." See: Gyulai, Linda. "Of Blight and Renewal." *Gazette* [Montreal] 13 Mar. 2010 Gazette B1+. Print.
[710] Gyulai. "Of Blight and Renewal." B5.

whole block."[711] Another asserted that Saint Catherine Street would not thrive as long as it remained "haunted by the festering corpse" of the Seville.[712]

Terrain Vague

The remains of the Seville and the street it had contaminated were together forming what, in the parlance of urban planning, is sometimes referred to as an "urban void" or "dead zone." In 1995, Ignasi Solà-Morales observed a growing fascination among photographers with empty, abandoned or disused spaces. These areas form what he calls *terrain vague*, functioning as "interior islands."[713] That is, they are physically part of a city, but otherwise external to its dominant order, "strange places left outside the city's affective circuits and productive structures."[714] Largely "foreign to the urban system," their primary effect on citizens is, most frequently, estrangement. [715] Thus, they are commonly regarded as antithetical to commerce and citizenship, provoking an evacuation of life from the area.

While on the one hand these areas might be characterized by emptiness and incoherency, Solà-Morales, on the other hand, offers a different reading. Such areas, he suggests, and the loss of vitality they induce, can indeed be regarded as a "negative image" of the city. Yet, the formation of such spaces simultaneously evokes a sense of "expectancy." An urban void, he argues, is both an "absence" and yet may also be perceived "as promise,

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[711] "Project Will Halt Decay."
[712] See image caption. Gyulai, Linda. "A Neighborhood on the Verge of…Something." *Gazette* [Montreal] 13 Mar. 2010: A1. Print.
[713] Ignasi de Solà-Morales. "Terrain Vague." *Terrain Vague*: *Interstices at the Edge of Pale*. Eds. Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron. London: Routledge, 2014. 24-30. Print. 26.
[714] Ibid.
[715] Ibid.

the space of the possible, of expectation."[716] In this way, it is a city's "negative image," not just in terms of a "critique" but also, as a "possible alternative."[717]

The idea that such areas are "empty" or "dead" can likewise be misleading. Gil Doron, for instance, points out that urban voids often "look empty, and appear as ones which do not have any use (any more)."[718] However, within such areas, "an order of a different kind" can also take shape, particularly in those spaces occupied by architectural ruins. As a building collapses and the surrounding area becomes devoid of social and commercial life, this signifies a breakdown of order, a rupture with the dominant urban system. But this rupture can be productive, clearing the way for a new arrangement, bearing other signs of life. This, he suggests, can happen in the form of nature "reclaiming its place." It can also occur through the informal, ad hoc re-appropriation of discarded space.

From "Estrangement to Citizenship"

An evocative photograph documenting the Seville in 2010 features a close-up of one remaining brick pillar at the site of the former theatre. Inscribed with the words "Home Sweet Home," this image captures one of the final roles that the Seville would play on Montreal's urban stage: a refuge for the homeless community.[719] Both the Seville and the surrounding quarter were maligned for the growing number of panhandlers, squatters,

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[716] Ibid.
[717] Ibid.
[718] Gil Doron. "The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression." *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Policy, Action* 4.2 (2000): 247-263. Print. 248.
[719] The Seville became a source of renewed fascination in the final days of its existence. Its remains were captured and reported on by amateur photographers and bloggers in Montreal. See, for example: "Seville Theatre Feb 7th 2010." *Montreal Graffiti*. Blogger, 18 Feb. 2010. Web. 15 Jun. 2014. <http://www.mtlgraff.com/2010/02/seville-theatre-feb-7th-2010.html> ; and "Seville Theatre." *Urban-Lookout.com*. Wordpress, 26 Mar. 2007. Web. 15 Jun. 2014. <http://urban-lookout.com/2007/03/26/seville-theatre/>

vandals, drug addicts and prostitutes to which they increasingly played host.[720] As the Seville repelled commerce, thwarted pedestrian traffic and became an urban outlier, it became an enclave for people and practices on the social and economic fringes.[721]

The remains of the Seville and the desolate streetscape it helped create would not be permitted to endure over the long term. This final iteration of the Seville had taken shape while the theatre remained in limbo, resulting from the "suspension of new plans."[722] Because the theatre was always demarcated for future planning, in other words, its abject condition was transient.[723] Left to exist in its current state, the Seville and its empty environs would have undermined an ordered image of the city. Urban planners, city administrators, architects and developers were intent on taming the unruly Seville and the *terrain vague* it had engendered. Such rationalizing entities are what Solà-Morales describes as the "instruments of organization"; their work is to transform the "uncivilized into the cultivated, the fallow into the productive, the void into the built."[724]

In September 2010, Claridge joined forces with Prével, a real estate developer, in a $112 million project set to replace the remains of the Seville with a commercial-residential tower.[725] The material residues of the Seville were removed and construction on the site would begin shortly thereafter.[726] Promoters of the project claimed that the development

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[720] This social activity was often framed in disapproving terms. As a case in point, see: Gyulai. "Of Blight and Renewal." B4.
[721] Members of the homeless Inuit community were living in the wreckage of the Seville. See: Laurent Boursier. "Théâtre Séville: Drame Inuit." *Photodocumentaire*. Unblog, Aug. 2010. Web. 15 Jun. 2014. <http://photodoc.unblog.fr/theatre-seville-drame-inuit/>
[722] Doron 260.
[723] Ibid.
[724] Solà-Morales. 28.
[725] Lalonde. "Le 'Vert' Se Veut Abordable."
[726] Ibid.

would help wrangle the street into orderly form, reconstructing a "deconstructed" area.[727] [HG transl.] This section of Saint Catherine Street, no longer encumbered by the Seville, would be gradually integrated with the rest of the thriving downtown, moving from "estrangement into citizenship." [728] The disenfranchised community that had been drawn to the neighborhood would be displaced, part of what promoters called a "natural movement" of the area. As compensation, they pledged to donate more than half a million dollars to an organization combating homelessness.[729]

[727] Ibid.
[728] Solà-Morales 28.
[729] Lalonde. "Le 'Vert' Se Veut Abordable."

Chapter 7- Conclusion

One of the aims of this dissertation has been to fill in various shades of urban cultural life in Montreal as they are expressed by happenings in, around and attendant to its historic movie palaces. This project traverses wide-ranging territory. Crossing disciplines, it encompasses the history of film exhibition and reception, the history of film exhibition in Montreal, and the history of architectural preservation. By necessity, however, it remains circumscribed by a particular framework and scope. At times it pulls at but does not fully unravel related threads, both historical and contemporary. This matter of unfinished business, however, represents an opportunity. This project ultimately endeavors to generate knowledge, thinking and discussion around the late-modern movie palace, to highlight its relationship to other fields of inquiry. Unsettled issues and lingering questions, a few of which I will underline briefly here, can serve as guideposts to future study. This, I hope, will serve to nurture a larger scholarly enterprise, an ongoing effort to parse the dynamic relationship between space, culture and urban life.

Speaking the Language(s) of the City

One of the most salient yet underexplored aspects of everyday urban cultural life in Montreal is its multilingual identity. Montreal is known for its linguistic duality, a bilingual character forged by the city's historic coexistence of Francophone and Anglophone communities. This social composition is a legacy of Montreal's "double colonization," its initial settlement by French colonials and then seizure by British conquerors in 1760.[730]

[730] Sherry Simon. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006. 21.

Since then, fraught relations between French and English cultures, culminating in a period of intense social and political tumult across the 1960s and 1970s, have played a formative role in Montreal's urban cultural history.[731]

Divisions between French and English communities have, to some extent, been mapped onto the social geography of the city. Even now, Montreal is known as a city divided into predominantly French and English-speaking zones, the East and West ends, respectively. Over time, the historic boundaries marking out the social geography of the city have become more fluid and porous.[732] Nevertheless, vestiges of this historic spatial arrangement remain. Such socio-geographic divisions have become an "enduring aspect of the city's social, economic, and political landscape."[733]

Montreal is not simply home to French and English communities but to multiple ethnicities, languages and cultures. While the city experienced an influx of immigrant populations, a first wave in the early twentieth century and a second following the Second World War, only in the late-modern period has its cosmopolitan identity come to be celebrated.

We see examples of this in Montreal's first official heritage policy, published in 2005. The policy emphasizes the city's plurality and its correspondingly diverse heritage, carrying traces "from the First Nations, from French and British Society and from the

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[731] For a comprehensive history of the shifting linguistic, social and political relations between French and English communities in Montreal before, during and after the Quiet Revolution, refer to Marc Levine's work on the subject. Levine traces how public policy shifted in favour of the "reconquest" of an English-dominated city by the French-speaking majority. See: *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in Montreal*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010. Print.

[732] The city's linguistic geography had settled into this arrangement by the mid nineteenth century. Levine 11.

[733] Levine 11.

contributions of numerous immigrant groups."[734] To maintain its global standing as a "distinctive North American metropolis," a "showcase for the French-speaking world" and a "major continental and international centre of culture, finance, science and intellectual endeavor," it must prioritize its heritage, in all its diversity, amid new urban planning schemes.[735]

Language and inter-cultural relations serve as more than a mere backdrop to everyday life in Montreal; they actively shape urban citizenship in the city. One cannot venture across the city, navigating its sundry neighborhoods, without a felt sense of its "proximate differences."[736] How, then, can we read the local history of the movie palace against the complex linguistic and cultural relations that are part and parcel of Montreal's urban cultural history?

Sherry Simon's work on translation and the city offers a useful starting point. Redressing a tendency among studies of the city to favour its visual components, Simon compensates for what she calls the "deafness of much current urban theory."[737] She is concerned with the role of language as a shaping force in the city's cultural history. Rather than approach this topic through a paradigm of isolation and difference, though, upholding the "spectre of separateness" that has haunted the cultural imaginary of the city, she looks to provocative moments of overlap, to border crossings and passages.[738]

In her book *Translating Montreal*, for example, Simon charts the physical journeys of poets, journalists, novelists and autobiographers across town, exploring their ventures into

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[734] *Heritage Policy*. Montreal: Ville de Montréal, 2005. 1-97. *Ville de Montreal, Urban Heritage.* Web. 4 Jul. 2014. 9.
[735] Ibid. 9.
[736] Simon. *Translating Montreal*. 18.
[737] Sherry Simon. *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. Print. 8.
[738] Simon. *Translating Montreal*. 4

the city's different linguistic zones. These cross-city journeys, she demonstrates, were highly productive, forming the creative basis of seminal works of literature. Simon's focus on linguistic intersections provides a revealing lens through which to understand urban citizenship on a lived basis in Montreal. She does not seek to deny the existence of historic boundaries and divisions, nor does she make a case for their dissolution. Instead, her work points us toward the social realities of living in Montreal, a place where different languages collide in space.

Simon's approach to urban space here and elsewhere in her scholarship has specific implications for this dissertation's central object: the movie palace. In particular, the idea that certain spaces in the city both express and facilitate the circulation and flow of languages seems apt. Urban sites of cultural negotiation are "contact zones," threshold spaces where the convergence of language finds "particular intensity."[739] Such points can assume many forms, most audibly in public areas of social interaction, such as the "noisy streets of polyglot neighborhoods."[740] Yet in other instances, these zones and the interactions they facilitate are more unassuming and thus harder to trace. Such spaces hold quieter exchanges and carry "hidden pockets of dialogue."[741] It is in this latter context that we might situate the movie palace.[742]

Movie palaces, this dissertation has shown, have long been enmeshed in Montreal's cultural landscape: as vaudeville houses, as first- and second-run movie theatres, as repertory cinemas, as repurposed spaces for live spectacle and as heritage sites—to name a

[739] Simon. *Cities in Translation* 1.
[740] Ibid.
[741] Ibid. 1-2.
[742] Simon, in fact, names theatres alongside publishing houses, translation agencies and software research firms as key examples. Ibid. 2.

few of the identities I unpack in the previous chapters. Across these variable identities, movie palaces have found some measure of consistency as sites of communal activity, remaining intimately bound up in the city's social dynamics. What remains less clear, however, is the degree to which movie palaces have historically reinforced or cut across linguistic schisms in the city. How, for instance, have movie palaces functioned as enclaves, that is, as social milieus catering to specific linguistic communities? While a theatre might have been inclusive to one language community, did this function at the exclusion of others? Alternatively, in what way have movie palaces functioned as "contact zones," bringing together otherwise disparate linguistic communities?

The movie palace's contemporary associations with local cultural history and urban memory further point us toward the issue of linguistic relations. If, as Simon argues, Montreal's cultural history is inextricable from a history of language relations in the city, then it follows that the movie palace's retention, revaluation and re-use must be considered in relation to language as well.

Based on my research, I have gleaned some sense of the active role assumed by local movie palaces in the broader field of language relations in Montreal across the late-modern period. I have made passing reference, for example, to the Rialto's operation as a Greek cinema in the 1970s, catering to the surrounding Hellenic community. At later points in this theatre's history, it offered a bilingual repertory cinema policy, catering to both French and English moviegoers. Most recently, the Rialto has offered mixed programming and performances, both French and English content, although the 2010 community meeting to discuss the future of the theatre was conducted entirely in French. The shifting linguistic

dispositions of the theatre, at the very least, tell us that the city's languages have inflected the history of this space.

Consider another example, the Outremont theatre, which I discuss briefly in chapter 5. The Outremont, one might recall, is the theatre whose threatened status and subsequent preservation spurred a citywide theatre preservation movement, which would centre on a number of locations, including the Rialto. The theatre is located in the upscale borough of Outremont, an area that is predominantly though not exclusively French-speaking.[743] The theatre, after being acquired by the municipality of Outremont in the late 1990s, underwent a restoration project. It was reopened as a performing arts venue in 2001 and has since remained an anchor for neighboring businesses along Bernard Avenue.[744] Part of its mission is to encourage "cultural diversity by showing and promoting works from the various communities that make up Montreal."[745]

Across its history, however, the Outremont has maintained an important role with respect to Francophone culture, although this function is scarcely mentioned in histories of the theatre.[746] Following the widespread decline of movie palaces in the 1960s, the Outremont was re-launched in the early 1970s as an English-language repertory cinema. In retrospect, this seems like an odd decision, given the French-speaking disposition of the surrounding area. Reportedly, Roland Smith, its owner, had introduced an Anglo-centered

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[743] The area also consists of other linguistic minorities, most notably a large segment of the Hasidic Jewish community whose spoken language is primarily Yiddish. For a discussion of the sometimes-tense relations between Outremont's Franco-Quebecois and Hasidic Jewish residents, see: Stoker, Valeria. "Drawing the Line: Hasidic Jews, Eruvim, and the Public Space of Outremont." *History of Religions* 43. 1 (August 2003): 18-49. Print. 20.

[744] In 2010, the Outremont was turned over to *La Corporation du Theatre Outremont*, which oversees all operations at the theatre and works collaboratively with the Outremont borough city council.

[745] "History." *Theatre Outremont*. N.p. N.d. Web. 15 Oct 2014. <http://www.theatreoutremont.ca/en/about-us/history-mission/>

[746] See, for example, Dane Lanken's detailed history of the Outremont, which does not mention its emphasis on French-language programming during its operation as a repertory cinema: *Montreal Movie Palaces* 134-137.

policy, showing mostly "English or English versions" of cinema, based on a general assumption that Montreal boasted a more devout, English-speaking audience for repertory cinema at the time.[747] A few years after opening in 1970, however, Smith switched the policy to French-language fare. After this point, only a third of the films featured English subtitles.[748] Framing the Outremont's policy change as a direct response to the desires of his patrons, Smith would later reason that he had given a "quickly-growing francophone audience what it wanted."[749] Reflecting on the success of this earlier policy change, Smith in 1976 connected the emergence of a francophone audience for repertory cinema to a palpable identity shift among French-speaking *Québécoises*. For Smith, the formation of an audience of French-language cinephiles directly corresponded to the growth of a more vigorous Quebecois national identity across the 1960s and 1970s. "The French Quebecer has a new identity now," Smith stated, one that had ossified with the Parti Québécois' rise to power in the 1976 provincial election.[750] For Smith, the Outremont theatre was tied to broader political concerns, namely, the preservation and affirmation of French language and culture. For the French-speaking community, the theatre would serve as a vessel through which to exercise solidarity with a wider French nationalist project, to assert their position concerning "*la question linguistique*."[751]

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[747] Dane Lanken. "Humphrey Bogart: One of Film's Favorite Tough Guys Fills the Bill as a New Repertory Cinema Makes its Debut." *Gazette* [Montreal] 3 Dec. 1976: 31**.** Print.
[748] Ibid.
[749] Julia Maskoulis. '"Montreal's 'Rep' Cinemas: Most of Them Are Doing Fine." *Gazette* [Montreal] 19 Mar. 1977: 39. Print.
[750] Ibid. The Parti Quebecois (PQ) is a French nationalist political party, which, in the late 1970s, advocated for Québec's sovereignty from the remainder of Canada.
[751] This term broadly invokes the preservation and affirmation of French language and culture in Quebec that was central to the Quebec Independence movement of the 1960s and 1970s. See how the term is employed by Levine, for example: *The Reconquest of Montreal* 2.

Smith did not neglect Montreal's English-speaking demographic, however. A few years after opening the Outremont, he leased the Imperial theatre downtown from then-owner Cinema International, headed by Jacques Patry. Following the subdivision of the Imperial into two smaller halls, Ciné-Centre I and II, Smith reopened the venue in 1974 as an English-language repertory cinema, which I previously discussed in Chapter 4.[752] Smith, whom the Anglophone local press described as "a francophone despite the name," indicated that the Ciné-Centre would, like the Outremont, offer repertory programming and occasional live concerts. The Ciné-Centre, however, would appeal to Montreal's English-speaking residents. It was, per Smith, intended to serve as "a cultural centre for Anglophone Montrealers such as the Outremont has become for the Francophone side."[753] In the words of one French journalist, the Ciné-Centre would be the Outremont's English-speaking "alter ego."[754]

When the Ciné-Centre failed in its opening year to attract a level of business on par with the Outremont, forcing Smith to cede the rest of his lease to France-Films, some blamed Anglophone culture in general. Patry spoke of a disengaged English-speaking population. Unlike the French-speaking demographic, Anglophones by the late 1970s were reportedly turning out in low numbers at local movie theatres. The Ciné-Centre's English-language policy failed, Patry stated, simply because "the English do not go to movies."[755] Don Drisdell, the vice-president and general manager of United Theatres, the Quebec arm of Famous Players Corporation, characterized Patry's assertion as an oversimplification of the matter. But he conceded that there was some truth to his statement, noting that

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[752] Maskoulis.
[753] Lanken. "Humphrey Bogart."
[754] Pierre Pageau. "Le Miracle de l'Impérial 2." *Le Devoir* [Montreal] 4 May 2013: 10. Print.
[755] Maskoulis.

approximately eighty percent of the theatre chain's audiences were French, "even for English movies."[756] At the time, the majority of United's cinemas were located within or close to the Montreal city centre, with the exception of two theatres in the West Island: the Fairview cinema in Pointe-Claire and the Dorval cinema in Dorval.

If, as local film exhibitors and industry magnates had suggested, large portions of the city's English-speaking population were not attending the movies, why was this the case? One wonders, for instance, if this might have had something to do with the flight of Anglophone Montrealers to the newly formed West Island suburbs across the 1960s, which held seventy percent of metropolitan English speakers. This would have relocated the city's English population away from the city centre where a number of repertory cinemas were concentrated.[757]

Such claims regarding the differing moviegoing habits of French and English audiences, moreover, seemed to mirror statements made by political discourse at the time, emphasizing divisions between the two cultures. It also reinforced an idea of socio-geographic separation of French and English communities in Montreal, the image of "two solitudes" coexisting in the city.[758] Smith's conversion of two separate movie palaces, one repertory cinema for Francophones and the other for Anglophones, spoke of a need to have separate spaces accommodating rigid social schisms existing beyond the theatres' walls.

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[756] Ibid.

[757] Although a number of Francophone suburbs emerged during this period, both on the eastern part of the island (including Anjou, Montréal-Nord and Saint Léonard) and "off-island" (Laval and Longueil on the North and South Shores, respectively), there nonetheless remained a higher concentration of Francophones than Anglophones residing in the city core. Levine's research indicates that "45 percent of the metropolitan area's Francophones lived in the city of Montreal in 1971, compared to only 30 percent of the region's Anglophones." Levine 13.

[758] Levine argues that while the city's geographical separation of French and English communities has often been overstated, at the time it was enough to "help keep potentially conflict-producing linguistic contacts to a minimum." Ibid.

What, then, can we make of another downtown movie-palace-turned-repertory cinema, the Seville, which similarly opened in 1976 but offered a bilingual policy? Its goal, the management stated, was not to privilege one segment of the population over another, but to capture as wide an audience as possible.[759] Ostensibly, one of the motives underlying the bilingual policy was financial. Capturing a larger demographic would mean attracting a higher number of admissions. If, as Patry and Drisdell suggested, there were fewer English-speakers going to the movies, it would make good economic sense to solicit both language constituencies. But significantly, this programming policy also promoted a social space that would, at least in theory, bring French and English cultures together at a time when their relationship had been particularly fraught. The bilingual policy served as an opportunity for cultural and linguistic convergence, which on its own suggests that the rhetoric of Franco-Anglo division in circulation across the 1960s and 1970s might not have corresponded to everyday life in Montreal.

What this brief snapshot of the Outremont, Ciné-Centre (Imperial) and the Seville demonstrates is that language has indeed played a role in the historic development of these theatres, but the particularities of this role remain unclear. The function of specific theatres in relation to language politics in Montreal, past or present, might offer fertile ground for an ancillary study of the movie palace.

We might extend this question of language, moreover, to the preservation of Montreal's architectural heritage, generally. Shortly after assembling into an official heritage organization in the early 1970s, *Sauvons Montréal* for example indicated that one of its goals would be to elicit more support and participation from the eastern end of the

[759] Maskoulis.

city, historically codified as predominantly French-speaking. It might be worthwhile to pursue this question further, to consider if and how the city's linguistic divisions and its social geography have affected the management of local heritage.

The Movie Palace of the Future

This dissertation offers a cultural history of the late-modern movie palace and an analysis of the shifting meaning and value it has been ascribed over time. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 centre most heavily on telling the story of the movie palace's postwar decline and the local responses to this decline over subsequent decades. While it brings the reader up to date, indicating where individual case studies like the Rialto and the Seville have ended up circa 2015, the bulk of this research concentrates on the latter half of the twentieth century-- from the early 1950s to the late 1990s. The twenty-first-century role of the city's remaining movie palaces thus invites further research and analysis.

As chapters 5 and 6 have shown, while much work has been done in Montreal to salvage the city's remaining theatres, to designate buildings as heritage objects, this step has often been complicated by the ensuing problem of a space's contemporary use and economic viability. Movie palaces cannot merely exist as fossilized remains of the past; to prosper, they must engage with and respond to the exigencies of the present. It remains to be seen how successful existing reanimation projects will be over the long term. If, for example, the Rialto is to encounter financial difficulty at a future juncture, then previous decisions about its heritage status may once again be called into question. Indeed, there exists a false assumption that heritage credentials offer immunity from revision or reproach, that they confer essential meaning and value upon an object. Rodney Harrison,

for example, suggests that once sites, objects, places are "transformed into heritage" many believe that "they will very rarely revert or transform into something else."[760] In actuality, however, an official catalogue of heritage, an historic register, "comes to act as a sort of holding pen, a limbo."[761]

We have seen in cases like the Seville that official designation and the "holding pen" of a heritage register is no guarantee of permanence. Much can be learned from the destruction of buildings like the Seville. We often focus heavily on the act of preservation, what we choose to remember and maintain over time, but less attention to what we remove or erase. As chapter 6 explores, decisions concerning what should or should not be removed from the urban landscape often corresponds to the dominant ideologies, cultural sensibilities or regimes of power in place at the time. The removal of something formerly conferred with heritage value can signal a wider change to the social order.

Heritage: An Evolving Concept

While the movie palace is a constantly evolving object, so too is the concept of heritage. Across the global community, "heritage" has become an all-encompassing idea, broadened to the point where "almost anything could be defined" as such.[762] Most recently, it has moved away from an emphasis on material objects and a "concern with 'things'" to make room for intangible aspects of culture: traditions, customs, practices, rituals and the "cultural spaces'" in which these unfold.[763]

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[760] Rodney Harrison. *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge, 2013. Print. 168
[761] Ibid. 168
[762] Ibid. 115.
[763] Ibid.

Montreal's first official heritage policy employs a similarly expansive definition of heritage, citing the international tenets outlined by UNESCO as a primary influence.[764] As such, the policy applies to all forms of heritage-- "natural, tangible and intangible cultural heritage."[765] The conservation and protection of local heritage, in all its multifariousness, has a united purpose: to keep Montreal's "collective memory alive."[766] Heritage, the policy asserts, has an impact on "all Montrealers."[767] As such, the city's heritage is a "common responsibility" assumed by city officials and local residents who must work together to safeguard a "fragile community resource." [768] Heritage, it suggests, can serve as a "unifying force," bringing Montrealers together in a shared concern for preserving the past in service of the present and future.[769]

The effects of this leaning toward an expanding concept of heritage, one that accounts for cultural plurality, have yet to be seen. Harrison argues that our culture is headed toward a "crisis of accumulation" where too many things are cited, classified, designated, and added to historic registers. The result, he warns, is that we may someday find ourselves beleaguered by mass repositories of heritage artifacts. We wind up making heritage so encompassing that it loses its exceptionality, its sense of rarity. Heritage is thereby rendered meaningless. As a curative, Harrison proposes that societies "move past the "dominant 'salvage' paradigm" to focus on heritage as an active production of the past in the present, which must meet the needs of contemporary societies."[770] This process, he

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[764] *Heritage Policy* 31.
[765] *Ibid.*
[766] *Ibid.* 36.
[767] *Ibid.* 9.
[768] *Ibid.*
[769] *Ibid.* 3.
[770] Harrison 167.

notes, must be revised constantly. It does not presume that heritage decisions of the past, objects conferred with value, are beyond revision.

Some Parting Thoughts

Across the chapters of this dissertation, I have situated the movie palace within a cultural history of Montreal. This study has framed the late-modern movie palace as an object that actively participated in the production of urban culture. It has argued that, more recently, this structure has become an object of preservation, either by official classification or merely by discursive association. And it has shown that this redefinition, rather than resolve the matter of the movie palace's ambiguous identity, has instead given rise to further challenges.

Montreal's movie palaces have come to be associated with heritage and urban memory. Individual movie palaces like the Rialto, for example, have been officially designated as emblems of collective memory. What remains to be seen is the future role that local movie palaces will play as city planning moves forward, as cultural values shift, and as the concept of heritage continues to evolve.

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