

Framing Visibility and Access:  
Picturing Silo No. 2 as Montréal's Industrial Pride,  
Modernist Icon, and Public Space



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September 2010

A series of parks, museums, and pockets of year-round entertainment frame Montréal via the Saint Lawrence River, providing a stretch of green space within the historic and now luxury neighbourhood of Old Montréal. Hosting numerous tourists and an increasing population of locals, the Promenade du Vieux-Port, stretching from Rue de la Commune in the East to the Pointe-à-Callière Museum in the west, is a shared space of leisure and entertainment that receives millions of visitors each year.<sup>1</sup> The Promenade also frames the view of the Montréal skyline from the water, accessed through piers extending into the river. Looking in the opposite direction from the city, one can see Habitat 67, a housing complex built in 1967 for Expo 67 that has come to symbolize the period of ambitious architectural projects undertaken under the then-mayor, Jean Drapeau (1916-1999), who promised the modernization not only of Montréal's architecture, but also of the city's lifestyle. The Old Port and adjacent Promenade, with their mixture of recreational activities and picturesque views, simultaneously echo a nostalgia for public squares and areas where commerce, entertainment and relaxation intertwine seamlessly. As a resident of Montréal, I too enjoy having this space in which to wander around, enjoy the city's brief, intense summers, and pass time. The view of Montréal pictured on the cover of this essay is one that claims to be, indeed, for all.

One of the most prominent buildings on the Promenade is the Marché Bonsecours, located on the west end of the pedestrian walkway. It faces a park with a basin with a small island, which is accessible through the piers that frame it from both East and west. While standing on the west pier, called the Clock Tower Quay, Marché Bonsecours is framed by the green lawn that spreads in front and the tall office towers that rise behind it. The lawn is the

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<sup>1</sup> Old Port of Montréal Corporation, *Annual Report: 2004-2005* (Montréal: Old Port of Montréal Corporation, 2005), web (accessed 1 Oct. 2009) 7. This item is no longer available online as of August 2010.

former site of the Grand Trunk Railway Silo no. 2, which was demolished in 1978 in order to create public access to the water; this vantage point is one of the most reproduced views of the Montréal skyline. Today, it is difficult to imagine how this view, this iconic image of Montréal could have been entirely blocked once by a series of mammoth concrete structures.<sup>2</sup>

Taking this vantage point on the pier as my departure point for this essay, I discuss the relationship between two images of Silo no. 2 (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). The first image is from *The Massicotte Scrapbook Album of Streets*, collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec.<sup>3</sup> It is a newspaper clipping from *Canadian Courier*, dated 12 October 1912, taken at the time of the Silo no. 2's completion. The original caption describes the image as the "Largest Grain Elevator on the Atlantic Seaboard."<sup>4</sup> I took the second photograph from a similar vantage point during a site visit in October of 2009 (Fig. 2). The pier from which both images were photographed is directly adjacent to Shed 16 on the Clock Tower Quay, an area that also encompasses Bonsecours Park (Fig. 3).

Historically, the former site of Silo no. 2 has been in a constant state of flux, as if this particular piece of land facing Marché Bonsecours has been designated as a site for marking important decisions in the history of the Old Port. The original construction of the Silo no. 2 provided a large enough new storage facility to make Montréal the largest grain exporter on the Atlantic Seaboard, followed by its demolition in 1978 which marked a new era for Montréal's relationship with the Saint Lawrence River, then the choice to unearth its foundations in 1992 to

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<sup>2</sup> "Silo à grain no 2", *Vieux-Montréal: Fiche d'un Bâtiment* (2009) web (accessed 1 Oct 2009).

<sup>3</sup> "Silo no. 2 at the Time of Its Completion" (photograph), *Canadian Courier*, 12 Oct. 1912; collected in *The Massicotte Scrapbook Album of Streets* (Montréal: Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec, 2005) web (accessed 1 Oct. 2009).

<sup>4</sup> "Silo no. 2 at the Time of Its Completion..."

be presented as archaeological ruins, and finally covering the ruins, as they were deemed unsafe for the millions of visitors using the area during events. I see these instances as a series of symbolic acts of uncovering and recovering, hiding and revealing, negotiated through visibility and access to the view of the river and the skyline. Using two images, one historic and one contemporary, to trace the site's trajectory to its present state, I explore how the site of Silo no. 2 has been deployed in the image of the Old Port over time, while establishing parallels between these events and the ways in which artists and architects have also used Silo no. 2 to both preserve and disrupt the legacy of industrialism to which it belongs.

Existing scholarship about Canadian grain elevators has been growing in the recent years, as the buildings begin to acquire heritage status and as their future becomes threatened by new developments and a changing grain-export industry. Notable scholarly contributions include Patricia Veervoort's 2006 article, "'Towers of Silence': The Rise and Fall of the Grain Elevator as a Canadian Symbol," also a 1967 essay by architect Melvin Charney, who seriously considers, for the first time, the architectural legacy of the Montréal grain elevators.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Nathalie H. Senécal's 2001 master's thesis provides important historical background on the Port of Montréal, as well as Silo no. 2.<sup>6</sup> To my knowledge, there have been no detailed studies done specifically on the history of Silo no. 2 in English, although details about its history appear throughout studies on Le Corbusier, such as Jean-Louis Cohen's 2007 translation of *Vers une Architecture*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Melvin Charney, "The Grain Elevators Revisited" *Architectural Design* 37 (July 1967): 328-331.

<sup>6</sup> Nathalie H. Senécal, "The No. 5 Terminal Grain Elevator in the Port of Montréal: Monument in a Shifting Landscape" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> See Le Corbusier, Jean-Louis Cohen, and John Goodman, *Toward an Architecture. Texts & documents*, 1923 (Los Angeles, Calif: Getty Research Institute, 2007).

Changes to the site chronicle numerous redevelopment plans produced through the Société du Havre de Montréal. They describe a set of shifting values that have shaped the fate of the Old Port in terms of leisure, tourism, and accessibility. They also document the use of photographs of the Port as means of marketing Montréal, either as a symbol of industrial progress or leisure and tourism, both for locals and visitors.<sup>8</sup> The acts of framing and accessing the view are intertwined through the rhetoric of using words such as “window” or “opening” onto the river, used to promote the various plans for the Port’s redevelopment.<sup>9</sup> The most recent reconstruction of the Old Port has followed in this tradition of using the framed view as a means of achieving an image of the city as historically cohesive whole.

Before attempting a visual analysis of the two images, I would like to explore the notion of photographing the site to create a set of “then” and “now” images. In “Rephotography Reprised,” an essay accompanying a catalogue of Andrzej Maciejewski’s project *After Notman: Montréal Views – A Century Apart*, Martha Langford discusses the practice of rephotography, taking two identical images to document the changes that have taken place over a period of time in a specific location.<sup>10</sup> While the basis of rephotography appears to signify stability: “same site, same frame, same position,” it enters into a dynamic conversation with the “now” image, and the two become intertwined through a narrative that encompasses the history in between.<sup>11</sup> The two moments are arbitrary, but their linkage signifies the flow of time and the fluidity of the

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<sup>8</sup> Patricia Vervoort, “‘Towers of Silence’: The Rise and Fall of the Grain Elevator as a Canadian Symbol, *Histoire Sociale - Social History* 39:77 (2006): 183.

<sup>9</sup> Association Le Vieux Port, *A Redevelopment Strategy for le Vieux-Port de Montréal: A Practical Program Proposed by the Association Le Vieux-Port* (Montréal: Association Le Vieux Port, 1979) 70.

<sup>10</sup> Martha Langford, “Rephotography Revisited,” in *After Notman: Montréal Views - a Century Apart*, ed. Andrzej Maciejewski (Toronto and Montréal: Firefly Press and the McCord Museum of Canadian History, 2003) 43.

<sup>11</sup> Langford 48.

photographic act.<sup>12</sup> To extend this argument, I would like to propose that they also signify the fluidity of the physical site as well, not only of the construction of images. The seemingly arbitrary moment in time and space from where the photograph is taken acquires layers of significance as the image travels and as is manipulated and reproduced, choices that are then reflected in the material decisions towards the site itself.

The photograph in *Canadian Courier* (Fig. 1) was likely taken to mark the completion of Silo no. 2 for the Grand Trunk Railway Company by John S. Metcalf, a Chicago-based engineering firm specializing in grain elevators.<sup>13</sup> Founder John Metcalf was originally from Sherbrooke, Quebec and was instrumental in modernizing Montréal's Port in the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> His innovative use of reinforced concrete made Silo no. 2 the largest and tallest concrete building the world at the time of its completion.<sup>15</sup> Reinforced concrete grain elevators were the newest innovation in port cities in the early-twentieth century, developed to handle large amounts of grain brought from the prairies by train, which is why railroad companies owned most of the grain silos in Montréal. The train cars were unloaded directly into the storage bins, which constitute the largest part of the silo's volume.<sup>16</sup>

In the *Canadian Courier* photograph of Silo no. 2 (Fig. 1), the contrast between the dome of the market and the silo is the main focus of the composition. Examining the form of the

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<sup>12</sup> Langford 50.

<sup>13</sup> "Silo à grain no. 2."

<sup>14</sup> Nathalie H. Senécal, "The No. 5 Terminal Grain Elevator in the Port of Montréal: Monument in a Shifting Landscape" (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2001) 25.

<sup>15</sup> Senécal 26.

<sup>16</sup> Senécal 1.

building, one could imagine that John S. Metcalf is playing with blocks of volume between the top chimney elements and the imposing horizontal lines of the main block. Setting it apart from the other silos in the port, Silo no. 2 does not have visible cylinders, which are hidden inside the structure. As this was Metcalf's largest project to date, and was a great landmark for the Port of Montréal, this was likely to have been an aesthetic decision. The building of Silo no. 2, with its interplay of horizontal and vertical volumes and its gigantic mass towering above the skyline of the city, enters into a conversation with the dwarfed Marché Bonsecours, making a bold statement about the extent of the port's industrial progress.

This image was likely taken from the pier extending into the Saint Lawrence River, putting the photographer in a position of a sailor on an incoming ship, giving the view that passengers aboard ships would have encountered when approaching the city from the water. Looking from east to west, the Cold Storage Warehouse, Silo no. 2, as well as the neighbouring Silo no. 1, and Elevator B (which is now known as Silo no. 5), provided a parade of majestic industrial might. Combining this view with Marché Bonsecours, a bustling fresh food market dating back to the Port's earliest days, would have given a first impression of the Old Port as an interplay of old and new, creating a visual and spatial narrative of the Port's history of technological innovations.<sup>17</sup> This particular vantage point, from the pier and from the water, was a privileged one; only those going through the Port could stand on the pier to enjoy the view, and access was strictly prohibited to regular Montréalers and visitors beginning in the early 1920s when a fence was constructed.<sup>18</sup> The architecture of the grain elevators was also designed to be

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<sup>17</sup> Wendy Butler, "The Cultural Landscape of a Site in Old Montréal: Reflections on *Urban Memory*," *Montréal as Palimpsest: Architecture, Community, Change*, ed. Cynthia I. Hammond, (Montréal: Gail and Stephen Jarislowsky Institute for the Study of Canadian Art, 2008), web (accessed 15 October 2009), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Senécal 28.

seen from this privileged angle, as the back of Silo no. 2 was much plainer than its water-facing façade.

Photographs of grain elevators, including Silo no. 2, were disseminated across North America and Europe for two very different reasons. On one hand, they were used in pamphlets distributed in Canada and Europe to attract tourists and immigrants, highlighting the city's wealth and resources, and advertising Montréal's progress and industrial might.<sup>19</sup> On a completely different level, they acted as icons for generations of modernist architects in Europe, many of whom had no information about the buildings' location or history. Architectural publications often labelled the silos incorrectly and excising unwanted visual material from the images, while revering them for their "pure" architectural form and apparent anonymity.<sup>20</sup>

In 1913, German architect Walter Gropius drew a comparison between the grain elevators in North America and the Egyptian pyramids in an article for *Jarbuch ds Deutschen Werkundes I* titled "Die Entwicklung Moderner Industriebaukunst," proposing the elevator as a monument of industrial purity and functionality (Fig. 4).<sup>21</sup> He suggested that the form of the elevator was so individual and so strongly tied to its function that every passerby could easily understand it.<sup>22</sup> However, the images upon which Gropius based his argument were photographs produced by the builders of the elevators, taken from vantage points legally inaccessible to those putative passers-by. Following in Gropius' footsteps, Le Corbusier marvelled at the North American grain elevators in his 1923 work *Vers une Architecture*, putting the image of Silo no. 2 on the cover of

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<sup>19</sup> Vervoort 184.

<sup>20</sup> Vervoort 187.

<sup>21</sup> Sénécal 39.

<sup>22</sup> Sénécal 39.



one of its editions. He admired the silos' use of volume and clean surfaces, and was inspired by the use of reinforced concrete and the supposed anonymity of the elevators' creators, calling the grain elevator a "magnificent first-fruit of the new age."<sup>23</sup> He again drew comparisons between the elevators and classical Greek and Roman architecture, suggesting that both are governed by a fundamental human need to see form through light and geometric shape, suggesting a universality of form governed by natural forces.<sup>24</sup>

In what later became one of the most notorious falsifications in the history of modern architecture, Le Corbusier's illustration of Silo no. 2 in *Vers une Architecture* hides the dome of Marché Bonsecours, and identifies the silo as American (Fig. 5).<sup>25</sup> The same image changed names and locations another three times during publication in Scotland and Germany in a series of postcards.<sup>26</sup> In a later article, Walter Gropius published the same photograph together with images of other American and Canadian elevators, labelling them incorrectly yet again.<sup>27</sup> Lack of context and improper labelling has deeply affected current research in the subject of grain elevators in Canada, as numerous books, papers, news, and online sources contain erroneous information in identifying the structures' names and locations.

Christine Boyer, in the "Epilogue to the City of Radical Artifice," discusses Walter Benjamin's notion of the aura, stating that its loss through reproduction had led to a suspension

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<sup>23</sup> Le Corbusier 20.

<sup>24</sup> Le Corbusier 105.

<sup>25</sup> Le Corbusier 102.

<sup>26</sup> Vervoort 190.

<sup>27</sup> Vervoort 180.

of critical or historical engagement with otherwise historicized cityscapes.<sup>28</sup> Through the continuous process of being misidentified in architectural publications and on postcards, Silo no. 2's industrial history and architectural specificity have been overpowered, reduced to an idealized form.<sup>29</sup> The image meant to mark Montréal as the world's largest grain exporter was reduced to decontextualized lines and planes, to an iconic influence on modernist architecture.

Architectural historian, Leslie Sklair formulates a definition of an architectural icon. On one hand it must be famous, but that is not enough; it must also hold a special symbolic meaning tied to its aesthetic quality.<sup>30</sup> While there is an argument that architectural iconicity is closely tied to an image, Sklair suggests that this neglects the importance of the actual building.<sup>31</sup> However, in the case of Silo no. 2, the building's iconicity was almost entirely the result of its image – a distinction that becomes crystallized in looking at numerous errors about its physical location in architectural literature. Another important distinction that Sklair makes is between professional and public icons.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, Silo no. 2 is indubitably a professional icon. The public had very little in the way of a relationship with the building itself; it loomed over a part of the city that was closed off to visitors, blocking their view to the river and beyond. If any public, iconic meaning could be assigned to it, it would be in the negative: the silos of the Port and the fences that surrounded them were symbolic of the separation between the Saint Lawrence River and the

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<sup>28</sup> Christine Boyer, "The City as Radical Artifice," *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1998) 489.

<sup>29</sup> Senécal 42.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie Sklair, "Iconic Architecture and Capitalist Globalization" *City* 10.1 (April 2006): 25.

<sup>31</sup> Sklair 26.

<sup>32</sup> Sklair 26.

people of Montréal, a comparison which frequently appeared in Montréal press.<sup>33</sup> This separation became the major target of the changes in the Port of Montréal that began, unofficially but dramatically, with the preparations for Expo 67.

In preparation for the global exhibition of Expo 67, the grain elevators, the sheds and towers of the Port facilities were painted grey in order to soften the barrier between the city and the water.<sup>34</sup> The interest in displaying the technological advances of the Port has been replaced by the fascination with megastructures of Expo 67 and the era of Jean Drapeau (1916-1999), Montréal's ambitious and architecturally-focussed mayor. However, there is a subtle link between the two, carrying the tradition of using the grain elevator as a reference for architectural innovation. In *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*, architectural historian Reyner Banham mentions the view from Expo 67 towards the Montréal skyline (Fig. 7):

The elevators are, like the office towers of downtown, part of the permanent commercial equipment of Montréal as a port; their relevance to megastructure thinking was not really appreciated until Expo year, when they suddenly became some of the most widely commented buildings there.<sup>35</sup>

He further argues that their impressive size and ambition provided a sense of enormity that gives megastructure their grounding in "natural" environments, arising from genuine need for functionality.<sup>36</sup> However, it is not their scale that most appeals to Banham; it is their interrelated functionality and composition, their use of space, and their incorporation into the urban design.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Senécal 28.

<sup>34</sup> Senécal 46.

<sup>35</sup> Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 105.

<sup>36</sup> Banham 119.

<sup>37</sup> Banham 120.

This view is influenced greatly by Melvin Charney's article "Grain Elevators Revisited" in the July 1967 edition of *Architectural Design*. In this article, Charney was one of the first architects to look at the elevators' functionality and systems, while criticizing Le Corbusier's focus on pure form.<sup>38</sup> This shift towards functionality and the local still echoes Le Corbusier's idealism in seeing industrial forms as more natural than architectural ones.

Painting Silo no. 2 for Expo 67 marks the acknowledgment of the declining role of the Port, while also representing a collective desire to have a clear view between the city and the Saint Lawrence River. In a series of photographs taken in late 1960s and early 1970s, David Miller and Melvin Charney express the shift of Silo no. 2 from a sign of progress to a monument of a passing industrial era (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7). Despite the emerging interest in the heritage of Old Montréal in the 1960s, the Port was neither a tourist destination nor a site of bustling industry at the time. The silos blocked the view of the water, looming over what appeared to have been an area destined for demolition.<sup>39</sup> While various heritage groups were campaigning to save buildings in Old Montréal, there was very little interest in preservation of its industrial history.

In David Miller's photograph taken in 1967, two years before Silo no2's demolition, the silo stands as a symbol of fading modernity, while still evoking the modernist passion for clean lines and pure forms (Fig. 6). The silos at the time were already vestiges of another era, one that was still too close to be classified as heritage: they were still in use and the Port was still closed to the public, but the former admiration has faded, and was only beginning to shift towards

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<sup>38</sup> Jim Donaldson, "Melvin Charney," *Alumni Interviews*, McGill University, School of Architecture (June 1999) web (accessed 1 Oct. 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Donna Gabeline, Dane Lanken and Gordon Pape, *Montréal at the Crossroads* (Montréal: Harvest House, 1975) 127.

nostalgia for the city's industrial past.<sup>40</sup> The empty train tracks and lack of human activity around them transforms the silos into a ruin. Like the Arcades in Walter Benjamin's discussion of a dialectical image, the empty towering silo makes manifest the transformation of Montréal's society and its receding role as an industrial metropolis.

Taken in 1969, the photograph of Silo no. 2 by Melvin Charney is taken from an unusual perspective (Fig. 8). It faces Marché Bonsecours head-on with the silo directly in the background, blending the two buildings into a visual whole. This approach resonates strongly with Charney's interest in collage. In his later work, he often used cut up photographs and superimposed images, drawing on them directly, searching for models hidden within.<sup>41</sup> In the photograph of Silo no. 2, the superimposition of the Marché Bonsecours onto the silo, with a foreground of cars and unkempt buildings, demonstrates what the further redevelopment projects will attempt to undo: an incoherent, mixed, and porous space.

The concept of *porosity*, from Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia*, uses to describe cities that reveal layers of time and history, similar to Walter Benjamin's description of the Paris Arcades. She proposes that both radical modernization and heritage restoration attempt to undo this porosity, as it does not fit within a total vision of the city as a coherent whole: "In cities in transition, porosity is particularly visible; it turns the whole city into an experimental art exhibit, a place of continuous improvisation that irritates developers."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Senécal 54.

<sup>41</sup> Gilles A. Tiberghien, "Notes on Nature, Huts, and Some Other Things: III," *Melvin Charney*, exhibition catalogue (Montréal: Musée d'art contemporaine de Montréal, 2002) 163.

<sup>42</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) 75.

In the 1960s and 70s, Montréal was a city in transition in many ways: Drapeau's megaprojects, the sovereignty movement, fading industrial pride, and increased focus on tourism and leisure. Indicating the shift from industry to leisure, articles written at the time referred to the gates and the barbed wire that separated the Port as the symbol of the relationship of Montréalers to "their" river.<sup>43</sup> The Port Authority was moving the Port operations to a container terminal further east, and the fate of the mammoth structures of grain silos had to be decided. The "Fenêtre Sur le Fleuve" project initiated in early 1970s focused on "returning" the Port to the citizens of Montréal, while stressing the transition of the city into a leisure society.<sup>44</sup> A pattern emerged from the project where all future redevelopment plans were being proposed as simultaneously serving locals and tourists, emphasizing public involvement and consultation, and solidifying openness. Access and a sense of proactive democracy were the ideals of the "Fenêtre Sur le Fleuve" project from the onset.

There were a few proposals to preserve and repurpose the Silo no2, but none were promoted as strongly as its demolition – a symbolic gesture that would unveil the new Montréal and Marché Bonsecours from the water, and the Saint Lawrence River from the port. Reflected in the final redevelopment plan, there was a lot of discussion and excitement about how the project will be giving to Montréal what Seine is to Paris – a site of recreation and local identity tied to the water.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Association Le Vieux Port, *A redevelopment strategy for le Vieux-Port de Montréal : a practical program / proposed by the Association/Le Vieux-Port* (Montréal 1979) 18.

<sup>44</sup> Association Le Vieux Port, 1979, 24.

<sup>45</sup> Association Le Vieux Port, 1979, 35.

Less than a year after the project's initiation, Silo no. 2 was demolished on the week of July 8, 1978. Fiona Malins, a member of the Residents Association of the Old Port, recalls that, "for nearly a week in 1978, [Silo no. 2] resisted all efforts to demolish it. I well remember standing on Place Jacques-Cartier and watching the demolition team at work. It was an amazing sight."<sup>46</sup> Looking at the newspaper image of the Silo no. 2's final demolition, through the lens of Malin's description, there is a simultaneous impression of power and anticipation (Fig. 9).<sup>47</sup> The power lies both in the structure's resistance and the ultimate ability to overcome it, while the anticipation is for a curtain lifted onto the new Old Port, revealing the river to the city and the city to the river. The demolition took place so quickly that it was taken as a sign of inevitable fate of all silos in the port. It was a statement that the project had begun, and that changes were already being made. Basing my judgement on the significance of Silo no. 2 in the history of the Port and its operations, I could only see the demolition as a symbolic statement that a new era had arrived. Its location in front of Marché Bonsecours likely played a role in this decision, as it immediately opened a cleaner view onto the river, an easier visual reading of the market, as well as the view onto the Montréal skyline.

Five years later, Silo no.1 was demolished in 1983 after months of heated public debates. Unlike Silo no. 2, the building was being defended as an architectural icon and a place of work, as its demolition meant the loss of sixty jobs.<sup>48</sup> The same year, twelve million dollars was invested into architectural preservation work on Old Montréal. After the demolition, the

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<sup>46</sup> Fiona Malins, "Rue de la Commune," *Out and About in Old Montréal*, 15 Sept. 2008, Association des résidents du Vieux-Montréal, web (accessed 1 Oct. 2009).

<sup>47</sup> "Demolition of Silo no. 2," photograph, *The Gazette* (Montréal), 8 Jul. 1978, Vertical file 87-A390: Le Vieux-Port, Montréal (CCA).

<sup>48</sup> "Le débat continue: Demolir ou préserver ce silo?" *Le Journal du Vieux Montréal*, 6 Feb. 1983; newspaper clipping, Vertical File: Montréal, Québec, Silos (CCA).

renovations project stalled, plagued by bureaucratic delays, while the Old Port gained popularity for both locals and tourists.<sup>49</sup>

Eventually, a new project was begun again in the late 1980s, to be completed by 1992 for Montréal's 350's anniversary.<sup>50</sup> This plan was perhaps the biggest example of public involvement in Montréal's history, with over sixty hours of public consultations, organized visits to the port, numerous exhibitions of historical photographs and paintings of Montréal's industrial history, and extensive media coverage.<sup>51</sup> The final proposal by the architect of the project, Aurèle Cardinal, included plans for the Silo no. 2 and its surroundings. The Silo no. 2 site became an important focal point for the project, which proposed to reveal its foundations as a testament to port's history.<sup>52</sup> An artificial basin and a park were to be built directly facing Marché Bonsecours, which underwent a radical renovation from a public marketplace into a tourist shopping space.<sup>53</sup> The rhetoric around the project integrated history, museums, and recreation. Instead of just providing a green leisure space, Cardinal emphasized the return "to the time when the harbour was at its highest level, at its optimal level of functioning."<sup>54</sup> As this time was intimately tied to the Silo no. 2, the site received a new life as an archaeological ruin.

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<sup>49</sup> "Action? What Action?" Editorial, *The Gazette* (Montréal), 6 April 1987, newspaper clipping, Vertical File, 87-A390: Le Vieux-Port, Montréal (CCA).

<sup>50</sup> Paul Wells, "Renovation project for Old Port aims to capitalize on its strengths," *The Gazette* (Montréal), 4 April 1991, Vertical File, 87-A390: Le Vieux-Port, Montréal (CCA).

<sup>51</sup> Consultative Committee of the Vieux-Port of Montréal, *The Vieux-Port of Montréal, Public Consultation Final Report* (Montréal: Société du Vieux-Port, 1986) 20.

<sup>52</sup> Dennis Trudeau, "Old Port to be renovated for City's 350<sup>th</sup> Birthday," *Montréal CBMT*, 19 April 1991, newspaper clipping, Vertical File 87-A390: Le Vieux-Port, Montréal (CCA).

<sup>53</sup> Butler 6.

<sup>54</sup> Trudeau.



In the language surrounding the unearthing of the foundations for the Silo no. 2, there is a pang of nostalgia for a historically unspecified past of the Old Port as a hub of activity and community. In an article written for the 22 August 1992 edition of *The Montréal Gazette*, Edgar Andrew Gollard states: “the people have come back to their waterfront, where their life began.”<sup>55</sup> He looks back at the “simple” time when the community enjoyed strolls by the water and swam in the river, now polluted by the industry. He mentions the fence, a fixture in discussions about the Old Port, but he specifies that it was built to keep the strollers from falling off the storm wall.<sup>56</sup> Instead of limiting access to the water, the fence was there to protect strollers and give them a safe space to enjoy themselves.

The ruins of the Silo no. 2 play into the same narrative. They are interpreted on a plaque, which explains how industrial structures works in Montréal, while pointing to the history of the Port. However, the immense irony of the “archaeological” unearthing of the foundations is that the demolition of Silo no. 2 was part of the same project. The foundations, fashioned to look like archaeological ruins, provide a new framing of the Marché Bonsecours’ status as a tourist destination.<sup>57</sup> The ruins make the building look “historic” again, but there is no longer a contrast between the *modern* Silo no. 2 and the *traditional* marketplace. The two periods are pulled together into a non-specific “history of the port that once was,” while the interpretation of the ruins is hidden away from view.

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<sup>55</sup> Edgar Andrew Collard, “City gets back its view of the river,” *The Gazette* (Montréal), 22 Aug. 1992, newspaper clipping, Vertical File 87-A390: Le Vieux-Port, Montréal (CCA).

<sup>56</sup> Collard.

<sup>57</sup> Butler 10.

The image created through the new landscaping of the Bonsecours basin, the ruins, and the Marché Bonsecours, could be viewed through Dean MacCannell's essay, "Staged Authenticity," which proposes that areas are staged for tourism to appear historically important, setting them apart from the everyday experience.<sup>58</sup> Wendy Butler views the selective process through which Old Port was renovated in the 1980's as an act of staged authenticity.<sup>59</sup> Even though Silo no. 2 was demolished, its ruins could contribute something to the set that the developers were creating for the marketing of Old Montréal as a historic district. Again, the site of the Silo no. 2 becomes instrumentalized in putting forth an image of the city as a coherent whole. Svetlana Boym in the *Future of Nostalgia* argues that urban renewal in post-modern cities is "no longer futuristic but nostalgic: the city imagines its future by improvising on its past."<sup>60</sup> This description helps us to understand the project to unearth the ruins of Silo no. 2 in the context of emphasizing the Port as a space of community. Two periods in Montréal's history are conjoined here: the Victorian era when the waterfront existed as a leisure space and the industrial era when it was home to complex grain-handling equipment.

Remains of the Silo no. 2 site were covered again in 2004 as the Société du Vieux-Port de Montréal declared them unsafe for the public, resulting in the current green lawn on the site.<sup>61</sup> The 2004/2005 Annual Report emphasizes the archaeological significance of the ruins, and points out that their concealment is reversible in case a future study of the site takes place.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>58</sup> Dean MacCannell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *The American Journal of Sociology* 79.3 (Nov. 1973): 597.

<sup>59</sup> Butler 3.

<sup>60</sup> Boym 75.

<sup>61</sup> Old Port of Montréal Corporation, *Annual Report: 2004-2005*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Old Port of Montréal Corporation, *Annual Report: 2004-2005*, 21.

original plaque from the 1992 still remains, although it is not obviously visible (Fig. 10). It points to the ruins, explaining how the silos of the Port operated. In an example of a dialectical image, this framing contains all stages of the site's history: Marché Bonsecours as a tourist space with contemporary art displayed under its cupola, the green lawn framing the Montréal skyline, and the panel which is explaining the ruins that are no longer in front it. The image of the Silo no. 2 on the crackled plaque contains the iconic image of the Silo no. 2 from the pier, likely taken from the same source as my initial newspaper clipping, Gropius' text, and *Vers une Architecture*.

The area around the Old Port is increasingly populated and Old Montréal is becoming a centre for local nightlife and luxury entertainment, catering to both to the wealthy locals and millions of tourists. Figure 2, picturing the former site of Silo no. 2 in October 2009, shows how both groups use the area as a pedestrian and recreational space. In this scheme, public access to the waterfront begins to signify a democratic aspect to the otherwise economically restrictive area of Montréal. While it is important to deconstruct the history of the Old Port and to acknowledge how the industrial past has been altered to produce its current packaging, the results of the redevelopment plans have created an area that is loved, respected, and widely used by the city residents. The democratic process that framed the redevelopment had its casualties, and Silo no. 2 was the first. Current debates surrounding the future of Silo no.5, the last remaining silo in the Old Port, indicate an increased interest in protecting industrial heritage of the city; the building has official heritage status and has received extensive press coverage.<sup>63</sup> By contrast, the site of Silo no. 2, currently indistinguishable from other manicured landscapes of

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<sup>63</sup> Senécal 92-94.

the Promenade, is an embodiment of the trajectory through which the grain silos have moved from being markers of modernization to their current status as towering ruins of industrial heritage.



Fig. 1 Silo No. 2, as published in *Canadian Courier*, 12 October 1912, and found in the *Massicotte Scrapbook Album of Streets*, Bibliothèque et Archives National du Québec, Montréal. Web. Accessed 1 Oct. 2009. Courtesy of the BANQ (<http://bibnum2banq.qc.ca>).



Fig. 2 Site of Silo no. 2: Promenade du Vieux Port, 2009  
Photograph: Natalia Lebedinskaia



Fig. 3 Detail, map of the Montréal Quays, from *Quays of the Old Port*, Nov. 2009. Web. Accessed 1 Nov. 2009.



25. GATE-BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE OF THE DEAD OF KING SAMSU-RA



26. GRAIN-ELEVATOR IN CANADA

Fig. 4 Grain elevator being compared to an Egyptian temple, in Walter Gropius, “The Development of Modern Industrial Architecture,” reprinted in Tim Benton, Charlotte Benton and Denis Sharp, eds, *Form and Function: a Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890 – 1939* (London: Crosby Lockwood Staples, 1975), 53.



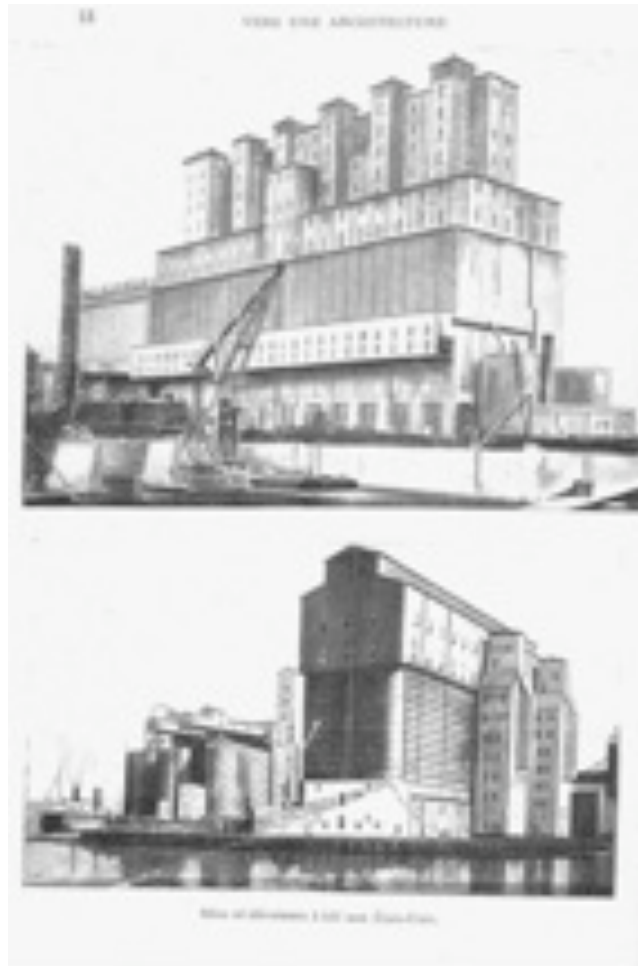


Fig. 5 Illustration of Silo no. 2 in Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* (Paris: G. Crès et Cie., 1924) 18.



Fig. 6 View of Silo no. 2 from the Expo 67 site, reproduced in Reyner Banham, *Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 105.



Fig. 7 David Miller, *Partial view of a shed of Grain Elevator No. 2, Port of Montréal, Québec*, September 1976. Courtesy of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (PH1979:0026).



Fig. 8 Melvin Charney, *Silos et élévateur à grain no. 2, Port de Montréal (avec le Marché Bonsecours, rue Saint-Paul)*, 1969. Courtesy of Sodart.



Fig. 9 Demolition of Silo no. 2, as pictured in *The Gazette* (Montréal), 8 July 1978.  
CCA Vertical Files, *Silo no. 2*.



Fig. 10 Plaque commemorating Silo no. 2, 2009.  
Photograph: Natalia Lebedinskaia

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Editor's note: Many of the local newspaper sources cited in this essay are located in the Vertical File collection of the Library of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal. The CCA collects news and other clippings in files on Montreal streets and buildings. Not all items in these files retain their original pagination, and for this reason the references in this list and in this essay's footnotes do not always show page numbers. For more information, please see the Vertical File holdings for "Le Vieux-Port" and "Montréal, Québec: Silos" at the CCA.

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