

The Henry Foss Hall Building, Montreal:
From Riots to Gardens in Forty Years



Wes Colclough

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Introduction

The Henry Foss Hall Building of Sir George Williams University (SGWU), Montreal, was inaugurated 14 October 1966, the same day as the opening of the Montreal Metro system (with free rides for all), and named after a former principal of Sir George Williams University.¹ The University commissioned architectural firm Ross, Fish, Duschene and Barrett, who hired James A. M. K. O'Beirne to draw up the plans (Fig. 1 and 2).² From 1966 until 1974 all university activities were held in the Hall Building. In 1974, after the merger with Loyola College and the subsequent renaming of the University as "Concordia," it continued as the primary edifice for the downtown campus until 1992, when the J. W. McConnell-Library Building was built. At the time of its construction, the Hall Building was touted as the only single structure to contain an entire university, and the democratic values which were said to constitute the approach to the building's design were considered above par. Assistant Vice Rector of Physical Resources, J. P. Pétolas, who sat on the University's Committee on Development, established to gather input from faculty, staff and students on requirements for the new building stated, "[the design process] was truly democratic. We made lists. Every department was asked to file a report on their new needs." Most got what they asked for, Pétolas claimed. "Some got more than they dreamed of"³ He continues:

Under this system the entire faculty and staff share in designing and planning facilities in a new building. Dr. J. W. O'Brien, Dean of Arts and former Dean of the University, said recently that the 12-story, 782,000-square-foot building

¹ Henry Foss Hall was Principal of Sir George Williams University from 1956 to 1962.

² James A. M. K. O'Beirne, an Irish-born architect, created the plans for the 'SGWU Project' when hired by architectural firm *Ross, Fish, Duschenes, and Barrett* in 1962.

³ Ross Rogers, "Everyone had a voice in the planning," *The Thursday Report* 31 Jan. 1985: 6-7.

was so completely planned by faculty that if any department was unhappy with its quarters (and he knew of none) then it was the fault of the department members, not the architects ...⁴

When the Hall Building was originally built it contained 10 auditoria, one seating 700 people, and another 300, 42 classrooms, 15 seminar rooms, 47 undergraduate laboratories, and 37 other smaller laboratories for research and graduate work, three language laboratories, four student lounges, a student government centre, and a Computer Centre (Fig. 3). The central escalators often feature in descriptions of the Hall Building's interior space, and ethics of a prudent economic rationalism are duly expressed in explanations of the building's plans. The journal, *Canadian University* wrote in 1967:

Because escalators are expensive and the building tender was \$2,000,000 over the original planning budget, some corners were cut. For instance, while the up-bound escalators are installed on every floor, the down-going units go no higher than the eighth floor. In addition, the standard 48-inch escalator width was reduced to 36 inches in some upper-floor installations, a considerable saving. (Large units cost \$42,000 each and the narrower ones only \$35,000.)⁵ (Fig. 4)

The Hall Building's modular, pre-stressed concrete exterior, contracted by Dutch company *Schokbeton*, epitomizes ideal economic distribution and a plain, straight-forward utility. Each module has a slightly curvilinear aperture for the window, giving the outer layer of the building a simultaneously organic and mechanical appearance. Although the exterior and the basic internal layout remain essentially unchanged today, events unforeseeable by its designers left their mark

⁴ "One-Building Campus: Sir George high-rise is full of innovations," *Canadian University* (Jan.-Feb. 1967): 2.

⁵ "One-Building Campus" 2.

on the form and structure of the space.⁶

The purpose of this essay is to consider several crucial points within the political history of the Hall Building, beginning with the Computer Riot of 1969, through to the 2002 Netanyahu Riot, and including political activities in the building up until the present day.⁷ The “riots” of 1969 and 2002 are significant aspects of this essay in part because they represent points at which contradictions within the everyday structure of the university as an institution became untenable, when social clashes resulted in physical struggle and material destruction. These incidents, named after the visible symptoms of much deeper, far-reaching social tensions, did not end in resolution; they did not necessarily sustain or attain any kind of broader, widespread resolution. Nonetheless, these acts and occupations within the Hall Building signalled a spatial resistance that this paper attempts to analyse.

The Hall Building became a site of contested space on more than one occasion, but why there, and at those times? This essay contends with those questions, and attempts to address certain conditions which contributed to the local, microcosmic internalization of broader inequities characteristic of an internationalized or global society. Some of the issues with the Hall Building and the concomitant socio-political structures treated herein entail the reification of the building itself and the social structure which supports it, both the material and social structure, at the expense of the students embodying it. This includes the value placed on maintaining a specific order despite that order's potential negative consequences for some users.

⁶ Recently, the *Journal for the Study of Architecture in Canada* published an excellent article by researcher Anja Borck, who considers the architectural history of the Hall Building. Anja Borck, “Seen But Ignored: Concordia University's Henry Foss Hall,” *Journal for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 34.2 (2009): 61-74.

⁷ Many events have transpired in the Hall Building that I do not address, such as the Valery Fabrikant murder of four colleagues on 24 August 1992, just a month before the official opening of the McConnell Library Building. Like the aforementioned “riots”, the Fabrikant shooting was traumatic. But it was an individual and personal, as opposed to collective and political, act. For this reason I do not discuss it here.

Granted, many voices vied for expression in the conflicts noted above, but where and when was hegemony maintained and who did it privilege?

The 1969 “Computer Riot”

By the late sixties, student participation became less about input into architectural design, and more about immediate political change. Student activism and political movements in general were at an all-time high. In Montreal, black power and black nationalism was on the rise. Dennis Forsythe, an SGWU Sociology professor at the time of the Computer Riot, remarked that Ida Greaves’ book, *The Negro in Canada* was an important text contributing to an awareness of the pervasiveness of slavery and colonialism in Canada, but also to feelings of pride and self-determination.⁸

Montreal historian David Austin states that the British government made moves to stem the tide of black emigration into the UK after their labour power had been harnessed for rebuilding post-war Britain.⁹ Caribbean governments petitioned Canada to lift its “climate unsuitability” clause and allow emigration to the north.¹⁰ In 1960 Canada largely lifted regulations that discriminated against new immigrants based on ethnicity, national origin, or a number of other unfair criteria. Many of these new Caribbean immigrants and international students, hoping to get a post-secondary education in Canada, had difficulty getting into prestigious schools such as McGill, which had a quota as late as the 1930’s restricting the

⁸ Dennis Forsythe, *Let the Niggers Burn! The Sir George Williams University Affair and its Caribbean Aftermath* (Montreal: Black Rose Books - Our Generation Press, 1971) 11.

⁹ David Austin, "All Roads Led to Montreal: black Power, The Caribbean, and The black Radical Tradition in Canada" *Journal of African American History* 92.4 (2007): 517.

¹⁰ People from Africa and the Caribbean were barred from immigration into Canada due to the discriminatory “climate unsuitability” clause until it was finally lifted in the sixties.

number of Jewish students and faculty allowed.¹¹ SGWU offered an opportunity for many black and Caribbean young adults to have an education otherwise denied, and so it became a favoured university by West Indies students for this reason.

It was the spring of 1968 when a group of primarily West Indies students first took action at Sir George Williams University, accusing biology lecturer Perry Anderson of racism.¹² The students lodged official complaints with the then-Dean of Students, Magnus Flynn. By the fall of 1968, this group of students felt that the administration was not addressing their concerns seriously. They began to press for a public hearing with students, the administration and the professor all represented in order to investigate the charges. The University agreed to establish the committee, but problems arose with students expressing dissatisfaction with an all-white committee. Sit-ins commenced and flyers outlining the reasons for the protest were publicly distributed. The hearing committee was established anyway. In protest, approximately 200 students walked out of the hearing on 29 January 1969, heading to the ninth floor Computer Centre. This act led to a full-fledged occupation, lasting about two weeks. Articles from the *The Georgian*, a student newspaper, reveal the tense atmosphere at the University, but portray the students as a calm, patient group maintaining relative autonomy and peace within the Computer Centre.¹³

Nine days after taking over the Computer Centre, carefully maintaining its integrity, monitoring temperatures, and respecting the equipment that the university valued so highly, the students descended to the seventh floor faculty dining facilities, and took control of the space.

¹¹ Austin 517.

¹² Austin 530. Austin states that at least one of the students accusing Perry Anderson of racism was Asian.

¹³ See Appendix II.

On 10 February, protesters thought that negotiations had reached a resolution and began to trickle out. It is the following course of events that remain contested even now. Sympathizers with the protesters say that early on the morning of 11 February negotiations went horribly awry, and police made several menacing invasions into the occupied space. Austin recounts three distinct incursions into the students' occupied space. Each time the students became increasingly panicked they retreated, barricaded stairwells and escalators, and cut phone lines. The group eventually retreated to the Computer Centre, where they barricaded themselves, but not before turning the firehose on the police, thereby repelling them temporarily. Furniture from the seventh-floor dining area was completely cleared out by this time and had been packed into the central core escalators and stairwells in an attempt to block the police. According to Austin, up until this final day of the "riot", no major damage had occurred to the Computer Centre, aside from thousands of computer cards flung out the window. However, by the police's third and final push into the Computer Centre, the students had used axes to utterly destroy the collection of computers, probably one of the most expensive and advanced data centres in the city at the time. They also broke windows and started three fires on the ninth floor, with the result of \$2-5 million dollars worth of damage (Fig. 5 and 6). According to the official University account of these events, all of this chaotic barricading and subsequent computer damage occurred before the police arrived.¹⁴ As IBM data cards floated down from shattered windows on the ninth floor, like some sort of apocalyptic snowfall, several fires blazed. The smoldering aftermath left the computer room and all the expensive equipment inside nothing more than charred ruins.

¹⁴ "Computer Centre Incident," Concordia University Archives, 2000, web, accessed 20 Nov. 2009.

Space as a social product

Through the process of industrialization, urban life came to take on new meanings unforeseen by Marx and Engels. The social relations as prescribed by industrial wage labour ceased to have the import and power once anticipated. The belief in the proletariat as a revolutionary force that would overturn capitalist society once and for all waned. Under these circumstances, urbanization took on new import as a “strategic place and strategic object' of social development.”¹⁵ If SGWU is considered as a space inhabited in a way that is neither exclusively public nor domestic, but a unique space akin to both home and work, a clearer picture is obtained of the world inhabited by students when they walked out of Perry Anderson's biology class.

When analyzing the Hall Building spatially one must take into account Henri Lefebvre's idea that “(Social) space is a (social) product.”¹⁶ Lefebvre, the French sociologist who developed extensive theories on the social production of space, was concerned with dominant and restrictive structures, and with the ways and means they entered and cohered in our everyday lives. Moreover, he was concerned with the ways “the analysis of the extant [articulates] an indictment against the strategies from which the everyday emerges and reveals the arbitrariness of the dominant order,” opening up the insurgent possibility for liberation, for “there always remains something that escapes domestication.”¹⁷ That something in the case of the Computer Riot manifested in the minds and hearts of the activists who occupied the Hall building in protest

¹⁵ Klaus Ronneberger, “Marxism and Everyday Life: On Lefebvre, Debord and Some Others” in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom (New York: Routledge, 2008) 137.

¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre *The Production of Space*, 1974 (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991) 26, brackets in original.

¹⁷ Ronneberger 136.

of the depersonalized machine (e.g. bureaucracy) that subsumed them in social importance, stature, and labour-power. It is this very totalizing moment, this attempt at closing down autonomy and self-organization that guarantees the fissure and breakdown of smooth operations. Whether it is an instrumentalized bureaucracy or a Computer Centre, the end result is the same: social disorder and a return of the repressed. The resolution of the conflict does not negate the old contradiction completely, but preserves it and brings it to a “higher level.”¹⁸

“Logical and analytical reason, coherent and strictly formal discourse, cannot capture the becoming, the movement of the sublation in the creative act,” explains Christian Schmid, an urban sociologist at ETH Zurich in Switzerland.¹⁹ This idea suggests why the SGWU administration was reluctant to grant students the power to self-organize, but insisted upon what as, for them, logical and reasonable protocol to address the problems. The administration could not rationally compute the actions of the protesters, nor the possibility of error on the part of the institutional apparatus – the university machine was air tight, the incompatible and indigestible remainder was marginalized and suppressed.²⁰

Richard Milgrom, professor of community design and urban planning at the University of Manitoba, explains: “Henri Lefebvre argues against the abstract space of capitalism, space that tends toward homogeneity and suppresses difference rather than attempting to accommodate the representational spaces and spatial practices of diverse populations.”²¹ The incongruities cannot

¹⁸ Christian Schmid, “Henri Lefebvre’s Theory of the Production of Space: Towards a Three-Dimensional Dialectic,” *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, ed. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom (New York: Routledge, 2008) 31.

¹⁹ Schmid 31.

²⁰ A statement from 11 Feb. 1969 by the Acting Principal of Sir George Williams University gives insight into the nature of the logic and reason that may be at stake inside the walls of the Hall Building. See Appendix I.

²¹ Richard Milgrom, “Lucien Kroll: Design, Difference, Everyday Life,” in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, ed. Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom (New York: Routledge, 2008) 264.

be suppressed infinitely, and inevitable eruptions of conflict arise when the extreme contradictions between spatial practice and representational space are not held in place by the 'ideological glue' of techno-bureaucratic conceived representations of space. The Computer Riot of 1969, like the Netanyahu Riot of 2002 and the current, multivalent conflict over autonomy and self-organization embroiled between leftist student activism on the Left and hegemonic, right-wing technocracy reveals complex relationships and a struggle over the power of representation, both symbolically and physically, within the spaces of the Hall Building.

The students who rebelled against the University's philosophy of rational absolutism resisted the performance of justice and democracy, by challenging the symbolic dominance of institutional education and occupying the 'centre' of the University – both physically and metaphorically.²² This “nerve centre” was the reified mind of the educational apparatus *per se*. It represented the ultimate alienation from thinking, the displacement by machine (outmoded by a superior calculating device), and embodied one of the most significant and quintessential shifts in twentieth century society. Hence, the computer initiated the transformation from analog into digital society and a move from diachronic, linear time toward synchronic spatialization – simultaneity. The threat and danger in the replacement of human by machine was not lost on the students who occupied the Ninth Floor Computer Centre, and essentially kidnapped the brain of the University in lieu of justice.

A formal Marxist reading of the effects of advanced technology might best be accompanied by a Lefebvrian analysis of the effect of the computer on the everyday. The

²² Here I draw too from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and symbolic domination, and Lefebvre's explanation of 'spatial practice' where he states that he borrows the linguistic concepts of performance and competence from Noam Chomsky. See Kim Dovey, “The Silent Complicity of Architecture,” in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot, England, Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 287-88, Lefebvre 33.

computer, as central to social organization, effects myriad aspects of society. If Marx recognized the role of economy in forming social relations, Lefebvre recognized the role of capitalism in producing (social) space in everyday life, and the role of society in turn, of producing that space. The paradigmatic shift from industrialization to urbanization, accelerated in the sixties, parallels the sublation of public and private spheres into everyday life. Therefore, contradictions inherent to domestic spheres become nascent in what was once considered public, business or institutional, and vice-versa. The local interpenetrates the global, and the reverse occurs. Hence, new constellations of contradictions arise. The Hall Building was essentially both a workplace and a home to thousands of students and faculty in the sense that one's lived space, especially in the urban context, comes to be inhabited consciously. Writing in the 1970s, Lefebvre envisioned the emergence of a new revolutionary subject that would revolt against the exploitation of labour-power and against the destruction of its familiar living environment.”²³ This destruction could be thought of as including the affective alienation from one's space of learning: the university.

Spatial and racial politics at the Hall Building

After the intense build-up of energy had subsided from the Computer Riot, acting principal Douglas B. Clarke, deliberating from the comforts of the Sheraton-Mount Royal Hotel, issued a statement:²⁴

About two weeks ago a number of students and other individuals occupied the University's Computer Centre and for the last week have occupied the Faculty

²³ Ronneberger 135.

²⁴ See Appendix I.

Club Lounge. The university, in order to avoid violence and in the hope that reason might prevail, had resisted all pressures to invoke the aid of the law and to call in the police. However, when violence broke out in the early hours of Tuesday, February 11th, 1969, and when the occupiers began to destroy university property, to ransack the cafeteria, and to turn on water hoses, the university decided that it would be derelict in its duty to the students, faculty and the community at large which supports it, if it took no action. Rather than tolerate any such further lawlessness, the university authorities after careful deliberation decided that they had no choice but to call for the assistance of the Montreal Police, and to retrieve possession of the Computer Centre.²⁵

If, according to French cultural theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, “aesthetic experience transcends human interest to a higher truth which entails a certain ‘disinterest’ in merely human affairs,” then here it is Principal Clark, and not the art or architecture, who is disinterested.²⁶ “The administration has made every effort to ensure that the rule of law is observed at Sir George Williams. This means that the law and regulations must be implemented by lawful process,” stated Principal Clark.²⁷ Clark is in the predicament of being both a representative of impersonal power and a fallible human being upholding law and justice. Sympathizers of the protesters point out the contradictions inherent in western civilization's “Rule of Law”. A year after the smoke had cleared and formerly protesting students were marched into the courtrooms for the grand narrative of civilization to unfold in the courts of justice, student Victor A. Lehotay responded critically: “It was also perfectly legal to make slaves of blacks and trade them on the market. A marvellous precedent for ‘due process (but is it just?).”²⁸

²⁵ See Appendix I.

²⁶ “The field is a social space which structures strategic action for control over resources which are construed as forms of capital” (Dovey 286). “Symbolic domination is the power to frame the field in which symbolic mastery will be determined so that the criteria of taste favour those who have already imbibed a basic disposition towards it through the habitus” (287).

²⁷ See Appendix I.

²⁸ Victor A. Lehotay, “Racism or the good old school spirit,” *The Georgian* 12 November 1969: 7.

Turning to C. George Benello, in “Wasteland Culture: Efficiency of Control” we find an insightful psychological deconstruction of contemporary Western society:

The real reasons for the present structure are discernable, though hidden. The organizations are power-ridden, and thus the purpose of the system is not efficiency as such, but efficiency of control. We live in a society in which power is to a high degree coordinated, not [yet] in a terroristic-political fashion but in a manipulative, economic-technical fashion, as Marcuse puts it. He further points out that in a society dominated by machine production, the machine becomes the most effective instrument for political control within the society. Exploitation goes on behind a facade of bureaucratic administration wherein power is concealed, distant, and highly rationalized.²⁹

Hence, we can understand better based on this voice of “student protest”, how the computer as intellectual machine *par excellence* represents a force to be reckoned with. David Austin reprints a quote by Robin Winks, author of *The Blacks in Canada*, which covers the history of slavery in Canada from its origins to the early 1970s. This source tersely and bitterly describes the Computer Centre Incident as the: “thoughtless, needless, and frustrated destruction of the twentieth century’s symbol of quantification, the ultimate equality – Sir George Williams University’s Computer Centre.”³⁰

This quote, while deriding the protesters for their thoughtless behaviour and destruction of the twentieth century’s greatest equalizer, the computer, also reveals the core issue. Inequality is a human problem, and no amount of computers will remedy this. Moreover, the Computer Riot as pointed out by Dennis Forsythe and Tim Hector, signifies a willingness on the part of the University administration and others to place technology and other property on a scale of

²⁹ C. George Benello, “Wasteland Culture,” in *Student Protest*, ed. George Payerie and Patricia Horrobin (Toronto: Methuen, 1968) 197.

³⁰ Austin 529.

importance higher than those of human beings, hence a gross reification of that technology.

Internal contradictions in the space of the University shed light on the Hall Building's role as a site of arbitration and conflict, a site of negotiation and of a contest of ideologies. The space was originally intended for a specific function. Few knew this function would encompass much more than the plans included, that this built form would give physical presence to a rupture in the logic found in the floor plans, with their depiction of carefully managed compartments. When the images of the Computer Riot became public, another view of the Hall Building emerged; one of the most famous photographs was of the hundreds of IBM data cards iconically floating down from ninth floor windows like so much apocalyptic snowfall. For those few weeks, however, the space represented someone and something else.

The constellation of forces which coalesced into the Computer Riot entailed a very physical struggle over space, paths, flow, and access. This same pattern of conflicting tensions, compressions and explosions of power, would be repeated in the Hall Building. The escalators, blockaded and strategic during the Computer Riot, would repeatedly become strategic points of interest, literally fulcrums between forces, at once global (macro) and local (micro) in scale. If one could sit and observe a specific space without affecting it, as if one's vision operated like stop-motion photography over the course of twenty to thirty years, and conceive of it all in a single minute, what would it look like? What points would become central to contesting power? Klaus Ronneberger, sociologist and member of the urban studies group "spacelab", explains: "each mode of production produces its own space, albeit not in a linear fashion. The relative fixity of spatial structures produces layering effects."³¹ Traces of the past remain; the repressed

³¹ Ronneberger 136.

returns.

The Netanyahu Riot of 2002

Hence, on 9 September 2002, a scheduled speech by Benjamin Netanyahu was prevented by masses of pro-Palestinian groups protesting the policies and actions taken by the then-former Israeli Prime Minister. The Netanyahu speech was to be an exclusive event held, controversially, in a public institution. Pro-Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims were barred from the event, according to Jon Elmer, author of the weblog, *From Occupied Palestine*. This exclusion suggested to onlookers the University's willingness to suppress and disenfranchise people who were directly affected by Netanyahu's policies, which, according to the warrant for his arrest issued by *Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights*, included "gross violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories and in the state of Israel."³² A CTV News article reveals the University's underlying desire to simply control and contain the dissent as a result of the outrage felt by so many Arab students at Concordia at the prospect of a political leader who espouses their suppression in another space — their homeland: "A Concordia memo ... suggested the speech should have been held at the University's suburban campus, west of downtown, where it might have been **easier to control the large crowds**. It also said the Hall building **should not have been left open to the public** prior to the speech – a move that allowed protesters to gather inside and disrupt the event."³³ If the Computer Riot were international in composition, the Netanyahu Riot was global.

³² Jon Elmer, "Concordia: The Netanyahu Riot," *Dalhousie Gazette* 11 Sept. 2002, web, accessed 20 Nov. 2009.

³³ Canadian Press, "Concordia U. Regrets anti-Netanyahu Riot." *CTV News* 15 Jan. 2003, web, accessed 14 May 2010, my emphasis.

The scene eerily resembled that of the Computer Riot. As with the Computer Riot, left-leaning, non-Palestinian students organized around a disenfranchised ethnic minority, only this time the source of controversy stemmed from a site of oppression outside Canada. Ben Addelman and Samir Mallal's 2002 documentary about the incident, *Discordia*, offers an alternative representation of space that contradicts and conflicts with other conceived notions of the Netanyahu Riot. The film depicts forces militating against one another, increasingly intense, until finally something breaks. In this case, it was the ground-floor window of the Hall Building at de Maisonneuve Boulevard (Fig. 7). The escalators became a site of contestation once more (Fig. 8). Pro-Palestinian demonstrators entered from the Mackay Street entrance and entered the Hall Building on the mezzanine level. They funnelled down the escalator towards a line of pro-Israeli ticket-holders who had entered the building on the ground floor of Bishop Street, making their way towards the large auditorium on the ground floor, through a protective, police corridor.³⁴ The energy of the protesters grew in intensity. Samer Eletrash, son of Palestinians exiled from their homeland during the 1967 Israeli incursion into the West Bank, catapulted from the front of the line of pro-Palestinians pressing down from the mezzanine on the escalator. Being at the head of a massive body of energized demonstrators, Eletrash was physically compelled towards the line of police protecting the ticket-holding attendees. Police seized Eletrash at the same moment that pro-Palestinian demonstrators outside the Hall Building shattered the enormous, plate-glass window on the de Maisonneuve elevation (Fig. 7). Chaos ensued, and before long the entire ground floor and mezzanine were saturated with gas. In an uncanny repeat of the Computer Riot actions over three decades earlier, protesters blocked the

34 Elmer.

escalator with furniture, holding off riot police as long as possible (Fig. 8).

This incident, although very distinct from the Computer Riot, also expresses aspects of the original contradictions that were suppressed in 1969 in the Hall Building. In this case, while international students were involved in the Computer Riot, the accusation of classroom racism was centred in the university itself. However, in the case of the Netanyahu Riot, a political situation outside of the Concordia University and the country itself effected the political situation at the University. At the time of Netanyahu's planned talk, American economic, political and military support for Israel was continuing to destabilize the Middle East. Canada, a persistent ally of the U.S.A., remained a bastion for immigration and international academic exchange. These factors, combined with global conditions indicated by migration, rapid travel, digitized mass media, and heightened intensities intrinsic to the post-9/11 era, gave rise to a space within the Hall Building that was being claimed by both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli factions as home territory; both parties were willing to fight for it.

In this analysis I would like to revisit Lefebvre's notion of inhabiting (*habiter*) as a subversive category. In the case of the Hall Building and the Netanyahu Riot, students who belonged to the University student body were made to feel unhomely, uncomfortable in their own skin, denied access to their own (inhabited) space. When we consider the shifts from the factory to the living space of the everyday as potential for subjection to ideological conditioning and as the boundaries of public and private, local and global become blurred, and the university's importance as a site of subversion of social control becomes heightened, for it is the university itself where social controls are developed. And it is through education that what Lefebvre calls the "structuring structures" of society are reproduced, where representations of space are

delivered.

The People's Potato

The Hall Building, as part of an institution of higher learning, although welcoming to people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, embodies contradictory forces. Both corporate, profit-oriented food services and emancipatory expressions of self-sufficiency in everyday life such as The People's Potato who serve lunch on a donation basis exist side by side (Fig. 9). The People's Potato began in 1999 to address student poverty, and serves vegan meals every weekday from 12:30-2:00pm to students, faculty, staff and anyone who is hungry. Most large, corporate food service providers, such as Chartwell's (presently contracted at Concordia in the Hall Building right next to the People's Potato kitchen and elsewhere (Fig. 10) and SODEXHO demand a contractual monopoly on all food sales from client universities. Over the course of ten years the popularity and student support of The People's Potato has grown, ensuring a secure space where volunteers and collective workers cooperatively prepare and serve 400-500 meals per day.³⁵ Collective members operate on a consensus and volunteers participate in the cooking process in a warm, friendly atmosphere that affectively acts like an extended family. The collective-run space is shared with others upon request and cooking and food preservation workshops take place there.³⁶

Both panoptic surveillance security and volunteer-based ecological biospheres on the 13th

³⁵ "History of the People's Potato," Community University Research Exchange (CURE), nd, web, accessed 15 July 2010.

³⁶ The People's Potato supports and serves events that are social and ecological in orientation, such as the QPIRG-sponsored "Study in Action" environmental-justice themed weekend, called "Other Inconvenient Truths", and the Forum Against Police Violence in response to the 2008 death of Fredy Villanueva at the hands of Montreal police.

floor coexist (Fig. 11 and 12). After the 2002 Netanyahu Riot the Hall Building mezzanine was riot-proofed; all furniture was bolted down and a new translucent wall installed above the railing to prevent furniture or other objects from being tossed over the side. Every column in this static interior layout is installed with cameras pointing in each direction so that all activity is easily monitored from the security booth on the ground floor just below. However, if one ventures beyond the renovated twelfth floor and follows the signs to the greenhouse, an amazing array of plants are cared for by earnest volunteers. The west-facing greenhouse originally served the SGWU biology department as a hands-on research site. Between 2002 and 2003 a new, state-of-the-art greenhouse was constructed on Concordia's western, "Loyola" campus and the old thirteenth floor greenhouse was slated for demolition. During this time People's Potato workers clandestinely grew vegetables in the former greenhouse. Subsequently, a movement surrounding the re-purposing of the greenhouse grew to save it and eventually, due to popular demand, student activism prevailed. The Concordia Greenhouse Project formed while administration made moves to preserve the greenhouse for sustainability projects.³⁷ Today, composting vermiculture farms can be obtained and a wide range of plant-life and aquaculture can be appreciated.

The university represents a space that will be contested when certain contradictions arise. Representations of space convert students into reproducers of idealized space. "In modern industrial societies," according to Ronneberger, "the everyday is clearly molded in fundamental ways by economic-technological imperatives that colonize space and time." But it is the creative subversion of space, as in the occupation of the Computer Centre in 1969, the surge of popular

³⁷ "Concordia University Greenhouses – A Brief History," Concordia University Archives, April 2009, web, accessed 15 July 2010.

protest that disrupted the Netanyahu Speech of 2002 and the constant move to redefine and reconfigure the social space of the Hall Building and therefore, of Concordia University that makes lived space potentially transformable into a democratic space, even if it is only through struggle that we achieve it.³⁸

Conclusion

This essay is an effort to chronicle some of the most notable political struggles that have taken place in the Hall Building. The 1969 Computer Riot is the one of the most pivotal of these events and makes up a major portion of the essay. The 2002 Netanyahu Riot is also a remarkable political incident. Interestingly, these two events have similarities, and garnered a lot of attention at the time they occurred. These events have given Concordia a reputation. After both of these events there was a period of relative calm. In the case of the Netanyahu Riot there was an attempt to regulate and control activism on both sides leading up to the cancelled event. What finally resulted, however, was a suppression of all political activism related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict following the protest, and a reactionary backlash within the student body. Some students are embarrassed when they are reminded of these incidents while others actually came to Concordia specifically because it has a reputation for vibrant political activism. In many ways, this essay is for those students who came to Concordia with an activist spirit, but I would like to impart some knowledge about these events for those of us who have been confronted by others about Concordia's reputation as a hotbed of political activity, for in many ways it remains a bulwark of the status quo. However, activism has also changed the built space of Concordia

38 Ronneberger 135.

University, and it is to be hoped that this is the result that will persevere in regard to the ongoing building and organizing of the sustainable, livable community that is Concordia University.

Figures



Fig. 1 Looking South-East at building site of the new Hall Building, 2 June 1964.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 2 Looking North-East at new Hall Building under construction, 4 Oct. 1965.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 3 The Ninth Floor Computer Centre, Hall Building, 1968.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 4 Interior of the Hall Building, ground floor, showing escalator, 1965.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 5 Damaged computer bank, Ninth Floor, Hall Building, 1969.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 6 Computer Riot fire damage, Ninth Floor, Hall Building, 1969.
Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives. For research purposes only.



Fig. 7 Shattered ground-floor window, Hall Building, Netanyahu Riot, 9 Sept. 2002.
Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Concordianethanyahuincident.jpg>



Fig. 8 Pro-Palestinian protesters stand off against riot police, 9 Sept. 2002.
Photograph courtesy of <http://blog.fagstein.com>.



Fig. 9 A Volunteer at The People's Potato, Hall Building, Concordia University.

Photograph by the author, 2009.



Fig. 10 Chartwell's vacant dining area, 7th floor, Hall Building, Concordia University. Photograph by the author, 2009.



Fig. 11 The thirteenth-floor greenhouse: secret treasures in the Hall Building, Concordia University. Photograph by the author, 2009.



Fig. 12 Life in the thirteenth-floor greenhouse.
Photograph by the author, 2009.

Appendix I

This following constitutes excerpts from a statement of 11 Feb. 1969, issued by Douglas B. Clarke, Acting Principal of Sir George Williams University on what were, at that time, current events at the Hall Building:

“About two weeks ago a number of students and other individuals occupied the university’s Computer Centre and for the last week have occupied the Faculty Club Lounge. The university, in order to avoid violence and in the hope that reason might prevail, had resisted all pressures to invoke the aid of the law and to call in the police. However, when violence broke out in the early hours of Tuesday, February 11th, 1969, and when the occupiers began to destroy university property, to ransack the cafeteria, and to turn on water hoses, the university decided that it would be derelict in its duty to the students, faculty and the community at large which supports it, if it took no action. Rather than tolerate any such further lawlessness, the university authorities after careful deliberation decided that they had no choice but to call for the assistance of the Montreal Police, and to retrieve possession of the Computer Centre.

...

About eighty individuals have been arrested and will be charged by the university before the criminal courts. Painful as the task may be for the university, the university has the duty to see to it that academic freedom is preserved and that no one is permitted to threaten or destroy its functions.

...

The administration has made every effort to ensure that the rule of law is observed at Sir George Williams. This means that the law and regulations must be implemented by lawful process”

Signed:
Douglas Burns Clarke
Acting Principal
February 11th, 1969

Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives.

Appendix II

“Though Norris Building administrative offices were open yesterday, Vice-Principal O’Brien and other administrators are still in seclusion in the Sheraton Mount-Royal Hotel ... Students at the occupation site feel the crisis is coming soon.

The computing centre is a vital component in the administrative apparatus. All paychecks go through the computers, as do class lists, schedules and exams. The university pays \$1,000.00 an hour to rent the huge bank of machines that have lain idle for over 24 hours. As well, the administrative contracts in for an enormous amount of industrial computer work that has been halted since the occupation began.

The students have been careful with the machines – despite cartoons and slogans pasted up on the walls denouncing the depersonalization of the university through computer relations. The main computer area has been sealed off and the automatic temperature regulators are being checked continuously to prevent any damage to the delicate machinery.

The possibility of police action has been considered and occupying students have expressed a desire to avoid any type of situation that might result in possible damage to computer equipment.

There has been no indication yet as to whether the administration is planning to call the police in.

[An unnamed “black student” is quoted as saying, on 29 Jan. 1969:] ... ‘We vow to prolong this just occupation of this *vital nerve center* of the University until justice is properly meted out to us and the whole student community which is also affected by the now universally known rigidity of all University hierarchies ...’”

Source: “In the Data Centre: Occupation Continues.” *The Georgian* 32-33 (31 Jan. 1969): 3.

Courtesy of the Concordia University Archives.

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