

## Holt Renfrew: Showplace of a Nation

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Thirteen hundred Sherbrooke Street West, located in the city of Montreal, Quebec, is the current site of Holt Renfrew. I will begin with an architectural analysis of the Holt Renfrew site and illustrate that it fits within the Art Deco style of Streamline Modern. I will discuss the distinctiveness of this style including influence and what the style was reaching for metaphorically. From here, I will describe the particularities of Sherbrooke Street and offer a brief history of its development, into which I will place, the Holt Renfrew site.

Holt Renfrew is a high-end department store that first started out as a fur trading company. Its main store is in Toronto, Ontario. Holt Renfrew was conceived of as a “showplace of the nation”<sup>1</sup>, which was something that it strove for throughout its history and continues to this day. Architect Ken London voiced the desire for Holt Renfrew to be thought of as such in 1994 but Holt Renfrew’s 1937 construction suggests that the desire for it to be a showplace of the nation was in the plans since the very beginning. The building is an example of modern architecture, which was used towards nationalistic and utopian purposes reinforcing the idea that Ken London’s 1994 statement of Holt Renfrew as the showplace of a nation was in the thoughts of its architects, designers and corporate officials, albeit it was not explicitly expressed with as much clarity at the time. The location of the building, the style of architecture as well as the reinforcement of this purpose by corporate members all worked in collaboration to uphold this ideal. Holt Renfrew has come to be a capitalist spectacle where consumerist ideals outweigh any historical elements. Renovations for this site have been informed by marketing and consumerist strategies

rather than the desire to keep historically significant architecture intact. I would like to examine marketing strategies that are used in commercial architecture and demonstrate how these are integral to Holt Renfrew's how the designers of Holt Renfrew envisioned the store and subsequently projection this utopian vision to the public at large.

I will refer to Elizabeth Grosz and the idea of utopia to further develop my analysis of Holt Renfrew's ambitions. The term utopia can be vague and imply a variety of meanings and in this particular case; it will be nuanced to mean a type of idealistic society represented by a select view to convey ideas of nationhood. I will also turn to Jean Baudrillard and his discussion of Simulacra and Simulations and refer to his discussions on Disneyland to see how Holt Renfrew is a type of simulacra and hyperreal.

### **Holt Renfrew: 1937**

Architects Ross and Macdonald who received a medal of honor from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada the following year built the Holt Renfrew building in 1937. The Holt Renfrew building is an example of Streamline Moderne, which was influenced by the modern aerodynamic designs emerging from advancing technologies in aviation, ballistics, and other fields requiring high velocity. The shapes resulting from scientifically applied aerodynamic principles can be seen in the Holt Renfrew building especially when looking at the window forms and their variations, creating a visual sense of verticality and a delineation of space. We can see this effect in the treatment of both the Rue de la Montagne and Sherbrooke Street façades. The two façades are connected by a four story curved mass. This corner treatment allows for a unique display area but also softens the transition for the pedestrian rounding the corner.<sup>2</sup>

## **Capitalist Spectacle**

Jean Baudrillard is a canonical figure for his exploration of the capitalist spectacle. He states, Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle.<sup>3</sup>

According to Baudrillard, the hyperreal has come to replace the real life itself. The hyperreal refers to not only Disneyland and amusement parks but also other places and venues of consumer consumption such as malls. Television and other media outlets, with their projected ideal worlds, are also sites where simulations prevail. This is why he states that Los Angeles and the America surrounding it is no longer real, they are simulacra and the individuals inhabiting these places can no longer differentiate between real and representation of the real because once these spectacular simulations proliferate, they begin to refer to themselves.

Holt Renfrew is a site that Baudrillard would refer to as a simulacrum where an ideal world is presented to passerby and those that swing through the large doors. It is not just the site itself that is the sole simulation but rather one of many. Magazines and other print media, television, fashion shows especially all present spectacles that are simulations of real life. They present a bombardement of spectacles on a daily basis of an ideal life that can seemingly be purchased but in the end is never achievable because it is constantly reinventing and changing in order to provide the spectacle for the masses that are ready to absorb it.

## **Elizabeth Grosz and Utopia**

Looking to Elizabeth Grosz's essay *The Time of Architecture*, I will turn specifically to her outlook on utopia and the future. In this particular paper, Grosz takes on the subject of time while using architecture as an object of study. While discussing utopia, I would like to draw out some key characteristics of this text. Grosz remarks that, "the utopic is not that which can be planned and built, for that is to imply that it is already an abstract possibility that merely requires a mode of realization."<sup>4</sup> She argues that utopia is something that is impossible to achieve and because it has never happened, it does not exist in time and space. Towards the end of her paper Grosz states, "Utopias are precisely not about consensus but about the enactment of ideals of the privileged, ideals of the government by the few of the many, ideals not derived from consensus but designed to produce or enforce it."<sup>5</sup> This view illustrates the role that Holt Renfrew has taken on for itself. I will position Holt Renfrew as having a privileged status and their ideals transfer to the community at large despite the fact that it may not suit the desires of such a community. Holt Renfrew does so in such a way that the ideals filter through until a quasi-consensus is achieved long enough for them to push through renovation ideas.

Holt Renfrew takes on the role of a few. It is the few that control its day-to-day business and the few that take advantage of the services it has to offer. Nevertheless, Holt Renfrew manages to grow, not only as an economic power but also as an architectural structure. The privileged are enacting their ideals that are not necessarily representative of the larger group, which in this case may be opposed to some of the proposed projects that have come up over the years. This majority is encouraged to think that what the privileged few desire is also, what they desire. Since Holt Renfrew positions itself by its corporate members as the 'showplace of the nation', they are putting an idealized image forth.

## **Nationalism**

Jody Berland discusses both modernism and nationalism in her essay, “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis.” She distinguishes the use of modernism in her inquiry to “refer to a strategic representation and consolidation of specific values, dispositions and administrative processes that constitutes postwar cultural discourse in English Canada”.<sup>6</sup> Postwar nationalism was on the rise in Canada but “to join the partnership of modern nations Canada had to learn to advertise its own progressive modernity”.<sup>7</sup> Art was something that Canada could use to define itself as a nation but it was necessary for the art to be grounded in materiality and connected to space. It turned out that, “Modernism thereby served the apparently antagonistic but actually complementary goals of nationalism and internationalism which motivated and defined Canada as an emergent nation of the postwar period”.<sup>8</sup> Art was able to serve the dual role of representing Canada to itself but also to other nations.

### **Expo ‘67**

Another example of a site or conglomeration of the presentation of nationhood is Expo ’67 which pushed the ‘showplace of a nation’ intent to an extreme level. Randal Arthur Rogers examined the idea of nationhood in relation to Expo ’67. He points out an initial goal for Expo ’67 was for it to “be a microcosm of the world in which one sought knowledge for the future and where the mode of experience was touristic.”<sup>9</sup> The conceptual focus was on the presentation of a utopia especially in terms of technology that would represent the way of the future. Sixty-one participating countries were all grouped under a large umbrella where “man” was at the centre. While the pavilions were all quite different, there was a sort of homogeneity of purpose to them all. They were all striving for something; whether this was culturally, architecturally or technologically and this was the uniting, albeit utopian character of Expo ’67. This presented a humanist perspective where the importance is placed on the things that unite rather than divide.

Expo '67 was greatly concerned with modernity, which was something that was passed onto the visitors. It was also meant to be a pedagogical experience, which explains the variety of print material that accompanied the world fair. There was an official guide and individual pavilions had material available for consumption. The *Official Guide* is a valuable resource in deciphering the aims of Expo '67. Rogers noted that it was the descriptions of the pavilions that “give a clear indication of the emphasis placed on modernity as it was represented in architectural designs and materials”.<sup>10</sup>

Expo '67 can be understood in the context of Baudrillard's Disneyland where there are simulacra of the real but a lack of anything actually real. Expo '67 was the ultimate simulacrum. Visitors to the site were treated and presented with spectacles and over the top feigning of the real. These were simply stereotyped versions of what once could have referred to the real. Visitors are handed passports and encouraged to “travel” to the different nations that were participating within the world fair and get their personal stamp after having visited and ideally, learned all about the presenting nation. Each pavilion was specifically designed for the exhibition and was meant to be taken down shortly after. Therefore, each pavilion had the task to make themselves distinct from one another and yet similar in relation to the structured parameters. All pavilions had instructions and guidelines that dictated a series of DO's and DON'T's regarding details pertaining to construction and even direction of the type of material to use. Because one of the elements of 'Expo was for it to be pedagogic, the transfer of information is crucial. Pavilions then had the difficult task to build something unique that remained within the guidelines but also something that transfers everything important to that group quickly and effectively. It is probably because of this need for speed among the aforementioned factors that led to the clichéd renditions of nationalistic pavilions. These were not the only factors that were nothing than mere spec-

tacles. Even small details were considered and made exclusively to keep the image of modernity and newness present in the visitor's heads. Garbage receptacles turned into triangular, sculptural forms and even signage became so 'modern' that visitors had problems distinguishing the women's and men's restrooms based on the signage.

Expo '67, in addition to being a simulacrum, was also a utopian miniature representation of itself, yet new and modern and even more technologically advanced.

### **Location, location, location**

Holt Renfrew is located between rue de la Montagne and Crescent Street, which places it in the heart of the Golden Square Mile. This was the residential neighborhood of the Canadian upper class between 1850 and 1930. The majority of controllers of most Canadian rail, shipping, timber, mining, fur and banking companies of any size made their homes in the Square Mile and it was in these residents' hands that a great portion of the country's wealth lay. Not only were a large proportion of the residents wealthy but also, "several of the Square Mile's inhabitants were considered heroes of the nation, thanks to their political or economic activities."<sup>11</sup>

Since the early twentieth century, the streets of the Golden Square Mile that have been lined with Victorian greystone houses have given way to the city's contemporary business centre. Only a few houses from this era remain, most of which are clustered north of Sherbrooke Street. Today, the tradition of fine living, high standards of service and refined surroundings have been carried on through time by Montrealers who still call the Golden Square Mile their home. Sherbrooke Street continues to be seen as a very important, nationalistic site for Montrealers. Downtown councilor Nick auf der Maur proclaimed, "There are two things that are sacred in Montreal; the mountain and Sherbrooke Street"<sup>12</sup>

Before the architects began planning the Holt Renfrew building, Sherbrooke Street had a distinct personality already based on its surrounding buildings. To the right of what would be the new site for Holt Renfrew stood and continues to this day, the Ritz Carlton. Known as “the grand dame”<sup>13</sup> of Sherbrooke Street it was officially opened on New Year’s Eve in 1912 with an inaugural ball. At the time that it was built, it was one of Montreal’s tallest buildings. Across the street are the Le Chateau apartments. Completed in 1926 the design is an interesting synthesis of several architectural influences. The horizontal division of the 12-story facades into three sections derives from early principles of skyscraper design. The building’s architecture was part of the château style inspired by the castles of France. The building was topped with a copper roof, which is reminiscent of the types that were used for Canada’s railway hotels.

Other notable buildings on Sherbrooke Street include the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the McCord Museum of Canadian History and Maison Alcan. To this day, bulks of architecturally and historically significant buildings remain on Sherbrooke Street. Heritage Montreal created a walking tour where individuals could visit the buildings on Sherbrooke Street and learn about their historical significance. A plaque designated each site on the tour. Most of the buildings pre-date Holt Renfrew, and it is therefore quite possible to get a ‘taste for the times’ by examining the neighborhood before the Holt Renfrew addition.

Highlighting modernity was of utmost importance in this particular area of the city. Conditional donations were given so that a Protestant hospital dedicated to Queen Victoria would be built on the upper border of the Square Mile. Upon its opening, “speeches and newspapers described the hospital an emblem on Montreal modernity, a monument dedicated to science, and a proof of the philanthropy of the city’s elite.”<sup>14</sup>



These high-end apartments, hotels and museums are an example of the type of clientele that Sherbrooke Street, and by extension Holt Renfrew, were trying to maintain. Once the bearer of the nation's wealth, it had a reputation to upkeep. The utopian ideal was to create an exemplary neighborhood filled with all the luxuries that life had to offer. In this case, not only the residents but also city planners had a utopian vision for what they thought Sherbrooke Street was and should be. Into this space of affluent residencies, Holt Renfrew was well suited as there was already a considerable client base within close proximity.

Design has played an important role in developing nationhood. "Since the reign of Louis XIV, the monarchs of France has systematically promoted the decorative arts to develop the nation's economy, and, most importantly, to further international prestige."<sup>15</sup> The decorative arts serve to provide an accessible form of national identity. It is a clear indication of how a nation would like to see itself as and therefore presents itself to others. This was quite obvious at Expo '67 where nations presented what they felt was the best of their nation whether it be architecturally, culturally or technologically to others. The nation could participate in an unabashed self-promotion. In Postwar Canada, arts were something that proved to be helpful in establishing national identity concerning modernism.

Art Nouveau flourished, having the most popularity from 1890-1910. It was an architectural and design movement that came about because of ideas that were brought forth by the Arts and Crafts movement, active in England in the late nineteenth century. Some characteristics or influences that were brought over included the artisan's respect for materials as well as two-dimensional ornamentation. Another influence was taken from Japanese print designs.<sup>16</sup> This style had the initial aim to unify the arts to create a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art).<sup>17</sup>

Art Deco was an international design movement that was immensely popular on an international scale from 1925 to 1939. Art Deco followed on the heels of Art Nouveau. “In the evolution from art nouveau to Art Deco, linear convolutions became modulated planes, contorted plant life became schematized flowers and animals, a turgid flight fantasy became the distillation of tradition.”<sup>18</sup> *The Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, held in France 1925, was the time where Art Deco became immensely popular on an international scale. Like decorative arts in the past, this exhibition wished to highlight a variety of expressive objects. One artist commented, “we have only one intention, one desire: to express through ordinary objects the manners of our time.”<sup>19</sup> This view could be seen in all aspects of modern day life, including fashion. A series of articles appeared in *Vogue*, the fashion magazine, at the same time that the *Exposition Internationale* was taking place. The writer commented on the relationship and relatability of fashion and exhibition methods when referring specifically to objects made in an Art Deco style. Making reference to the work included in the exhibition *Vogue* noted that it had profited from a development of taste, which has indisputably turned to simple forms. The architects are led by the same spirit that leads women to wearing close-fitting dresses and tuck their short hair beneath unadorned cloches. Our age has recognized the vanity of frills, and for the eyes of the future we will remain models of austerity.<sup>20</sup>

It is interesting to note that the lack of ornamentation was being manifested in design objects and reflected in the fashions of the times. Modernism was taking over by storm and all creative outlets were affected. There was change in building design and fashion. Modernity was stressing a change towards a more simplified but advanced technologically future, leaving excess in the past. This is particularly evident in the Holt Renfrew building. It is composed of clean lines that do not indulge in an excess of ornamentation. This is because the modernist viewpoint

affected the way in which architects worked. “Architects, fired by the technological spirit of the age, purged their minds of the historical past in order to tackle each new situation without prejudice...where traditions could be seen as evolutionary, modernism was revolutionary.”<sup>21</sup> Modernism was affecting the way architects looked at buildings and this could be seen in the end. Art Deco was a style that was heavily influenced by modernism and this can be seen in several buildings but also design elements of the time.

One of Canada's most notable architecture firms in the early twentieth century was Ross & McDonald who were based in Montreal, Quebec. The firm began and executed the design for 1300 Sherbrooke Street, which was to be the new Montreal location for Holt Renfrew. The firm had also designed the Union Station and the Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto and many other notable buildings in Montreal including the former Eaton's store<sup>22</sup>, as well as the aforementioned Le Chateau apartments, which are located in close proximity.

The Holt Renfrew building as we see it today has been through some significant changes since its opening day back in 1937. The main building still looks very much Art Deco but has been altered to fit in within changing times. In 1946, it has gone through an extension to the west by James Kennedy that blended it with the rest of the building. There has also been a glass-walled addition on the roof, which forms a seventh story.

The 1960's brought about another wave of changes for the city of Montreal as a whole. The downtown core was transforming with the additions of high-rise buildings that inevitably transformed the look of what used to be a traditional city.<sup>23</sup> The city as a whole was going through major changes at the time. Deluxe apartment buildings were being built as replacements for single-family dwellings and these “ate away at the swanky residential fabric of what in the

preceding century had been the Square Mile of Montreal's upper crust".<sup>24</sup> With ambitions to turn Montreal into the 'first city of the 21<sup>st</sup> century' or a 'metropolis of progress' major projects were underway. The construction of the underground metro, the hosting of the world exhibition in 1967 and the 1976 Olympic games were all contributors to the vision of Montreal as a modern city, very much involved in its own development on an international level. While Montréal's inhabitants accepted initial development, time and continued construction brought forth a new attitude that did not mirror the original enthusiasm.

In the 1960's, Montrealers were proud of the construction boom which was transforming their city. But by the early 70's, the dream had turned sour. Montrealers began to realize that the finest parts of the city were disappearing to make way for increasingly shoddy new buildings; communities were being torn apart for expressways.<sup>25</sup> One writer went so far as to say, "as things are going, Montreal will soon be indistinguishable from Toronto, Pittsburgh and all other high rise horrors".<sup>26</sup> The vision was therefore changed and an importance was shifted from the earlier concern for modernity to a concern for the preservation of historically significant architecture and design. Its culminating point can characterize this period, which was the demolition of the Van Horne mansion. After this event which many saw as a great tragedy, initiatives began whose purpose was to save Montreal from turning into a 'high-rise horror' by making sure that all significant buildings do not disappear completely.

The proposed plan in the 1990's included the dismantling of three turn-of the century greystone houses and their reconstruction closer to the sidewalk. This would end up on the same alignment as the Holt Renfrew building. The space provided by this displacement would allow for the construction of a 12-storey office building, part of which would rise above the existing buildings. Local newspapers commented on the impending additions with mixed feelings.

A similar project, the Place Mercantile project, had taken place further down Sherbrooke Street where the result was not favorable. The glass and aluminum curtain wall of the new tower clashes with the greystone row and the project as a whole had eliminated any sense that each greystone house was once a separate building.<sup>27</sup> Ken London, an architect for this plan enthusiastically supports the project and claims to have developed a style of architecture, which would integrate all components of the Holt Renfrew site harmoniously. In the *Montreal Downtownner*, London states, “the greystones will be restored to mint condition, the exterior will look exactly as it was when first constructed”.<sup>28</sup> In another article London states, “the intention behind the reconstruction of the greystones, is to restore them to their original splendor, intention and prominence on Sherbrooke St”.<sup>29</sup> Later on he also remarks “It will probably be the most prestigious retail experience, deserving of Sherbrooke Street”.<sup>30</sup> There have been three distinct phases of the greystone buildings. The first phase is that of the original construction which had the greystones serve residential purposes. The greystones have similar façades and are united visually. The second phase is after some changes have been made for commercial purposes which means the façades have been reworked and are no longer uniform. The idea of Ken London is an attempt to go back to the original look of the greystones with the proposed renovations. He proposes to unify the façades once again so that the greystones appear like parts of a unified series.

It is because Sherbrooke Street is held in such high esteem that the utopic ideals of the Holt Renfrew site are continuously fueled. But, once again, I would like to bring up Grosz and remark upon the idea that the utopic cannot simply be planned and built. Architecture attempts to control every social eventuality and it simply cannot which accounts for not only the difference of opinions but also the hesitant and often anxious approaches that take place before any plan is put into action. Joel Rath, Toronto based president of the 12-store chain said, “People in Quebec

desire great quality, attention to good design. And we think that's what our business is about."<sup>31</sup> The desire is to turn the Sherbrooke Street unit into "The showplace of the nation"<sup>32</sup> It is here, on the corner of Sherbrooke and de la Montagne that fashion-forward modern merchandise is found, all wrapped in a container that fits within the same image.

The idea behind renovations is that the implemented 'look' is one of lasting good taste and grace, straddling the fine line between modern/ avant garde and classicism, never straying into traditional blandness or flashy exhibitionism. Inseparable from the corporate personality factor are expressions of strength, substance and longevity. The implied message, perhaps oversimplified, is that, just as holds true for the displayed merchandise, the stores' image always stays in fashion.<sup>33</sup> Image therefore plays an important role in how Holt Renfrew envisions itself, both as a store and brand. Holt Renfrew is synonymous with good taste and its design, architecture and merchandise all reflect this idea. It is a showplace of the nation where the architecture, store image and products sold all reflect the same ideals.

### **Consumerism and Architecture**

What has perhaps not been addressed up to this point is the role and purpose that Holt Renfrew plays. While perhaps an obvious statement, Holt Renfrew is a department store, and therefore a site for consumer consumption. John Chase from the University of Southern California examined the Role of Consumerism in American Architecture. He noted "buildings such as theme parks and shopping malls are consumerist when their design advertises the businesses they house or intensifies the experience offered therein"<sup>34</sup>. He feels that consumerism plays a dual, conflicting role in relation to architecture. On the one hand, consumerism "is capable of produc-

ing architecture with genuine civic and public characteristics, but its manipulative exploitation of forms for commercial purposes tends to contradict and undermine this potential.”<sup>35</sup>

When examining the Holt Renfrew site, the dual role of the architecture becomes quite apparent. Referring to the graystones, before any renovations, they had both civic and public characteristics. They were indicative of a time when Sherbrooke Street was more residential than commercial. The Holt Renfrew Company had the proposal to restore this section of the site to its original state using their historical significance as justification for the change back. The proposal for changes explains the justification. Originally the facades of the greystones reflected the fact that they were used for dwellings. London explains that the façades of the greystones have gone through changes that have caused them to longer bear resemblance to their original usage. He also feels that the series of interventions that have taken place have detracted from presenting the facades as a unified composite.<sup>36</sup> This plan was executed so that Holt Renfrew boutiques could take up the space, and it was commercially beneficial to have the new boutiques at customer eye level than to have it up one storey where merchandise would not have been clearly visible from the street. Therefore, while pleading to benefit the citizenry that had been deprived of ‘historical’ architecture, Holt Renfrew is in fact supporting such a change for commercial purposes.

Consumerist architecture exhibits a love of eclecticism similar to that found in post-modernism, but it is an eclectisms founded on the belief that memories of other eras and places can legitimately be represented, rather than ironically deconstructed. Unlike, high art architects, consumerist architects are not free to satisfy only their own internal set of artistic concerns, rather they must try to locate common ground with the sets of architectural images already held by the public at large.<sup>37</sup> Chase also points out the difference between consumerist and vernacular architecture, the former being greatly influenced by marketing techniques with the end goal of

promoting consumption while the latter is for the most part interpreted by individuals for their own use.

This is particularly true on the part of Holt Renfrew's architects because they not only have to satisfy the public's view of Holt Renfrew, but they have to do so nationwide since the corporate objective is to keep a familiarity between the stores. Chase points out that consumerist architecture has the ability to communicate, and in fact, it is something that it must do actively based on the psychology that is involved. "According to market strategy, the consumer needs to believe that there is a conceptual difference between shopping center A and shopping centre B."<sup>38</sup>

Holt Renfrew has been able to define itself as unique by maintaining a type of exclusivity to its customer base. This is largely due to its prestigious location on Sherbrooke Street, which reinforces product differentiation, by being more expensive and exclusive than other areas in the city. It is not merely the Holt Renfrew building, but rather the surrounding buildings that reinforce this concept.

Stephan Kiernan looks at buildings as containers. Much like packaging plays a crucial role to marketing, so do buildings. He states, "A package has three marketing functions: to be visible; to be found (by differentiating it from other products through form, style, color and texture) and to be legible (by conveying information about its contents through graphics and details)."<sup>39</sup> The Holt Renfrew site is clearly fulfilling its role as a container, packaged and ready for consumption. The first function being visibility, Holt Renfrew is clearly visible as it not only has two facades on adjacent streets, but it has display windows that span almost the length of the block. Holt Renfrew also actualizes the second function of differentiation. The building itself is



different from its surrounding neighbors because of style and size. It sits alone on the corner of two streets, which makes it easy to locate. The building features a very distinct coat of arms right above the second storey display area which is yet another point of distinction. The third role is that the container be clearly legible by conveying information. Holt Renfrew has excelled at this portion of the marketing strategy because they occupy almost a whole block of Sherbrooke Street and another portion of Mountain Street with window displays at street level that display their merchandise to the passerby. These are ever changing, much like their merchandise and therefore, the window displays can always be up to date with the contents that are found on the inside.

While perhaps obvious, it must be noted, “Because buildings and cities are big, they inevitably serve wide public tastes; because they last a long while, over the length of their lives, they serve many people”.<sup>40</sup> And this is certainly the case of Holt Renfrew because the clients that attended for opening day are not the same ones that frequent the store in the present day. Holt Renfrew as a company has to keep up with the changing times, and the changing demands of clients. While modernity was a key element and concern for people when the store first opened, the needs are changing constantly. Holt Renfrew has to keep up the image of being modern, but modern and up to date on a fashion but also design level.

The Holt Renfrew Company attempts to create a familiarity with its stores by incorporating similar interior design among their multiple locations. One sign of family kinship among the stores, for example, is realistically expressed by similarities in symmetrical layouts with clearly defined and logically oriented traffic lanes. This creates a reassuring familiarity for people shopping at Holt Renfrew stores whatever their location.<sup>41</sup> This is another way that Holt Renfrew is positioned and seen as the ‘showplace’ of the nation. Having several stores imparting the same image conveys a sense of unity and since the stores span the nation, it conveys a sense of nation-

hood. Having a similar layout, and architectural elements remaining constant brings forth a sense of comfort that despite the location, the customer could find what they are looking for.

Each individual store is its own showplace of simulations, but the simulations are similar so that individuals can continue living through the simulations even if they change locales. It also reinforces the simulation because it gives the impression that that is all there is. There is no more real life, just simulations, and they are the same across the nation. It is here that we can refer back to Grosz and note how a utopian ideal does not truly exist in time and space. Holt Renfrew exists as a site, but its idealistic ideas and conveyance of nationhood is never quite achievable, because that is also the nature of utopia.

Holt Renfrew was conceived of as a 'showplace of the nation', which was something that it strove for throughout its history and continues to this day. It strives for a utopic ideal that is never achievable. In its quest it puts itself forth as a series of simulacrum that refer to themselves. Much like Expo '67, Holt Renfrew is a site of spectacles. The location of the building, in the prestigious neighborhood of Sherbrooke Street reinforces the idea of a national identity. The street itself is highly looked upon and remains so to this day. Sherbrooke Street, and more specifically, the Golden Square Mile have been a stage upon which modernism could act out its aims. Holt Renfrew has participated in the reinforcement of modernism through its use of architectural elements but also in the way it strove for continuum between its many stores across the nation.

The style of the architecture as well as the vision that is presented by the corporate individuals is one of nationalist pride, which maintains Holt Renfrew as a showplace of the nation. By this very same nature it has come to be a capitalist spectacle where consumerist ideals out-

weigh any historical elements. Renovations for this site have been informed by marketing and consumerist strategies rather than a pursuit for keeping historically significant architecture intact.

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  - Fred S. Kleiner and Christin J. Mamiy, Gardener's Art Through the Ages Twelfth Edition, (Australia, Canada, Mexico, Singapore, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2005.)
  - Klaus Richter, Art: From Impressionism to the Internet. (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 2001.)
  - Ibid. Hunter.
  - Simon Dell, "The Consumer and the Making of the "Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes 1907-1925," *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1999), 311-325. 319.
  - Ibid. Dell. 319.
  - Dennis Alan Mann, "Between Traditionalism and Modernism: Approaches to a Vernacular Architecture," *Journal of Architectural Education*. Vol.39, No.2 (Winter, 1985): 10-16.
  - Ross and McDonald used Art Deco within their Eaton's building that, albeit closed, is still looked fondly back upon. The seventh floor was a restaurant where patrons would dine and use it as a place to simply get away. A movie about this restaurant, *Les dames du 7ieme*, featured interviews with past patrons that described their experience of going to the restaurant as traveling because of the ambiance and decor that the place offered. Many employees stayed with the company for years, getting to know the clientele who would frequent the restaurant regularly, often spanning several generations.
  - Martin Drouin, "Un autre paysage urbain à valoriser et à sauvegarder." Dans Le Combat du patrimoine à Montréal, 1973-2003, (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2005.), 33-58.
  - Andre Lortie, "Montreal 1960: The Singularities of a Metropolitan Archetype." The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big, ed. Andre Lortie, (Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver: Canadian Centre for Architecture, Douglas & McIntyre, 2004.), 75-115.
  - "How Save Montreal Began" *S.O.S. Montreal*, vol. 1, no.3 (1973) in Martin Drouin. "Un autre paysage urbain à valoriser et à sauvegarder." Dans Le Combat du patrimoine à Montréal, 1973-2003. (Québec: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2005.), 33-58.

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  - Chase, 211.
  - The original text is in French and reads as follows; "Altérées au cours des ans, les façades principales ne présentent plus l'ensemble des caractéristiques de la composition d'origine liées à l'habitation. Les modifications faites à ce jour l'ont été comme une série d'interventions disparates qui brouillent la perception de l'ensemble.". From Ken London Architects and Atelier de recherche urbaines appliquées. Holt Renfrew. La proposition architecturale et urbaine. December 1992.
  - Chase, 211.
  - Chase, 215.
  - Stephen Kiernan. "The Architecture of Plenty" *Harvard Architecture Review* 6 (1987), 103-114. 107-8.
  - Denise Scott-Brown. "Architectural Taste in a Pluralistic Society." *Harvard Architectural Review* 1. (Spring 1980), 41-52.
  - Ibid Geran.

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