

## Reclaiming Le 9<sup>e</sup>:

Jacques Carlu's Art Deco wonder + Lady Eaton's gendered space  
= Heritage Site for all?



Maya Soren

September 2010

## **Introduction**

From 1931 until 1999, the Eaton's Ninth Floor Restaurant, known as "Le 9<sup>e</sup>", was a fixture in the hearts of generations of Montréalers. Located downtown at the corner of University and Ste-Catherine streets, the restaurant once stood on the imaginary dividing line between French and English Montréal. Today, with the Complexe Les Ailes and numerous offices occupying the building, it is difficult to envision from street-level (and almost hard to believe) that a 1930s Art Deco restaurant still exists on the ninth floor. Unfortunately, today's younger generation of Montréalers does not have the opportunity to enjoy the restaurant, because while it has been officially classified a heritage site by the provincial government, it is closed to the public. When I first began researching the site, I was puzzled by this conundrum: how could the restaurant be closed to the public domain, if heritage is supposed to be collective, if not universal?

This is a question I attempt to address in the present essay, which is the result of a research project that required an understanding of the entire building's historical and architectural significance, as well as an exploration of the restaurant as a gendered space. As of this writing, I have not been able to enter the restaurant.<sup>1</sup> I did explore, however, the office floors accessible via the 1500 University entrance, including some of the ninth floor. As my research progressed, I found that many people have been trying to enter the restaurant since its closure

---

<sup>1</sup> To further my research, I contacted Complexe Director Johanne Marcotte, to see if she could allow me access to the restaurant. Unfortunately, I was denied entrance. I also contacted Dinu Bumbaru (Policy Director of Heritage Montréal), Georges Drolet (Associate Architect of Fournier, Gersovitz, Moss), Julien Geoffroy (JKG Architects) Jean Bélisle (Architectural Historian), and Sandra Cohen-Rose (Founder of Art Deco Montréal), in the hopes that one of these professionals could help me get into the restaurant. Unfortunately, none of them could provide me with access, as none had been able to access the restaurant themselves for many years.

and subsequent heritage classifications.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most successful attempt was made by the group, Urban Explorers Montréal (UEM). UEM refer to sites like the Eaton's restaurant as "unspace," which is loosely defined as any abandoned or hidden places in cities that are explored by urban spelunkers.<sup>3</sup> At some point since the restaurant closed in 1999, the group managed to enter the foyer and have documented their intervention on their website, though they did not enter the restaurant itself.<sup>4</sup> When I visited the ninth floor however, I only was able to progress as far as a door just beyond the elevator that barricades the visitor from entering the foyer (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Present-day barricaded entrance to Le 9<sup>e</sup>. Photograph: Maya Soren, November 2009.

Aside from the UEM intervention, the restaurant has seen very little activity since 1999.

Yet this paper does not position itself as a lament, outlining the failure of Eaton's, the subsequent

---

<sup>2</sup> Dinu Bumbaru (Policy Director of Heritage Montréal) has not been in the restaurant since 2001, nor has Georges Drolet (Associate Architect of Fournier, Gersovitz, Moss) since 2002.

<sup>3</sup> This is a term used in the urban exploration community. It is referred to in (and may have originated from) Steven Hall's novel, *The Raw Shark Texts* (New York: Canongate, 2007). Urban Explorers Montréal refer to this text on their website.

<sup>4</sup> Photographs of the UEM Eaton's intervention can be viewed here: <http://uem.minimanga.com/occupied/eatons/>.

mothballing of the restaurant's space, and its museumification. Instead, in addition to celebrating the architectural value of Le 9<sup>e</sup>, this paper encourages public interest in the restaurant as both a heritage site and as a unique, gendered space. Perhaps with enough public interest, Ivanhoe Cambridge (the property management company that oversees access to Le 9<sup>e</sup>) and the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine will allow the restaurant to be publicly accessible. With this goal in mind, this essay acts as a tactic, a proactive and pragmatic attempt to reclaim this once-loved restaurant for the public of Montréal.<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary to begin my discussion of Le 9<sup>e</sup> with an outline of the history of the Eaton's store in Montréal, with a focus on the development of its built environment from 1925-1931. I also examine its current state under the management of Ivanhoe Cambridge. In an attempt to understand the restaurant's heritage value, I make three main points that legitimize the space as a unique and historic cultural landmark. First, I discuss the restaurant's Art Deco style as a reflection of the architectural trends in Montréal that were contemporary with its construction, and I determine what attempts are currently being made to preserve it as a classified heritage site. Secondly, I argue that the restaurant is a gendered space, which played a major role in its years of financial success and acted as a setting where women negotiated space, which was largely due to matriarchal figure, Lady Eaton. Lastly, I argue that instead of simply symbolizing the historically divisive bi-cultural politics of Québec, the restaurant emphasizes a shared *lieu de mémoire* for both French and English communities.

---

<sup>5</sup> Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaró, "Things, Flows, Filters, Tactics," in *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, ed. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaró (Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: MIT Press, 2002) 11.

## **The Eaton's Building, Montréal**

In 1925, the Timothy Eaton Company bought the three-storey Ste-Catherine store and property from Goodwin Limited (Fig. 2), another retail and mail order business, for \$5.3 million.<sup>6</sup> Extra floors and large show windows were added in sections, so that by 1927 a new six-storey building was completed and Eaton's occupied the whole city block.<sup>7</sup> By 1931, the roof elevation and addition of three floors was completed (Fig. 3), which included Jacques Carlu's restaurant on the ninth floor. Hiring architects Ross & Macdonald of Montréal and Sproatt & Rolph of Toronto as consulting architects for all of the exterior and structural renovations, the Eaton family took great pride in hiring local contractors and in using Canadian steel and concrete as high quality, modern, building materials.<sup>8</sup> This final addition to the store was made possible due to a new 1929 city by-law, which permitted downtown buildings over 130 feet (40 metres) as long as they allowed for a setback of "one foot for every four feet additional height."<sup>9</sup> This by-law was instrumental in adopting the pyramid silhouette so characteristic of the New York skyscraper, which influenced many Montréal buildings of that era, such as the University Tower in 1929 and the Aldred Building in 1931, among many others.<sup>10</sup> The Eaton's store also capitalized on an additional stipulation for department stores which allowed for the square

---

<sup>6</sup> This was Robert Young Eaton's (nephew of company founder Timothy Eaton, cousin of second president John Craig Eaton - Flora McCrea Eaton's husband) first large acquisition. Known as RY, he was the third company president after the death of John Craig Eaton in 1922 from pneumonia. William Stephenson, *The Store That Timothy Built* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969) 86.

<sup>7</sup> Stephenson 86.

<sup>8</sup> Ross & Macdonald Architects, "General Specifications for Extensions to Store for The T. Eaton Co. Limited of Montréal," 19 Feb. 1930, Ross & Macdonald Fonds (Canadian Centre for Architecture – Archives) 5-10.

<sup>9</sup> Isabelle Gournay, "Gigantism in Downtown Montréal," *Montréal Metropolis: 1839-1930*, ed. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem (Toronto/Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture/Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1998) 177.

<sup>10</sup> Gournay 177-178.

footage of the floors to be up to eight times the area of the lot if the building provided public entryways on a minimum of three streets.<sup>11</sup>



Left: Fig.2 *Goodwin's department store (future site of T. Eaton Co.), Ste-Catherine Street Montréal, QC, ca. 1912.* Photographer unknown. Silver salts on paper – Gelatin silver process. MP-1984.105.4 © McCord Museum

Right: Fig.3 *Addition to the top of Eaton's store, St. Catherine Street, Montréal, QC, 1930.* E. W. Bennett. 1930. Silver salts on paper mounted on linen – Gelatin silver process. MP-0000.2092.7 © McCord Museum.

Because of these by-laws, which “protected urban morphology, but also began to generate contrasts in scale that were increasingly difficult to manage”<sup>12</sup> it became “possible to constantly modernize the range of the commercial and residential facilities required for a North American city the size of Montréal.”<sup>13</sup> The Eaton's building reflects this trend in modernization and captures the spirit of the booming construction era; after a mere six years, it had transformed massively in height and area. In Montréal between 1880 and 1930, “commercial gigantism –

---

<sup>11</sup> Gournay 178.

<sup>12</sup> Gournay 182.

<sup>13</sup> Gournay 182.

though here more technological and programmatic than stylistic in nature – remained the principle vehicle of architectural modernity.”<sup>14</sup> Certainly, these transformative renovations were practical, but also lucrative measures, which were taken in order to maintain the company’s world-class reputation as the biggest, and perhaps the most prestigious, retail company in Canada at the time. In other words, as a new institution in twentieth century Montréal, the Eaton’s store perfectly reflects the evolution toward a modern metropolis seen in architecture, and the increased importance of commercial leisure, shops, and consumers.<sup>15</sup>

For decades the Eaton’s Ste-Catherine store flourished and its legacy is anchored amongst other department stores such as Ogilvy’s, Dupuis Frères, and The Bay, which for a time were successful in changing the ways in which citizens shopped. By democratizing material consumption through the sale of affordable, mass produced goods, the middle class could also take part in a culture of luxury, where shopping trips downtown were often a weekly ritual, even if the customer lived in suburban areas. While this cultural shift was positive for department stores, it severely hurt the catalogue business. By the 1970s, the Eaton’s catalogue was no longer a profitable business venture; the 1976 spring-summer catalogue was the company’s last edition. In the 1990s, Eaton’s quickly started to see a decline in sales, which is largely due to competition from discount and dollar stores (as well as poor management decisions), perhaps best exemplified with the emergence of Wal-Mart in Canada, its first store being opened in Mississauga in 1994. In retrospect, it seems obvious that the department store would have great difficulty competing with cheaper stores like Wal-Mart, Zellers, and Costco (a problem that

---

<sup>14</sup> Gournay 182.

<sup>15</sup> Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers, “Introduction,” *Negotiating Identities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Montréal* (The Montréal History Group, Vancouver/Toronto: UBC Press, 2005) 13.

department stores like Sears and The Bay still face), and the closure of Eaton's could perhaps be called inevitable. After 74 years in business and several years of financial troubles, on 27 August 1999 the Ste-Catherine store closed its doors following the bankruptcy of Eaton's Québec stores, which kept over 2,000 employees at home across the province.<sup>16</sup> Remarkably, the ninth floor restaurant was able to remain open until a final day of service nearly two months later. On 14 October 1999, after sixty-eight years of service, the restaurant and its staff said goodbye to Montréalers during an emotional ceremony. Journalist Marie-Andrée Amiot describes this poignant moment: "sur fond de cornemuses jouant le très beau *Amazing Grace*, plusieurs employés et leurs invités ont fondu en larmes."<sup>17</sup>

Following the closure of the Montréal store, the former Eaton's property was acquired by Ivanhoe Cambridge, the real estate arm of the Caisse de Dépôt et Placement du Québec, specializing in the property management of shopping malls and office space. In 2000, Ivanhoe Cambridge hired Architects Lemay et Associés to renovate the building which would henceforth be known as Le Complexe Les Ailes. Today a high-end shopping centre and its flagship store, Les Ailes de la Mode operates in the basement and first three floors of the building (Fig. 4), while floors three through eight are designated for office space, housing major tenants such as Computershare Trust, L'Oréal Canada, Hydro Québec and Nuance Communications. The main renovation to the existing building is exemplified in the glass roof and central atrium, as well as the indoor winter garden (Fig. 5), accessible only to the office tenants from floors five through nine (but not accessible from the restaurant).

---

<sup>16</sup> For details about the bankruptcy of Eaton's Québec see: Noble, Fine, and Nicol, "Eaton's Goes Bankrupt," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

<sup>17</sup> Marie-Andrée Amiot, "Allez, au revoir les amis," *La Presse* (Montréal), 15 Oct. 1999. "In the background bagpipes were playing the very beautiful *Amazing Grace*, while many employees and their guests burst into tears" (trans. Maya Soren).



## Le 9<sup>e</sup>

While the Eaton's building has yet again transformed, the ninth floor restaurant has been protected, mainly due to the efforts of Heritage Montréal. On 24 August 2000 the Québec Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, which Heritage Montréal describes as “the only authority able to protect interior spaces,” classified the restaurant as an official heritage site upon Heritage Montréal's request.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, no transformation, modification, or demolition of the space and its contents can be made without the consent of the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication. Additionally, the site has been named an “immeuble de valeur patrimoniale exceptionnelle” under municipal jurisdiction, further protecting its architectural state, though also complicating and entwining its fate with planning policies and political agenda.<sup>19</sup>



Left: Fig. 4 Complexe Les Ailes, view of shopping mall from the second floor.  
Photograph: Maya Soren, November 2009.

Right: Fig. 5 Indoor Winter Garden, view from the seventh floor.  
Photograph: Maya Soren, November 2009.

---

<sup>18</sup> The Heritage Montréal website outlines the organization's ongoing attempts to save the Ninth Floor from further mothballing.

<sup>19</sup> The Grand répertoire du patrimoine bâti de Montréal website offers minimal information about the site's provincial heritage status and as an “immeuble de valeur patrimoniale exceptionnelle” (building of exceptional heritage value, trans. Maya Soren) under municipal jurisdiction.

In the early 1900s, it was customary for businessmen to return home for lunch to dine with their wives. However, Timothy Eaton (1834-1907) often found himself too busy to make the trip home, preferring to stay at work and eating a sandwich in his office at the Toronto Queen Street store. Eventually, a table was set up for him and progressively a few more for customers in the grocery department, becoming a forerunner of the Eaton's snack bars and restaurants.<sup>20</sup>

Restaurants could be found in the great department stores of London and New York, and Lady Eaton (1880-1970) had frequented such establishments on her travels. According to Anderson and Mallinson, "London's Debenhams, Selfridges and Harrod's and New York's the B. Altman Company and Lord & Taylor were her natural terrain."<sup>21</sup> When Lady Eaton joined the Eaton's Board of Directors in 1921, "[it] is no wonder, then, that [she] began to entertain the idea of a modern restaurant, equipped with first-class equipment and food."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the ninth floor restaurant and foyer (Fig. 6 and 7), which opened on 26 January 1931, is a manifestation of Lady Eaton's vision for restaurants in the Eaton's stores, which naturally added to the institution's sophistication within a culture of luxury and gave it a social function that was both prestigious and lucrative.<sup>23</sup>

Designed by Jacques Carlu (1890-1976), the famous French architect, winner of the *Premier Grand Prix de Rome* in 1919, and professor at MIT, the restaurant was inspired by the

---

<sup>20</sup> Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton* (ECW Press: Toronto, 2004) 39.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 40.

<sup>22</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 41.

<sup>23</sup> Gournay 178.

elongated formality and elegance of Lady Eaton's favorite transatlantic ocean liner,<sup>24</sup> the 1927 *S. S. Ile-de-France*, which Carlu had also worked on under Pierre Patout (1879-1965).<sup>25</sup> The



Fig. 6 (left) *One of the showplaces of Montréal, Canada, is the Ninth Floor Restaurant of the T. Eaton Co. Limited Department Store.* Photographer unknown, date unknown. Postcard. IRIS 0002633956. © Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec.

Fig. 7 (right) *The foyer approach to the Ninth Floor Restaurant of the T. Eaton Co. Limited Department Store, Montréal, Canada.* Date unknown. Postcard. IRIS 0002631602. © Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec.

interior of the Eaton's College Street<sup>26</sup> Round Room Restaurant in Toronto was also designed by Carlu and is perhaps closer to the Montréal Ninth Floor than the *S. S. Ile-de-France* in terms of style and the materials used, however it is more often associated with the latter.<sup>27</sup> Thus, it is

<sup>24</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 71.

<sup>25</sup> Sandra Cohen-Rose, *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montréal* (Corona Publishers: Montréal, 1996) 85-87. Cohen-Rose notes "understandable" similarities between the Maison Cormier and Le 9<sup>e</sup>, considering how both Ernest Cormier and Carlu attended the Beaux-Arts school in Paris and worked with Patout on the ocean liner. From 1946-1951, Cormier, Carlu, Le Corbusier and others also collaborated on the United Nations headquarters in New York.

<sup>26</sup> Ross & Macdonald and Sproatt & Rolph also designed the Toronto Eaton's College St. store.

<sup>27</sup> Georges Drolet, personal interview, 20 Nov. 2009. Drolet states that it is a misconception that Carlu was entirely responsible for the design of the interior of the *S. S. Ile-de-France* and that it is a myth that Le 9<sup>e</sup> is a replica of the ocean liner. While Lady Eaton did travel aboard the *S. S. Ile-de-France*, the restaurant's association with it is more a lucrative maneuver in order to give it a sense of European prestige in a world-class culture of luxury, rather than bearing specific architectural relationships aside from the Art Deco style.

perhaps more accurate to say that Carlu's Art Deco design related to his training in Beaux-Arts gigantism while also exploring a new direction known as "Streamline Moderne."<sup>28</sup> In an additional attempt to associate the Ninth Floor with French magnificence, it "was originally to be called François Premier, after a 15<sup>th</sup>-century French king, but the name did not catch on and the restaurant was simply known as Le 9<sup>e</sup>."<sup>29</sup>

Jacques Carlu's detailed account of the restaurant is provided here, as I have not been able to visit the space and formulate my own. His account offers a valuable visual description of the restaurant's Art Deco interior, especially when read in combination with existing photographs:

The central nave presents a clerestory ringed with horizontal windows admitting, through panels of opal glass, natural and artificial light well under control. [Fig. 8] The aisles are illuminated indirectly with light placed in inverted wells in the ceiling.

The nave is surrounded with a range of columns of *escalette breche* marble in pink and soft gray, supporting the wall where the clerestory windows are set. The lintels between the columns are decorated with bas-reliefs by Denis Gélín.

At either end and along each side are low raised balconies with railings of Monel metal, reached by steps of black Belgian marble. The walls are covered with a horizontally striped French fabric, beige and pink.

The floor is of *Ruboleum* tiles with an unusual pattern of colours. At both ends of the room are two huge vases of ceramics, resting on Belgian marble bases. These are illuminated from the inside.

Among the appliances incorporated in the design is the radio installation behind the Monel metal grilles. Music from the outside can be enjoyed, or in the case of a large banquet or gathering, the voice of the speaker can be well distributed about the dining room.

---

<sup>28</sup> Gournay 178.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 71.

The platforms at each end have been so arranged as to be transformed easily for staging fashion shows. Concealed electric spotlights have been provided to enhance the displays.<sup>30</sup>



Fig. 8 *View of restaurant looking towards one of the two large murals by Natacha Carlu. c. 1987*  
Source: Art Deco Montréal's Flickr photostream (web).

---

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Carlu, "The T. Eaton and Co. Department Stores in Toronto and Montréal," *The Architectural Record* 69.6 (1931): 447, 452.

Clearly, Carlu's description emphasizes the refinement of imported European materials, underscoring the sophistication and elegance of the space, which "serves to counterbalance the building's neutral exterior."<sup>31</sup> There is also a "striking contrast" between Le 9<sup>e</sup> and "the other large halls built in Montréal in the 1920s, all of which were highly eclectic – particularly the neo-Tudor concert hall constructed in 1929 in Ogilvy's,"<sup>32</sup> another work by architects Ross & Macdonald. Cohen-Rose demonstrates that Montréal is home to numerous public and private buildings in the Art Deco style, such as schools, fire halls and theatres, and especially emphasizes the role of Ernest Cormier (1885-1980) and his works (most notably the Main Pavilion at the Université de Montréal). Yet it is rare to find an extant, *interior* space in the Art Deco style; this is what makes Le 9<sup>e</sup> restaurant unique and worthy of preservation, according to Georges Drolet, associate architect of Fournier, Gersovitz, Moss.

Responsible for surveying the restaurant in 2001, Drolet outlined a retrofit and conservation strategy for the restaurant should it be repurposed.<sup>33</sup> Since the restaurant's closure, the enormous kitchen, which also serviced the lower level snack bars, has been removed. While this factor would seem to make it difficult to open a new restaurant in the space, according to Drolet, a modernized kitchen would have been a wise installation regardless, because the old one (which took up about a third of the entire restaurant) was much too big in order to operate at maximum efficiency. I also learned from Drolet that the restaurant though fairly well maintained from 1931 until 1999, is now in the last ten years seeing signs of decay and in need of restoration. For example, due to a minor electrical fire in the spring of 2000, the two murals (one

---

<sup>31</sup> Gournay 178.

<sup>32</sup> Gournay 178.

<sup>33</sup> Drolet.

representing the Pleasures of the Chase, the other the Pleasures of Peace) by Jacques Carlu's wife, Natacha Carlu (birth date unknown), have been damaged and remain unrestored. Drolet is also concerned about the floor, which was designed by Jean Carlu (1900-1997, Jacques' brother) and is what he calls "the most avant-garde aspect of the restaurant."<sup>34</sup> Drolet and his team analyzed the colours and composition of the floor, drawing comparisons with it and Jean Carlu's graphic design work, concluding that it could be considered characteristic of the artist's Art Deco poster art of that era.

Drolet's conservation strategy emphasizes the preservation of original (to the restaurant's 1931 construction) architectural elements as well as a respect for the sequence or pattern of movement throughout the space as a whole, which requires an understanding of the "original values" in order to determine how to intervene (or not).<sup>35</sup> These priorities, as explained by Drolet, led me to inquire about the repurposing of the restaurant into a hotel, an idea that Ivanhoe Cambridge dabbled with before Le 9<sup>e</sup> was classified as a heritage site in 2000. The proposed hotel would have encompassed the top three floors of the building. Drolet replied that this idea was "not unfeasible,"<sup>36</sup> because the rooms would have ideally been built around a central atrium, thus apparently not drastically changing the restaurant's structure. Though Ivanhoe Cambridge had lured in about half a dozen hotels for this idea, this transformation was evidently never carried out. This was likely because (among other reasons), as General Manager of Development and Construction Jean Laramée pointed out, "[le] problème, c'est le format rectangulaire du

---

<sup>34</sup> Drolet.

<sup>35</sup> Drolet.

<sup>36</sup> Drolet.

plancher. Ce n'est pas l'idéal."<sup>37</sup> Drolet also discussed the owner's interest in turning the restaurant into a conference centre, an idea that he rejected because he believed that opening up the space into one large room would cause too much damage to the original structure. While Drolet was not able to share with me many more of the specific architectural recommendations for the restaurant (as they have yet to be implemented and are subject to confidentiality agreements), he did underline its heritage value for two major reasons: one, because it is a manifestation of the Art Deco style as a trend in restaurants and interior spaces in Montréal, and two, because it represents a "new way of thinking about luxury in the commercial field."<sup>38</sup>

### **The cultural landscape of Le 9<sup>e</sup> : gendered space**

In Dolores Hayden's words, "[a] socially inclusive urban landscape history can become the basis for new approaches to public history and urban preservation. This will be different from, but complementary to, the art-historical approach to architecture that has provided a basis for architectural preservation."<sup>39</sup> With this approach in mind, I believe that a reading of the site of Le 9<sup>e</sup> as a gendered space offers a different perspective regarding the heritage value of the restaurant. This idea is especially relevant when we consider how historians over the last thirty years "have reached several shared conclusions that challenge the interpretation of women's oppression as rooted in their confinement to the domestic sphere,"<sup>40</sup> showing "empirically the multiple ways that many women were not confined to the home or to the domestic or the private

---

<sup>37</sup> François Cardinal, "Un nouvel hôtel chez Eaton," *Le Devoir* (Montréal), 14 March 2000, np. "... the problem, is the rectangular format of the floor. It is not idéal" (trans. Maya Soren).

<sup>38</sup> Drolet.

<sup>39</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995) 12.

<sup>40</sup> Bradbury and Myers 5.



realm<sup>41</sup> in nineteenth and early twentieth century Montréal. First, it is instrumental to acknowledge the enormously influential matriarchal role that Lady Flora McCrea Eaton (1880-1970), daughter-in-law of company founder Timothy Eaton, played in the restaurant's construction and maintenance, as well as on a national level as important public figure.



Fig. 9 Lady Flora McCrea Eaton. Photographer unknown, date unknown.  
Source: *Dishing up some Canadian nostalgia*. FILE,  
York's Daily Bulletin. York University. 19 May 2004. Web.

Hailing from Omemee, Ontario, Flora McCrea was the youngest of a working-class family of eight children. At twenty years old, she took up a training position at Rotherham House in Toronto, a private hospital where John Craig Eaton (1876-1922) was a patient; the two were married in 1901. The couple traveled extensively, touring in Europe for business (Eaton's operated buying offices in Paris, Zurich, Belfast, London and other centres) and pleasure,

---

<sup>41</sup> Bradbury and Myers 5.

accompanied by “The Court,” an entourage of children, governesses, maids, and nurses.<sup>42</sup> While her life as an Eaton was certainly a highly privileged one, especially compared to her upbringing, Lady Eaton had a feisty and independent spirit that was never silenced, but instead heightened, as the wife of Eaton’s company president. To illustrate this point, Lady Eaton “insisted on driving her husband’s Winton Phaeton, the first automobile owned in Canada, and became the first lady driver in an accident.”<sup>43</sup> As a philanthropist, advocate of arts and culture, socialite, singer, world traveler, and mother of six, Lady Eaton joined the Eaton’s Board of Directors in 1921, “and influenced decisions there until her retirement in 1943, informing every aspect of the business.”<sup>44</sup>

After the death of her husband in 1922, “Lady Eaton stepped forward to take the reigns of the company,” and one of her particular responsibilities was to reorganize the company’s restaurants. In her autobiography she writes of the times, “Toronto badly needed a new, good restaurant, and I was groping toward the kind that would attract women as well as businessmen.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Lady Eaton envisioned a place where women were welcome to socialize, which would be another dimension to a store that already catered to their needs. The Eaton’s business acumen capitalized on the rising buying-power of middle-class women and was the first department store to specifically gear to them not only products (such as lace, linen, clothing, and shoes), but also services such as free buses from outside of the city, doormen and elevator attendants who helped them with their packages, full length mirrors and private

---

<sup>42</sup> Bradbury and Myers 32-33.

<sup>43</sup> Bradbury and Myers 29.

<sup>44</sup> Bradbury and Myers xi.

<sup>45</sup> Flora McCrea Eaton, *Memory's Wall: The Autobiography of Flora McCrea Eaton* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1956) 145.

fittings.<sup>46</sup> At the original Queen Street store in Toronto, “[in the Ladies Gallery and Waiting Room, women could rest, meet a friend, even have a bath. Their children could be cared for by nurses while they made their purchases.”<sup>47</sup> In order to further entice women shoppers, Eaton’s began the “radical practice” of hiring women buyers; “[women knew what women wanted.”<sup>48</sup> Contrary to a general misconception that women in early twentieth century Montréal were confined to the home, “[girls and women with some training were increasingly likely to find work in offices and stores as clerical and sales positions multiplied and as manufacturing declined relative to other sectors of the economy.”<sup>49</sup> Insisting on overseeing the Montréal restaurant’s initial hiring, Lady Eaton advocated for women in managerial positions and as dietitians in the kitchen. Notably, Lady Eaton hired Kathleen Jeffs, head of Eaton’s Montréal restaurant services for 23 years, and for whom Lady Eaton had a great amount of respect. When Jeffs returned from WWII as Chief Messing Officer of the Air Force, Lady Eaton writes:

At a postwar banquet given in her honour by the dietitians in Toronto, the ovation which greeted her just before the unveiling of her portrait, was deafening, and no two people present were prouder than Violet Ryley [friend and head of the Georgian Room Restaurant in Toronto and I.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, the restaurants prided themselves as offering a national cuisine, with Lady Eaton and her kitchen staff pioneering training for commercial dietitians in Canada (a model

---

<sup>46</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 5.

<sup>47</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 6.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 7.

<sup>49</sup> Bradbury and Myers 13.

<sup>50</sup> Eaton 149-150.

later borrowed by the military in World War II) and planning elegant menus.<sup>51</sup> Lady Eaton was also responsible for establishing a minimum wage for women (the first company in Canada to do so), as well as the Eaton's Women's Society, a women's mentoring network.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, Lady Eaton used her wealth, power, and social status to improve social and working conditions for women and the restaurant was truly *her* domain that she offered up to the women of Montréal, English and French alike.

In the twentieth century, spatial segregation includes private men's clubs, university faculty clubs, programs in higher education, and numerous other spaces. The segregation need not be absolute – women might be permitted to attend a class, but sit separately, or they might be allowed to enter a club as men's guests, provided they remain in a special room reserved for ladies, and so on.<sup>53</sup>

This segregation is perhaps simultaneously reversed and reinforced at Le 9<sup>e</sup>, where, as Catherine Martin's film *Les dames du 9e* (1998) demonstrates, the restaurant was dominated by a female presence, with an all female staff of servers and a clientele base largely made up of multi-generational groups of women. Martin clearly illustrates how the department store and restaurant were one of the few public places that were socially acceptable for women to explore on their own in 1930s Montréal. There is also a particular emphasis on how Le 9<sup>e</sup> remained a place into the 1990s where these now elderly and often widowed women felt comfortable frequenting. Martin shows how the restaurant was a place where, aside from solely acting as consumers, women formed friendships, interacted with the public and took on social roles outside of the

---

<sup>51</sup> Anderson and Mallinson xii.

<sup>52</sup> Anderson and Mallinson 35.

<sup>53</sup> Hayden 24.

private sphere. In the twenty-first century, it is disturbing that a place like Le 9<sup>e</sup>, which is so important to Canadian women's history, could be excluded from public access.

### **The politics of space**

The embodiment of the restaurant's racial and cultural politics is a necessary part of any contemporary interpretation of the restaurant and contributes to the heritage discourse. While the classification of the restaurant as a provincial heritage site protects its architectural state, it raises questions about and creates problems for the very nature of heritage in a city with a population that has become evermore racially and linguistically diverse. At the time of the restaurant's construction in 1931, it clearly represented a distinct racial, linguistic and socio-economic group of citizens that was mainly Caucasian, Anglophone/Francophone (and bilingual) and middle to upper class. Over the seven decades that the restaurant was in business, Montréal evidently diversified, and the restaurant's clientele surely reflected this cultural phenomenon to a certain extent. Eaton's as an institution, however, has been highly criticized by scholars and the media for several forms of discrimination. For example, journalist Rod McQueen chides Eaton's for its "poor, abrupt, and offensive" treatment of minority customers, (among many other issues raised throughout the book) as well as its catalogues as "out of step and insensitive to the diversity of the market."<sup>54</sup> He refers to Fredelle Bruser Maynard's book, *Raisins and Almonds*, which reprimands the 1928 advertisement for an "Eskimo doll", as a "run of the mill doll in a clown suit with pom-poms and ruff at the neck," and for portraying "darkies" as a comic-vaudeville

---

<sup>54</sup> Rod McQueen, *The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Royal Family* (Toronto/New York: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1998) 81.

characters.<sup>55</sup> McQueen notes the experience of Peggy Laskin, Chief Justice of Canada from 1973 to 1984, who has spoken out about not being able to get a job as a beautician at the Eaton's Toronto store, "because, as it was delicately explained to her, Eaton's did not hire Jews"<sup>56</sup> This account is reminiscent of Franco-Manitoban author, Gabrielle Roy's "harrowing expedition" of shopping at an Eaton's in Winnipeg and the "misfortune of being French Canadian," even after moving to Montréal in 1939, where treatment was little different.<sup>57</sup> Though Le 9<sup>e</sup> may have represented independence and liberation for the ladies who lunched there, the Eaton's building and the Eaton's institution clearly represented prejudice and discrimination for others. In my opinion, these voices are as important as any others to writing what Hayden calls a "socially inclusive urban landscape history" and in underscoring the multiple histories of Eaton's.<sup>58</sup>

As an English institution in Québec, Eaton's has undergone much scrutiny in the media and has been used as a symbol of English Canadian hegemony in the Québec nationalist movement, especially leading up to Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language (1977). In 1970 at *La Nuit de Poésie*, a song and poetry benefit for Québécois political prisoners in Montréal, Michèle Lalonde recited her famous poem, *Speak White*. As François Rochon explains: "Written in an incantatory style, the poem decries the inferior cultural, social and economic conditions of French Canadians, while calling for the solidarity of oppressed peoples against all forms of colonialism and imperialism."<sup>59</sup> The poem's title specifically refers to the francophone

---

<sup>55</sup> McQueen 80.

<sup>56</sup> Irving Abella, "The Making of a Chief Justice: Bora Laskin, The Early Years," *Law Society of Upper Canada Gazette* 25.3 (Sept./Dec. 1991): 424, quoted in McQueen 81.

<sup>57</sup> McQueen refers to the first chapter of Gabrielle Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow: The Autobiography of Gabrielle Roy*, trans. Patricia Claxton (Lester and Orpen Dennys, Toronto, 1987), 5, 7, quoted in McQueen 81.

<sup>58</sup> Hayden 12.

<sup>59</sup> François Rochon, "Lalonde, Michèle," *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*.

experience at Eaton's and other businesses in downtown Montréal, where racist jeers were uttered at customers who chose not to speak English when making their purchases. As a consequence of Bill 101, Eaton's stores in Québec dropped the English possessive in the chain's name (becoming simply *Eaton*) and changed store signage to French, as well as undertaking many other efforts to heal the wounds of its francophone customers.<sup>60</sup>

It is important to acknowledge the discriminatory treatment of francophone Eaton's customers in analyzing the heritage value of Le 9<sup>e</sup>. The restaurant is a space that accentuated the dominating position of wealth and power held by the English elite in Québec prior to *La Révolution Tranquille*. It was also one of the few places in Montréal where the English and French communities met, where they celebrated births, marriages, anniversaries, reunions and other special occasions together. Cultural historian, Andreas Huyssen believes that "trauma cannot be the central category in addressing the larger memory discourse."<sup>61</sup> While it may be difficult today for Québec politicians, ministry board members, entrepreneurs, architects, and Ivanhoe Cambridge executives to justify investment in heritage that is largely rooted in English Canada, "[m]emory, whether individual or generational, political or public, is always more than only the prison house of the past."<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> These efforts included hiring francophone employees and investing in marketing campaigns in the French-language media.

<sup>61</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2003) 8.

<sup>62</sup> Huyssen 8.

## **Conclusion**

As long as Le 9<sup>e</sup> remains a privately-operated site, it disappears from public memory. It remains invisible in the ongoing and shifting heritage discourse of Montreal, and this absence creates historical amnesia for its various publics. Huyssen suggests that “[w]e need both past and future to articulate our political, social, and cultural dissatisfactions with the present state of the world.”<sup>63</sup> While the restaurant on the ninth floor of the former Eaton’s department store may not reflect an ideal vision of heritage as universal, it is a manifestation of a rare Art Deco interior; it represents women’s active involvement in the public sphere in the early twentieth century, and it acts as a shared *lieu de mémoire* for both English and French communities. As I continue to investigate the architectural and cultural histories of Le 9<sup>e</sup>, I am reminded of Dolores Hayden’s question, “[w]hy are so few moments in women’s history remembered as part of preservation?”<sup>64</sup> Does the restaurant’s history as a gendered space contribute to the reasons why, as a heritage site, it is not publicly accessible? Is there a tacit willingness on the part of the provincial government to silence the English institution’s historic wealth and power in Québec?

While I do not have answers for these questions, I hope that through my analysis of the restaurant’s historical development, architectural style and current classification as a heritage site, scholars, architects, artists, and general members of the public can continue to consider Le 9<sup>e</sup> and its embodiment of issues of gender, language and heritage. It is my hope that this paper will encourage a public dialogue that could eventually encourage, in turn, the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine and Ivanhoe Cambridge to release Le

---

<sup>63</sup> Huyssen 6.

<sup>64</sup> Huyssen 7.



9<sup>e</sup> from its prison in the private corporate sphere. A site as vital and rich in history as Le 9<sup>e</sup> should not amass more dust in the collective memories of the citizens of Montréal.

## Works cited

Editor's note: some 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 do not always show page numbers. For more information, please see the Vertical File holdings for the Montréal Eaton's building in the library holdings of the CCA.

Amiot, Marie-Andrée. "Allez, au revoir les amis." *La Presse* (Montréal). 15 Oct. 1999. CCA vertical files: *Eaton, Montréal, Québec*. Print.

Anderson, Carol and Katharine Mallinson. *Lunch with Lady Eaton*. ECW Press: Toronto, 2004. Print.

Borden, Iain, Jane Rendell, Joe Kerr, and Alicia Pivaro. "Things, Flows, Filters, Tactics." In *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*. Ed. Iain Borden, Joe Kerr, Jane Rendell and Alicia Pivaro. Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: MIT Press, 2002. 2-27. Print.

Bradbury, Bettina and Tamara Myers. "Introduction." *Negotiating Identities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Montréal*. By The Montréal History Group. Vancouver/Toronto: UBC Press, 2005. Print.

Bumbaru, Dinu. "Re: Eaton's 9<sup>th</sup> Floor." Message to Maya Soren. 30 Sept. 2009. E-mail.

Cardinal, François. "Un nouvel hôtel chez Eaton." *Le Devoir* (Montréal). 14 March 2000. CCA vertical files: *Eaton, Montréal, Québec*. Print.

Carlu, Jacques. "The T. Eaton and Co. Department Stores in Toronto and Montréal." *The Architectural Record* 69.6 (1931): 447-456. Print.

Cohen-Rose, Sandra. *Northern Deco: Art Deco Architecture in Montréal*. Corona Publishers: Montréal, 1996. Print.

Drolet, Georges. Personal Interview. 20 Nov. 2009.

Eaton, Flora McCrea. *Memory's Wall: The Autobiography of Flora McCrea Eaton*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1956. Print.

*Eaton's 9<sup>th</sup> Floor*. Heritage Montréal, n.d. Web. Accessed 22 Nov. 2009.

Gournay, Isabelle. "Gigantism in Downtown Montréal." *Montréal Metropolis: 1839-1930*. Ed. Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem. Toronto/Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture/Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1998. 153-183. Print.

Hall, Steven. *The Raw Shark Texts*. New York: Canongate, 2007. Print.

Hayden, Dolores. *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995. Print.

Huyssen, Andreas. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2003. Print.

*Les dames du 9e*. Dir. Catherine Martin. Prod. Claude Cartier, Nicole Lamothe. National Film Board of Canada. 1998. DVD.

McQueen, Rod. *The Eatons: The Rise and Fall of Canada's Royal Family*. Toronto/New York: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1998. Print.

Noble, Kimberly, Fine, Phillip and John Nicol. "Eaton's Goes Bankrupt." *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*. Maclean's, 30 Aug. 1999. Web. Accessed 1 Dec. 2009.

*Redéveloppement de l'Édifice Eaton, Montréal: concept de revitalisation*. Caisse de Dépôt et Placement Immo Caisse. August 2000. CCA vertical files: *Eaton, Montréal, Québec*. Print.

*Restaurant L'Île-de-France*. Grand repertoire du patrimoine bâti. 16 Jan. 2007. Web. Accessed 22 Nov. 2009.

Rochon, François. "Lalonde, Michèle." *Canadian Encyclopedia Online*, n.d. Web. Accessed 22 Nov 2009.

Ross & Macdonald Architects. *General Specifications for Extensions to Store for The T. Eaton Co. Limited of Montréal*. 19 Feb. 1930. Ross & Macdonald Fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal. Print.

Santink, Joy L. *Timothy Eaton and the rise of his department store*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. Print.

Stephenson, William. *The Store That Timothy Built*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969. Print.

*The 9<sup>th</sup> Floor*. Urban Explorers Montréal, n.d. Web. Accessed 22 Nov. 2009.