

Dans l'Griff-In Griffintown: Three personal French Canadian narratives on their homes,
public spaces, and buildings in the former industrial neighbourhood of Griffintown.

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Abstract

Dans l'Griff-In Griffintown: Three personal French Canadian narratives on their homes, public spaces, and buildings in the former industrial neighbourhood of Griffintown.

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This Master's thesis focuses on a two-generation French Canadian family, who through a series of interviews and a selection of their personal photographs from the 1940s to the 2000s, describe their Griffintown community experience. Griffintown is a former industrial inner-city neighbourhood reflecting Montreal's industrial past, just south of the city's downtown. With only a handful of the original civic, residential and industrial sites remaining, the once thriving community of predominantly working class Anglo-Protestants, Irish Catholics and French Canadians has all but disappeared. Currently Griffintown is claimed and viewed by some as a once predominantly Irish neighbourhood; little has been done to recognize that other cultures and communities occupied Griffintown. The current gentrification of the neighbourhood has brought a condo boom, bringing in a new generation of young professionals and retired couples but the former community endures in memory, via recent, books, films and community art projects. Using an arts-informed research methodology for my interviews and a photo elicitation process, I triggered the Merciers' memories and stories about their former homes and community life, enabling them to recount their French Canadian experience in Griffintown. Using a short documentary film and educational website, this study articulates their personal narratives and memories from family homes and community living to reveal the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities. This thesis and documentary also highlight their views on the current condo projects changing the

face of Griffintown. This arts-informed template and framework are designed for similar studies while the documentary and website are created for educational use in the field of Art Education.

For my mother Joy MacLeod
Just to know her was to love her
And
My uncle James MacLeod
Teacher and Storyteller

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Preface

‘Every old man that dies is a library that burns.’¹

African Proverb

I honour Lise and Claude Merciers’ life histories because they are elders from another generation, who possessed an important archive of personal photos, insights and stories from the once working class neighbourhood of Griffintown. What was exceptional about the Merciers’ oral histories is that the life they described in Griffintown no longer exists, and that when they pass on so will their stories. Sociologist Patricia Leavy (2011) states in her book *Oral History* that, “[oral history] research is important because it provides firsthand accounts of these events—firsthand accounts that will otherwise die with the individuals who have experienced the event” (p.17).

Based on my personal experience writing this thesis and making the short film, I believe that the Merciers’ oral histories offer the viewer and scholar something deeper. I feel that I have had the privilege of capturing part of their library before it burned.

¹ Malian writer and ethnologist Amadou Hampâté Bâ is credited with this phrase: <http://people.africadatabase.org/profile/1929.html>

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction



Figure 1: Claude, Stefan and Lise Mercier in front of the Jetté family home The Thomas O'Connell Building on the corner of Ottawa and Murray streets Griffintown November 18th, 2010. Photo: Mercier archive

For this Master's degree project, I created a 17-minute documentary in French with English subtitles that explores the question: "What do the personal narratives of three French Canadian residents of Griffintown reveal about the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities?" This study focused on a two-generation French Canadian family: Claude Mercier (father), Lise Jetté-Mercier (mother) [1940s-1960s] and Stefan Mercier (son) [1970s-1990s]. As I am most familiar with ways in which knowledge is constructed through visual means, I used an arts-informed research methodology for my interviews. Specifically, I used a photo elicitation process to trigger their memories and stories about their homes and community life, enabling them to articulate their French Canadian experience in Griffintown. I conducted a series of interviews initiated while they viewed a selection of their personal photographs from the 1940s to the 2000s, in order to gain an understanding of their Griffintown community experience.

Griffintown is a former industrial neighbourhood in Montreal's inner-city; it lies just south of downtown. With only a handful of original civic, residential and industrial sites remaining, the once thriving community of predominantly working class Irish and French Canadians has all but disappeared. New construction gentrification is well underway and has brought a condo boom, but this community endures in memory, via recent books, films and community art projects.

My goal for this research was to create a short documentary film that displayed my data and answered my initial question on the life of Claude, Lise and Stefan. I was interested in acquiring my data through their personal narratives and memories, which centered on their family homes and their experiences of community living in order to

reveal the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities. I collected my data in the form of interviews and video records at their current home on Jean D’Estrées Street and in front of their previous homes on Ottawa and de la Montagne streets, as well as other locations of personal importance to them in Griffintown. I was interested in their view of the current condo projects now changing the face of Griffintown. I believe the arts-informed template and framework of this research will provide a useful tool in the field of art education, to encourage others to use arts-informed and life history research as methods to document and discover their own neighbourhoods and cities. The final goal of this research project is to create a life history documentary, website, and exhibition for educational use.

1.2 Problem Statement

By the time Jean Drapeau² was re elected as Mayor of Montreal in the 1960s, many families had left Griffintown, homes had already fallen into disrepair and many were knocked down.



Figure 2: Destruction of homes 1242 Notre-Dame Street W. Griffintown 1997. Photo: Mercier archive

² Mayor of Montreal from 1954 to 1957 and 1960 to 1986.

In Irish diasporic scholar Matthew Barlow's (2009) PhD dissertation, "'The House of the Irish': Irishness, History, and Memory in Griffintown, Montréal, 1868-2009," he writes about the depopulation of Griffintown. Barlow (personal communication, 2nd of February, 2013) told me that, "Griffintown underwent heavy depopulation in the period from 1920-60. Irish-Catholic Griffintown was already dead by 1961, both Sainte-Anne's and Sainte-Hélène's congregations were in deep trouble by 1962."

In Barlow's (2005) paper, "'Forgive My Nostalgia': The construction of Griffintown, Montréal, as a *lieu de mémoire*," he makes reference to what he calls "a rather telling moment" while watching Richard Burman's documentary, *Ghosts of Griffintown: Stories of an Irish Neighbourhood* (Burman, 2003). Barlow writes:

When asked by the interviewer, Patricia Burns,³ what it was like to grow up Jewish in the midst of all the Irish Catholics in Griffintown, [interview subject Bill] Greenberg answers: "Very difficult. Not easy. We basically had to defend ourselves to live down there."

The other interviewee—Charlie Blickstead, an Irish Catholic, immediately objects: "I never heard of Jews being molested."

Greenberg then back-pedals, "We weren't molested."

³ Patricia Burns is the author of *The Shamrock and the Shield: An Oral History of the Irish in Montreal*, and she conducted Burman's interviews for his film.

Blickstead then laughingly recalls, “Not like the French!” Greenberg lightens up some at this memory, “No, that’s right, the French really got beat up” (p.2).

What Barlow recognized is that Griffintown was not one-dimensional but that here were other groups that lived and interacted with the Irish. Barlow further states:

With this interview, we are witness to a rather fascinating aspect of the reconstruction of Griffintown as a *lieu de mémoire*, to borrow from Pierre Nora,⁴ by the Irish Catholic community of Montréal in recent years. In this reconstruction of the neighbourhood, the presence of other ethno-religious groups are dealt with in a telling manner: they are either ignored or explained away in such as to give the impression that their presence was nothing more than tokenistic, or, as in the case of the large *Canadien* minority, they become the punch line to the joke as we have seen above with Blickstead and Greenberg (p.2).

Barlow’s (2009) dissertation does have a section where he talks about French Canadians getting the short end of the stick by the Irish, notably the French Canadian boxer Marcel “Rocky” Brisebois. Barlow states, “First, French Canadians were granted a form of honorary Irishness in order to fit in, at least when they were not being beaten upon. This appears to have been the case with the boxer Marcel “Rocky” Brisebois, a French Canadian from Griffintown, who had a successful career as a professional boxer

⁴ Pierre Nora edited a monumental work of seven volumes about the *loci memoriae* of France, entitled "Les lieux de mémoire" (1984–92). What are such sites, or realms, of memory? "A *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)" (Nora 1996: XVII) <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/citd/holtorf/2.6.html>

in the 1950s, winning the Canadian welterweight championship, as well as being a prize fighter in the United States. After his career Brisebois and his wife, Raymonde, returned to the Griff.” After Rocky’s death in 2004, Raymonde Brisebois recalled:

His father was French Canadian, his mother was of German descent, but he was brought up Irish. This was his life, his Irish side. Before every fight, he’d go to St. Ann’s church to make a novena. On St. Patrick’s Day, he’d sing all those songs, wear shamrocks, and everything – ‘When Irish Eyes Are Smiling’ and ‘Danny Boy’. He could speak English with an Irish brogue” (p.282).

Sharon Doyle Driedger’s (2010) *An Irish heart: How a small immigrant community shaped Canada*, investigates Irish immigration to Canada and their presence in the community of Griffintown. I explored this book to see if and how the Irish interacted with the French Canadian populace. For the most part, Driedger does not recount the interactions, other than in passing. For example, in discussing the Second World War, she discusses the referendum on conscription and states that, “while Quebec nationalists staged protests and went on a rampage in Montreal, breaking windows in recruitment offices, many French Canadians from Griffintown enlisted” (p.331). By contrast Barlow (personal communication, 13nd of February, 2013) also told me that “So, too, did many Irish-Catholics. Same was true in WWI. But French Canadians enlisted in numbers equal to Anglo Canadians at the outset of both world wars, something that always seems to get overlooked by Anglos talking about conscription riots.”

For the most part, Driedger’s book focuses on the Irish of Griffintown, pushing me to explore the French Canadian experience in Griffintown through my interviews with

the Mercier family. Barlow's (2005) work clearly points out that what is missing in the narrative is the voice of the French Canadian community, and this observation is my point of departure for this thesis.

1.3 Research Question

I arrived at this question, "what do the personal narratives of three French Canadian residents of Griffintown reveal about the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities?" because the Merciers' life history is strongly connected to Griffintown, and in particular to their former family homes and community. Leavy (2011) states that this is an approach in "*Gaining 'community' experience knowledge*. Oral history interviews can be used to study the experiences of people bound by a shared sense of community; these are often referred to as "community oral history projects." These projects consist of interviews conducted with members of a group defined by a geographical place or a shared social identity" (p.25).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Literature/Film

As I am working in animation/ethnographic film I have referenced a variety of important historical sources, such as the National Film Board of Canada film *Griffintown* (Régnier 1972) by Michel Régnier⁵ and the multimedia exhibition *Quartiers Disparus-Lost Neighbourhoods*⁶ at the Centre D'Histoire de Montréal museum.

From an architectural and historical view of Griffintown, my starting points for this research were the *Griffintown and Point St. Charles Heritage Trail*, a guide produced by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN); Art Historian Jean Belisle's (2009) report on the architectural history of Griffintown, "Portrait des ressources patrimoniales du secteur des bassins pour la société du Havre de Montréal," and urban planner and UQÀM professor David Hanna's (2007) thorough report, "Secteur de planification détaillée de Griffintown. Griffintown: Son histoire et son cadre bâti." These studies helped me situate the Mercier family's homes in the broader history of Griffintown. Both Belisle (2009) and Hanna's (2007) reports chronologically detail the urban history of Griffintown, assess the different architectural periods and focus on a selection of individual building histories, some of which were relevant to the Merciers' experience in Griffintown. Their studies also had a series of useful photos and maps, which demarcated Griffintown's borders, streets and buildings. I relied on this preliminary research to create my on-line walking tour and guide titled, *Griffintown: A*

⁵ Michel Régnier made this short National Film Board of Canada documentary on Griffintown in 1972, which highlighted a small but persistent population attempt to create a citizens' committee, while living in the devastated and ignored borough. <http://www.nfb.ca/film/griffintown/>

⁶ The Quartiers Disparus-Lost Neighbourhoods exhibition took place from June 15, 2012 to September 1, 2013 at the Centre D'Histoire de Montréal, it documented the destruction of Goose Village, The Red Light and Faubourg à m'lasse districts between 1950 and 1970. http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=8757,97685570&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

Self-Guided Urban History Walk (2010-2011) www.griffintowntour.com. I include a selection of these animation drawings from www.griffintowntour.com (the web version of this guide) in the documentary film segment of this thesis.

Barlow's two works, "'Forgive My Nostalgia': The construction of Griffintown, Montréal, as a *lieu de mémoire*" (2005) and his PhD dissertation, "'The House of the Irish': Irishness, History, and Memory in Griffintown, Montréal, 1868-2009," (2009) are insightful critiques of the *lieu de mémoire* and re-Irishification of Griffintown. This research on the Irish community in Griffintown supported my inquiry to further explore the French Canadian presence in Griffintown via the Mercier family histories, which in turn helped develop my research question further. Barlow's dissertation on Griffintown was a key resource for my research on the history and gentrification of Griffintown.

To situate the importance of the home space, I relied on visual artist, writer, scholar, and teacher Kathleen Vaughan's (2006) dissertation, "Finding Home: Knowledge, collage, and the local environments," as well as assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland Heather McLeod's (2009) dissertation on her home, "The Art of the Everyday: Experiences of a House."

In terms of memory, I explored folklorist Henry Glassie's (1987) article, "Folklore and History," French historian Pierre Nora's (1989) article, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," and Doreen Massey's (1995) article, "Places and Their Pasts."

For the photo elicitation methodology I followed historian and journalist Douglas Harper's (2002) article, "Talking About Pictures: a case for photo elicitation," and finally

for ethnography I was guided by David W. McCurdy, James P. Spradley, and Dianna J. Shandy's (1972) book, *The Cultural Experience, Ethnography in Complex Society*.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis was epistemologically based as the Merciers' and I were using what Leavy (2011) calls, "oral history positions in a collaborative relationship" (p.8). I felt it was important to situate the Merciers in their former neighbourhood with their photographs, which in turn helped them recall their respective oral histories. As was the case for the oral history work by American academic historian, author, playwright, and social activist, Howard Zinn (1980) and American director and producer, Ken Burns (2007), this process enabled Claude, Lise and Stefan to share their oral histories of Griffintown on film through their own voices. Director of the MIT Center for International Studies, John Tirman (2011) in his May 6, 2011 online article *Citizen Zinn*, about Howard Zinn, stated:

The first is his insistence on encouraging ordinary people to speak up, and indeed recording and utilizing these voices in his writings. 'One day I walked unannounced into the Zinn apartment' in Atlanta, Staughton Lynd, another leftist historian, recalls. 'Howard was tape recording an interview with two African American young men, [civil rights organizers] who had just been released from jail in Albany, Georgia. A light bulb went on behind my eyes. It was not Studs Terkel, nor was it my native genius, that led me to oral history: it was Howard Zinn.' His 'bottom up' perspective not only made *A People's History* the all-time best-selling book on America's past, but it revolutionized historiography. The days of focusing only on the "great men"—the presidents and senators and

business tycoons—were gone. History writing and presentation has not been the same. But the device is more than merely innovative. In oral history, the intellectual steps aside, sacrificing, in effect, the role of the omniscient interpreter of events. Citizens speak, and are built a platform to be heard.

<http://www.thenation.com/article/160470/citizen-zinn#>

I found Patricia Burns' (1998) book insightful as she focused her interviews on the life histories of former residents of Griffintown and drew on their key memories, which in turn provided the reader with a the social history of Griffintown. These interviews were useful as they helped me establish a series of questions for the Merciers. Both Zinn and Burns helped me establish a comfortable collaboration with Merciers, thus enabling me to help them rediscover their own Griffintown stories. As a result of their own personal research, they came up with a selection of photos, which would be used to elicit their stories on location where their Griffintown past actually occurred.

2.3 Griffintown Research Site

Griffintown is commonly viewed as an historic Montreal neighbourhood that birthed the Industrial Revolution in Canada and was once home to a large immigrant community, but Barlow (personal communication, 2nd of February, 2013) stated to me that, “Griffintown wasn’t an immigrant community after about 1880 or 1890, Irish immigration dried up after about 1850, and by the 20th century, the massive majority of Griffintowners, of all ethnic backgrounds, were Canadian-born. As for French Canadians, they streamed into Montreal from the countryside, c. 1880-1930.” As such, there is value in recording personal narrative histories both as a documentary film and for the purposes

of an educational website. These two facets of my thesis project helped to contextualize Griffintown as a thriving neighbourhood before its disintegration and subsequent redevelopment. I am interested in the Merciers' past and am curious about their current views of the urban renewal and condo projects unfolding in Griffintown.

The destruction and gentrification of neighbourhoods like Griffintown are not new to Montreal. Under the Drapeau administration, Goose Village, a neighbouring community, was completely destroyed for the construction of the Bonaventure expressway. When reflecting on Drapeau's leveling the community of Goose Village through the eviction all of the residents and destruction of its buildings, author Henry David Thoreau's⁷ quote "the path of least resistance leads to crooked rivers and crooked men" comes to mind. The destruction of Goose Village was well documented at the time via interviews, photos and stock footage that was recently curated in the well-conceived *Quartiers Disparus-Lost Neighbourhoods* exhibition at the Centre D'Histoire de Montréal. Urban renewal of the sort that saw Goose Village destroyed was not unique to Montreal. In Jane Jacobs' (1961/1992) provocative, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she argues:

That such wonders may be accomplished, people who get marked with the planner's hex signs are pushed about, expropriated, and uprooted much as if they were the subjects of a conquering power. Thousands upon thousands of small businesses are destroyed, and their proprietors ruined, with hardly a gesture at compensation. Whole communities are torn apart and sown to the winds, with a

⁷ Henry David Thoreau (born David Henry Thoreau) was an American author, naturalist, transcendentalist, tax resister, development critic, philosopher, and abolitionist who is best known for *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay, *Civil Disobedience*, an argument for individual resistance to civil government in moral opposition to an unjust state.
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/15071-the-path-of-least-resistance-leads-to-crooked-rivers-and>

reaping of cynicism, resentment and despair that must be heard and seen to be believed (p.5).

Among empty lots and industrial buildings of Griffintown, only vestiges of this once thriving neighbourhood remain. Some of the existing larger industrial buildings have been preserved, such as the former Lowney Chocolate factory and Crescent Shirt Manufacturing Company buildings, and have been developed into condo projects, while the Dow Brewery complex was amalgamated into École de technologie supérieure, a public engineering school, and part of the Université du Québec system.

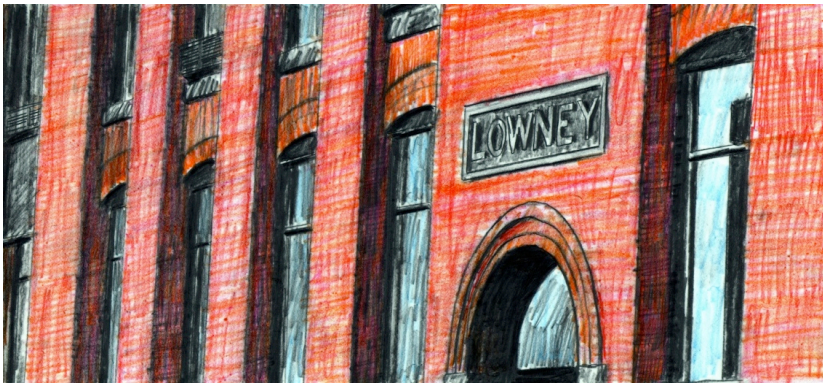


Figure 3: Lowney Chocolate Factory, animation drawing colour pencil on Mylar 2011. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod



Figure 4: Crescent Shirt Manufacturing, animation drawing colour pencil on Mylar 2011. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod



Figure 5: Dow Brewery Complex, animation drawing colour pencil on Mylar 2011. Photo:G. Scott MacLeod.

2.4 Home

To explore the idea of what home is, I referenced Vaughan's (2006) dissertation. Vaughan (2006) defined home not necessarily as a physical place but also as an engaged life experience. She states, "I came to realize that my own understanding of home is that of an ever-shifting standpoint from which to learn, grow, understand oneself, relate to others, and contribute to communal life. 'Home' thus may well contain or be linked to a specific structure or place" (p.4). Claude Mercier definitely exhibited a deep connection to the physical home, though his second home on William Street was demolished and now persists only in memory. Vaughan (2006) continues to elaborate the importance of home: "but—for me—it is also a quality of experience of self in relation to self and others" (p.4). This echoes Claude describing his former home on William Street, where his family and cousins lived and interacted with each other, "I am here at 1164 William Street... We arrived here in 1953. In one block—two blocks from this side, two blocks on this side—I had at least a 15 cousins. We would meet and see each other everyday."

McLeod's (2009) dissertation provides a theoretical framework for a case study of the Mercier homes. Like McLeod, I employed a narrative approach to my inquiry. She

states, “I used a study involving documents and artifacts and interviews with key informants. Taking an interpretive epistemological stance, I employed a narrative approach to inquiry” (p.iii). McLeod also states, in reference to the physical structure and space of each home, that, “every house has a history and could serve as a starting-point in such map-making.” She says explicitly, “Here I am making a political, and thus a philosophical and epistemological point about the importance of the everyday and the incidental” (p.4).



Figure 6: Mercier family Christmas 1959 at 1164 William Street Griffintown Claude and Lise on the left.
Photo: Mercier archive

A good example of mapping out the everyday can be seen in Stefan Mercier's description of his grandfather, Georges Jetté's, daily ritual of going up and down the stairs at the family home on 1165 Ottawa Street, to work for the O'Connell's plumbing business. Stefan recounts, "It was down here that my grandfather worked for the O'Connells. He worked downstairs and lived upstairs, so he went downstairs for 8:00 a.m. and went back up for noon, went back down at 1:00 p.m. and finished at 5:00 p.m. His only travel was up and down the stairs."

The family life in Stefan's grandparents' home reminds me of my grandparents' place in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, which was also full of history and many precious family moments. McLeod (2009) reflects on the priceless nature of such places: "from childhood to old age our connection to the physical environment of home goes through changes, reflecting shifts of attention from outer accomplishments to deep inner concerns" (p.7). I also share the strong connection and reverence that the Merciers have for their home and place, as I believe that these homes are repositories of our family lore, history, and memories. Fortunately, Lise's family home and the home that Claude was born in survived the wrecking ball. Currently they are occupied by other families and businesses, but the Merciers' memories of these homes have a physical anchor in the real world—a reference point that their photo albums connect to, and which became the key source to the work the Merciers and I did together.

The most pertinent of these two homes was the Thomas O'Connell building which became the focal point in the documentary. Situated at the corner of Ottawa and Murray streets, this was Lise Jetté-Mercier's home from 1953 to 1964. This two-story red brick commercial and residential building dates to 1902-03 and is an excellent example

of a typical commercial residential building of the period. There were many such residences in Griffintown but this is the only surviving example. The original owner of the property, Thomas O'Connell, was a plumber and a city councillor from 1906 to 1938 and enjoyed a reputation as the only person able to resolve problems between the community and the municipality (Hanna, 2007). Belisle (2009) states that this building, and the residential buildings immediately adjacent on both Murray and Ottawa streets, were purchased from the O'Connell family in 2004 and have since been restored (p.127). Today, with commercial offices on the ground level and residential rental units above where the Jetté family lived, this corner building retains its original mixed-use function.



Figure 7: Jetté family Christmas 1960 at 1165 Ottawa Street Griffintown. Photo: Mercier archive

During my interviews, Lise and Stefan Mercier spoke at great length about their family life in the Thomas O’Connell building. They both joyfully stated that most of their family holidays and community life was centred around Lise’s parents’, Georges and Jeanne Jetté, apartment on the second floor of this building. As the home is one of the themes I addressed in this thesis, I filmed Lise and Stefan in front the Jetté family home, the Thomas O’Connell building on Ottawa Street, and Claude in front of the Mercier home on de la Montagne Street. These homes are often featured in the Mercier and Jetté photos that illustrate memorable family moments, such as holidays and birthdays. Lise spoke fondly of her time at her family home, “On Sunday, we had to come for dinner. It was tradition for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day... As long as my grandmother was there, all the family came.”

Their son, Stefan, affectionately referred to the family home, as follows, “I always called this the ‘city hall’ of Griffintown. It was the centre of the action. It was here that we had the community life we knew.”



Figure 8: Stefan Mercier inside the old Jetté family home the Thomas O’Connell Building on the corner of Ottawa and Murray streets Griffintown May 6th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

For her book, *The Shamrock and the Shield*, Patricia Burns (1998) interviewed the Reverend Thomas D. McEntee whose uncle was Thomas O’Connell. “We lived over his plumbing shop where my father was the superintendent” (p.167). Coincidentally, this was the very apartment at 1165 Ottawa Street that Lise’s parents, Georges and Jeanne, occupied after the McEntees. The Jettés and the McEntees became good family friends—an example of the cross-cultural exchanges between the French Canadian and Irish families of Griffintown. Such exchanges between the Mercier and McEntee families were a positive and welcome contrast to the prevailing notion that the Irish beat up on the French Canadians.



Figure 9: Jeanne Caron-Jetté (Lise’s Stepmother) and Father McEntee in Griffintown 2006. Photo: Mercier

Archive

Fortunately, I was able to get the Merciers a quick tour of the recently renovated Thomas O’Connell Building. The ground floor, the former Thomas O’Connell plumbing business, is now a fine wine and technology outlet. The second floor, where Lise’s family lived, now contains offices for Maitre Carré Entrepreneur Promoteur Hugo and Normand Beauchamp. Walking through the space with Lise, Claude, and Stefan brought back a flood of memories for them and elevated their enthusiasm for their documentary.

Claude Mercier was born in building number 187 de la Montagne Street.⁸ Sitting across the street in the foundation of St. Ann’s Church, he states, “I was born exactly on the other side of the street in 1942 at 187. At that time the street was called McCord. Today it is called rue de la Montagne.”



⁸ Matthew Barlow (personal communication, 13th of February, 2013) stated to me that, “de la Montagne was called McCord Street in those days, it was only changed to de la Montagne in the 70s when it was connected to Mountain St. downtown. Mountain St. was named for Bishop Mountain, the first Anglican bishop of Montreal, so the French de la Montagne is completely ahistorical, though it sounds better than Mountain St.”

Figure 10: Claude Mercier in front former home at 187 de la Montagne Street Griffintown June 9th, 2012.
Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

This two story red brick building with original cornices and decorative brick arches was built in 1873. The original owner was grocer Michael Clarke and the building is among the oldest in the neighbourhood. These row houses face the old Saint-Anne church site. The buildings no longer have their original doors or windows and have been significantly altered yet are still considered worth preserving (Hanna, 2007). Today the buildings are still occupied by residents.

2.5 Memory

In this section I pose the questions “Whose Griffintown was it in the past? And whose is it now?” Both are difficult to answer, because of the variety of ethnic groups that have come and gone through Griffintown and because of the current condo building boom which has considerably changed the face of Griffintown. Popular belief is that most of the original families left due to former Mayor Drapeau’s destruction of Griffintown. Barlow (personal communication, 13th of February, 2013) argues that:

The myth of Griffintown, it’s not true, depopulation in Griffintown began in the 1910s, and carried through the 1920s. The Depression saw a lot of foreclosures and the tearing down of buildings, and people left in droves after WWII in the 1940s and 1950s. By the time of Drapeau, Griffintown was massively depopulated, which is why city hall rezoned the neighbourhood in 1963. This part, this is my contribution to Griffintown’s history, this is what I discovered through actually looking at census tracts and city directories and tax records.

Amazingly, no one had thought to do this before. It is also worth noting that vis-à-vis the Irish, they were clearing out from the 1890s, by the turn of the century, Irish-Catholics, Anglo-Protestants and French Canadians all made up about 1/3 of

the population of Griff, by 1921 census, French Canadians were the majority and remained so until 1971.

Many lost their homes and civic buildings, and, as such, there was no real housing shortage. Most had moved to nearby neighbourhoods of Pointe-Saint-Charles, Ville Émard, Côte-Saint-Paul, Verdun, and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

Lise Mercier states, “The majority of them [the homes] were demolished in the 1970s. And after the people were gone, so were the churches. St. Ann’s is gone, St. Helene’s is gone; therefore, the people left.” Barlow (personal communication, 13nd of February, 2013) argues, “the relationship is the other way around. Attendance at St. Ann’s declined 75%, 1945-60, and something close to that at St. Hélène’s.”



Figure 11: Lise Mercier in 1st grade at St. Helene’s school Griffintown 1940s. Photo: Mercier archive

There is little that remains of the former Griffintown. The current rapid gentrification of the remaining industrial and residential sections of the southwest and downtown boroughs lacks integrated public spaces and institutions of the old neighbourhood. This means that not only the buildings but also the defining cultural and ethnic *nature* of the old Griffintown will be completely eradicated. Such changes may be, in part, what drives a nostalgia for the old Griffintown along with a recent flurry of community arts-based projects, books, and films on the former Griffintown. One example is the documentary by Richard Burman, *The Ghosts of Griffintown* (Burman, 2003), which focuses on the former Irish community of Griffintown.

In Doreen Massey's (1995) article, "Places and Their Pasts", she states, "The identity of places, indeed the very identification of places as particular places, is always in that sense temporary, uncertain and in process" (p.190). Lise Mercier supports this notion as she sees the new Griffintown as something completely different from her experience. She states, "Compared to how the young people live now, it is completely different. It is really another world. One can not even compare. It is like another planet."

Driedger (2010) describes the emptiness of Griffintown after the Irish left:

Like the ghost villages of Ireland deserted during the Famine, Griffintown's lifeless streets and sidewalks, and the corners where tough Irish lads once stood, had an eerie, empty echo. Carters' horses clip-clopping over cobblestones, the solemn strains of the choir slipping out of St. Ann's wooden doors, the pulsating rhythms of tap dancers heel-stamping the stage of St. Ann's Hall, the *whip-bang* of firecrackers, police whistles and mouth organs, shouts and laughter and slamming shutters – the sounds of the once teeming neighbourhood had faded into

memory. The Irish had come and gone. Griffintown died and Montreal lost its Irish heart (p.367).

This documentary and thesis offered the Merciers the opportunity to give the viewer and reader part of their collective memory of a Griffintown now gone. What I discovered is that Merciers' histories are attached to the buildings and a landscape that have been torn down, re-imagined, and re-built many times. As Nora (1989) states, "memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events" (p.22). Massey (1995) mirrors this, saying:

Places as depicted on maps are places caught in a moment; they are slices through time. Yet, not only does that particular articulation of social relations which we are at the moment naming as that place have a history (as we have seen, it is the product of the historical accumulation and combination of numerous layers of such articulations over time) but also any claim to establish the identity of that place depends upon presenting a particular reading of that history (p.188).⁹

In Media Studies artist Lisa Gasior's thesis project (2007), "*Sounding Griffintown: A Listening Guide of a Montreal Neighbourhood*," she frames the listening guide as a "biased representation of abstract truths as opposed to a creation of exact truth" (p.5). I share Gasior's approach and view that, "in recording former residents of Griffintown, I am contributing to a collective, cultural memory of this space. Keeping in

⁹ Author Doreen Massey's article, Places and Their Pasts, from History Workshop Journal, No. 39 (Spring, 1995) p.188. Oxford Univeristy Press <http://jstor.org/stable/42893661>.

mind how strong this community, however dispersed, continues to be, it is my responsibility to allow these voices to be representatives of Griffintown” (p.5).

Henry Glassie (1987) supports the notion that “oral tradition, the resource of the folk historian, provides a poor guide to the far past and, like the written tradition, it tells of the exceptional more than the commonplace” (p.192). I would argue that the Merciers’ photo archive is not vital because it elicits memories but rather that the photos have an even greater meaning—to them, and potentially to us. The meaning of the photos is that they capture “a history that can speak and teach of the important things in life” (Glassie, p.192). Perhaps this is even more valuable than memory; perhaps this is what is passed on through photographs, voice recordings, film, and the written word—the values and practices of a way of living that had great meaning and was, essentially, the way of life of a bygone time, but perhaps still one we can be enriched by.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Oral History

My oral history approach follows what Leavy (2011) describes as, “a method of qualitative interview that emphasized participants’ perspectives” (p.3). I chose oral history for this thesis because of the nature of its qualitative open-ended method when conducting interviews. Curator in Oral History Robert Perks and author in Oral History Alistair Thomson (2006) state in their book, *The Oral History Reader*, that “the most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been ‘hidden from history’” (p.ix). I was motivated to work in this framework as no work had been done on the French Canadian population of Griffintown and the Merciers expressed the will to have their experiences shared through their photographs and stories. Influential examples of this model are found in Zinn’s (1980) book, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492 to Present*, and Burns’ documentary film series *The War* (Burns, 2009). I preferred both Zinn’s (1980) and Burns’ (2009) framework as it enabled ‘the people’ to recount their own oral histories through a collaborative process. Furthermore, I wanted my collaboration with Merciers to follow what Michael Frisch (1990) termed in Leavy’s book (2011) as “*shared authority* to denote the unique collaborative nature of knowledge production in oral history” (p.8). As a result of using this oral history framework, I felt that Claude, Lise and Stefan found it easier to share their Griffintown experience with me.

Educational researchers Ardra L. Cole and J. Gary Knowles’s (2001) book, *Lives in Context: The Art of Life History research* and Co-Director of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia, Steven High’s (2010) article, “Telling

Stories: A reflection on oral history and new media,” were helpful in establishing my research methods in Oral History. I was made aware of the Montreal Life Stories project where I received a general training certification at Concordia University’s Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling. This training helped with my research and interview process. In *The Oral History Reader*, Alessandro Portelli’s (2006) article, “What Makes Oral History Different,” he states that “Oral history changes the writing of history much as the modern novel transformed the writing of literary fiction: the most important change is that the narrator is now pulled into the narrative and becomes a party of the story” (p.41). An example of this approach can be found in Burns’ (1997) book, which offers a series of life history interviews with former and current residents from Griffintown. I concur with Burns’s statement that, “It is my belief that oral history makes our past come alive in a very special way by putting a human face on bare facts” (p.12).

3.2 Methods

My work is a combination of interviews and arts-informed research. It has been positioned as oral history. I was also conscious that I took an arts-informed approach to present my work, as I am an artist in addition to a researcher.

Basing my research and methodology on that of Zinn (1980) and Burns (2009), I collected personal letters, photos and oral accounts of their participants’ lived experiences. I favored their approaches as they enabled ‘the people’ to recount their own personal stories and histories. As a result of their work and process, the reader and viewer can better appreciate how ‘the people’ were directly impacted by events in history. I felt that this was an appropriate method for honouring the Merciers’ Griffintown experience. The end result was a positive documentary film experience for all of us.

The content of my research was always consensual. The Merciers had final say in the documentary's content and with their approval, I locked the film for a final edit in December of 2012. Any suggested changes or edits were done in accordance with their requests. When we showed the Merciers the first edit, Lise asked if she could add two extra photos that she felt were important, which we then included. I was delighted that Lise, Claude and Stefan unanimously approved the final edit as it validated the research design and our effective working collaboration with each other.

3.3 Photo Elicitation

Prior to making my *In Griffintown* (MacLeod, 2013) documentary, I successfully used photo elicitation as the methodology for my documentary, *After the war with Hannelore – A Berliner war child's testimony from 1945 to 1989* (MacLeod, 2009). In that documentary I reconstructed Hannelore's life from her family photo album, much like I have done with the Merciers' photos. The photos virtually turned into a storyboard, which enabled me to see the seven key stations of Hannelore's life from her birth in 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As a result I was able to gain access to the regional history, symbolism, and iconography of her life in Berlin.

In the case of *In Griffintown* (2013), this study via a series of interviews was initiated through a selection of the Merciers' personal photographs from the 1940s to the 2000s, in order to gain an understanding of their Griffintown community experience. Harper (2002) states, "Historically, ethnography can be considered the memory of community" (p.17). What is particularly relevant about the Merciers' experience is that they are from a two-generation French Canadian Griffintown family, and that Lise and Claude currently live in Griffintown in a new condo project that overlooks their former

family homes. From Claude and Lise's family photo archive, I had the opportunity to witness their personal French Canadian historical and social transitions in Griffintown, which in turn revealed data about the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities in Griffintown.



Figure 12: G. Scott MacLeod with Lise Mercier selecting photos for photo elicitation May 6th, 2012. Photo: Stefan Mercier

3.4 Creative Lens and Previous Arts-informed Work

I bring my own creative lens to this arts-informed research project, as my work is deliberately artistic and interpretive. Through many of my projects, past and present, I have sustained this interest in creative and interpretational work. This includes previous arts-informed history projects like, *The Starving Can't Eat Stone* (1995) at the Verdun Cultural Centre; *The Great Hunger* (1999) at Bishops University; *Ancestral Homes*

(2002) at the Swedish American Museum Chicago and the Nordic Heritage Museum Seattle in (2003), and my most recent films, *The Saga of Murdo MacLeod and his first contact with the Abenaki* (MacLeod, 2012) and *The Abenaki-People of the Dawn* (MacLeod, 2013). In this research and artwork, I investigated the history of First Nations peoples of Canada and my ancestors via the Irish Famines and Scottish Highland Clearances and subsequent migration to Canada, as well as the spread of the Viking peoples depicted in their North Atlantic Sagas. These earlier art enquiries and my own personal life parallel the Griffintown experience and helped me engage with the Merciers' experience.

My other previous urban architecture projects involved drawings, paintings, photographs and storyboards. The first, *Two Views of New York City* (2003), produced in collaboration with New York pinhole photographer Monica T. Götz, was exhibited at the Arsenal Gallery in Central Park. Two subsequent projects, *Lachine Canal – Past and Present* (2004) and *New York - III Visions* (2008), were produced in collaboration with New York photographer Jefferson Hayman. In my short documentary film, *After the War with Hannelore* (2009), I used a mix of period photography and film, pencil animations and live-action footage to craft a moving personal portrait of the unforgettable Hannelore, as well as an artful look into the reality of growing up in Berlin after the Second World War. *Empress Blue* (2010) was an animated short that chronicled the old Empress Theatre's history in my neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and is both a celebration of the old theatre's history and a rallying cry for the protection and preservation of this special building.

This previous work has led me to conduct arts-informed research and create an

on-line walking tour and guide titled, *Griffintown: A Self-Guided Urban History Walk* (2010 - 2011), which features my drawings, photographs, and data on twenty-one sites I researched in Griffintown. I developed this preliminary research through my independent study courses, ARTE 664 and ARTE 665. I photographed 21 key buildings and sites of interest within the commonly accepted borders of Griffintown: the Lachine Canal to the south and Notre-Dame, McGill and Guy Streets to the north, east and west.



Figure13: Map for *Griffintown: A Self-Guided Urban History Walk* TagTeam Studio 2011.

Chapter 4: Procedure

4.1 Ethical considerations

During the research process I ensured the ethical reviews were done within Concordia University's standards. I provided a consensual and safe forum for Claude, Lise and Stefan Mercier to develop their respective life chronologies through their own personal research via family archives, photos, letters and souvenirs of Griffintown. This way, they felt that they were a part of their own research process and not examined from a distance and then written about. Our documentary research process enabled the Merciers to design their own content for the documentary as they chose which stories they wanted to share with the viewer.

4.2 Outline of Procedure

During the two years I conducted research on Griffintown, I cultivated a positive relationship with the Merciers and as a result was well prepared to develop a series of questions about the importance of their public spaces, buildings and community in Griffintown. As a result of my speaking French and knowing Lise, Claude and Stefan for many years, a comfortable working relationship grew between us. We collectively decided to do the interviews via their personal photographs on location in Griffintown and make the film in French because it was Claude, Lise and Stefan's primary language. However, the documentary has been subtitled in English to make the film accessible to English speaking populations.

4.3 Data Collection/Analysis

As in my former projects, I collected data in the form of interviews, still photos and video records at the Merciers' current home on Jean D'Estrées, in front of their

previous homes on Ottawa and de la Montagne streets, and at other locations they selected in Griffintown. This was an appropriate strategy and helped Claude, Lise and Stefan be comfortable in order to tell their own stories, via their personal photo archives and memories.



Figure 14: Stefan Mercier eliciting a personal story through photo of the family home at 1165 Ottawa Street Griffintown June 10th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

Cole and Knowles (2001) discuss the challenge that I faced creating a series of questions when making this documentary. I would have to find the right questions to ask and then finally consider, “How close to the data’ and true to the original form is it important for [me] to stay? And, further, what considerations helped [me] answer these and related questions?” (p.119). In the end, the questions found their respective stories and the editing process revealed stories that reflected the greater narrative from the subjects’ former Griffintown experience.

As a life history researcher, I faced other challenges with the Mercier documentary. Cole and Knowles (2001) state one must, “find ways to make participants’ voices heard, to let their individuality show and shine, to make their stories sound loudly” (p.114). By making the Merciers authors and narrators of their own life histories, I believe we achieved this. I also had the “responsibility to provide a level of translation and theoretical interpretation. What this means in practice is for each life history researcher to understand and articulate” (p.115). Herein is the challenge of the researcher—my challenge—was to somehow synthesize our large amount of data.

Cole and Knowles (2001) reference noted educational anthropologist Harry F. Wolcott’s (1994) book, *Transforming Qualitative Data: Description, Analysis, and Interpretation*, where Wolcott “uses the concept of transformation to describe the researcher’s task of doing something with the vast amount of material collected so that it can be communicated in a coherent way to a larger audience” (p.115-116).

I chose the documentary film format to transform the vast amount of data into a clear and concise documentary film. Editor Vuk Stojanovic’s skillful editing and the

documentary format offered me the opportunity of showing the data to larger audiences in a coherent fashion.

Once my data collection was complete I went through my video footage with Vuk and selected stories on the Merciers' life in Griffintown, focusing on segments dealing with the importance of public spaces, buildings and communities. I believe that we succeeded in these choices as the Merciers approved the final content with very few changes.

After doing this work with the Merciers, I was struck by the fact that this research “will evoke more questions in our (and, it is hoped, the readers’) thinking that may inform future work.” (Cole and Knowles: 2001, p.112). Upon reflection I see that my earlier work, *After the War with Hannelore* (2009), did inform my *In Griffintown* (2013) documentary, and I expect that *In Griffintown* will inform my own and others' future life history documentaries. The photo elicitation/documentary template I used in both documentaries proved an excellent method for my data collection and analysis.

As an art educator and artist interested in producing accessible arts-informed research and work, I agree with Cole and Knowles (2001), that there is real value in “writing for meaning” (p.122). As they state:

In contrast to more linear approaches to research representation, where writing is interpreted as “writing up” the data and analysis, in the kind of research we advocate, writing (or any mode of arts-informed representation, for that matter) is an integral part of the analysis process. We write *for* meaning rather than *to record* meaning (p.122).

This proved a subtle but very important consideration when I was engaged in the data and analysis phase of my thesis.

4.4 Interviews

After I proposed my thesis project to the Merciers, they patiently waited two years for me to finish my course work and then gifted me the privilege of being witness to their Griffintown experience. During the course of filming this documentary in the summer of 2012, Lise, Claude and Stefan stood in front of my camera with a calm dignity and recounted meaningful moments, reflecting modestly and wisely about their former neighbourhood of Griffintown.



Figure 15: Claude Mercier eliciting a personal story through photo on Notre-Dame Street June 9th, 2012.
Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

I situated my questions broadly in the Mercier family's life chronologies and I made the questions relatively broad at the onset, as Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest:

Questions need to be sufficiently broad to allow space to roam but not so broad or vague that the focus of the research is easily lost or participants are uncertain about how to respond. Wording is important; questions need to be as free as possible from suggestion so that the conversations are not led in a particular direction. Similarly, and obviously, they need to be phrased in a way that is likely to elicit extensive responses rather than simple "yes/no" answers (p.73).

I interviewed Lise and Claude on the 21st floor of their current apartment building overlooking Griffintown on Jean D'Estrées Street, and in front of Lise's former home, the Thomas O'Connell building on the corner of Ottawa and Murray streets, as well as in front of Claude Mercier's home on de la Montagne Street. I also filmed Lise, Claude and Stefan at other outdoor locations pertaining to their respective photographs of Griffintown.



Figure 16: Lise and Claude Mercier in their current home on Jean-D'Estrées Street Griffintown June 10th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

Only when I was truly present in the interviews did I feel I could serve and find the Merciers' story, as explained by Cole and Knowles (2001), "as life history researchers we need to listen *for* a story rather than *to* a story as we engage with participants in conversation and later with information gathered" (p.120). This is where the interview models favoured by Zinn (1980) and Burns (2007) became germane, as they offer the historian and filmmaker the ability to have "the people" recount their stories in a safe forum. Claude, Lise and Stefan recounted their experiences of Griffintown through their own voices and photos rather than having their stories told in narrative voiceover, as I felt it was important to humanize the Merciers' experience.

What struck me in the interviews was that they spoke joyfully of their families, homes, schools, churches, holidays, courtship, friends, jobs, sports teams, but never angrily of the wrecking ball that knocked sections of their community down. Remarkably, the Merciers' accepted these changes as progress, as Claude states, "So things have changed. We are aware of this and know that we cannot stop progress, but we still hope that at the end of the line there will be something for future generations."

Cole and Knowles (2001) state, "The manner and tone of an introduction to a participant's life is crucial for framing the analysis and representational work of researching" (p.117). I placed Lise, Claude and Stefan's first interviews in front of their former homes and placed these interviews at the beginning of the film, as it was crucial to establish their former homes in Griffintown as the locations where their everyday life was situated. In particular, I featured the home at 1165 Ottawa Street, which reappeared several times as an entry and focal point of their stories.

Cole and Knowles (2001) state, "Individuals have profound experiences of many

kinds—events that turn lives around or, less dramatically, mark the passage of the years and the tone, tenor, and influence of a life. These are the events and circumstances to which we return when reconstructing the past and making sense of our lives. These are epiphanies” (p.120). Such was the case when Stefan told the story of his grandfather’s passing. Georges Jetté passed away in the front of the old home at 1165 Ottawa Street. Stefan recalls:

When my grandfather died—he died in front of his door on his way home—it was the firemen from Station Number 3 that found him and tried to resuscitate him, unsuccessfully. So I am glad the fire station is still here. They touched my life by trying to save my grandfather. To be down here on Murray Street or Ottawa Street, to see the fire trucks brings back vivid memories.



Figure 17: Stefan Mercier in front of Fire Station No.3 on Ottawa Street Griffintown June 9th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

This epiphany helped me realize that the buildings they referenced in Griffintown were often connected to their stories, so it was important for me to weave the buildings of their past into the interviews. These included, of course, their family home and Fire Station No. 3 on Ottawa Street. The buildings they mention are in essence important signposts and symbolic backdrops in their life histories. The physical buildings were just as important as the photos that elicited their stories and were a wonderful invitation for me to animate the Merciers into the urban landscape of their life histories.



Figure 18: Christmas 1972 Stefan Mercier with his Grandfather Georges Jetté in family home at 1165 Ottawa Street Griffintown. Photo: Mercier archive

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Griffintown Research Site

The empty lots and old factories of Griffintown have been attractive prospects to condo developers such as Devimco and Prével because of Griffintown's proximity to the city centre and Old Montreal. Claude and Lise Mercier are concerned about the impact these new multi-story condo projects will have on the new Griffintown. Claude Mercier states:

I think what we are worried about, and we have already mentioned it, is that they should keep some buildings or houses because of the heritage there. And even if they say they will not demolish any more buildings, we still see more disappear. There are not many left, and the condo builders do not make it their priority, so the City of Montreal should plan something else, to look after, to commemorate certain historical sites in the name of Griffintown, with some panels here and there.



Figure 19: District Griffintown condo project April 4th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

The question remains, will these new developments bring back a sense of community to the old and new residents of Griffintown? Claude Mercier continues:

But there should be a historical museum. It does not need to be huge, but because we are concerned, something that states that Griffintown was special and is still special. I wanted to also mention, we are with the young generation, and they are welcome, because it will be for the younger generation. We left as a working class generation. Now it is professionals and artists who want to come here to the centre of town.

Even after Stefan and his parents moved from Griffintown, their important family recollections were still centered around the grandparents' family home in the Thomas O'Connell building on the corner of Ottawa and Murray streets, and the Mercier home on de la Montagne Street. What is evident from this period in Griffintown's history is that the interpersonal relationships were cultivated in the streets, civic and religious buildings, and in family homes. Lise Mercier describes it as a village, "It was a village life. Everyone knew each other, everyone spoke English, French, hello, good day, and everyone respected each other." This sentiment is echoed by Driedger (2010) she closes her book stating, "sorrow and hardship and suffering were all around and yet, in the midst of it all, grew kinship, caring and belonging. In Griffintown, people were all they needed to be" (p.369).

Barlow (personal communication, 22nd January, 2012) attended the public consultation *Griffintown Selon Vous* on January 21st, 2012 and he stated to me in an email that, "this entire process is a sham, the city doesn't care what we or anyone thinks,

that was patently obvious in my conversations with the O.C.P.M.¹⁰ people, and there was no one there from the larger Ville de Montréal.”



Figure 20: The Jourdenais family (Claude Mercier’s mothers family) at 1242 Notre-Dame W. Griffintown 1948. Photo: Mercier archive

After personally surveying the two-day public information and reflection session, architectural maquette, Griffintown map, written materials, and after hearing all parties speak of the ‘new Griffintown’, it seemed to me to be a cash grab for the developers.

¹⁰ Office de consultation Publique de Montréal. About 800 people attended the two-day information and reflection session on the future of Griffintown. Under the theme "Griffintown looks to the future", Montrealers heard representatives of the City review the state of the premises and had the opportunity to ask questions, learn from the many experts at the conference, and exchange viewpoints with representatives of many groups with an interest in the development of this sector. <http://www.ocpm.qc.ca/>

Based on the initial map provided at the public consultation, there will be a concentration of condo projects devoid of any main street life and lacking low income housing, parks, schools, community centres, and cultural and religious institutions, all of which could cultivate the pedestrian and community life that was commonplace in the former Griffintown. Lise Mercier took note of this and stated, “There are no more schools, there are no more churches, there is nothing left there.”

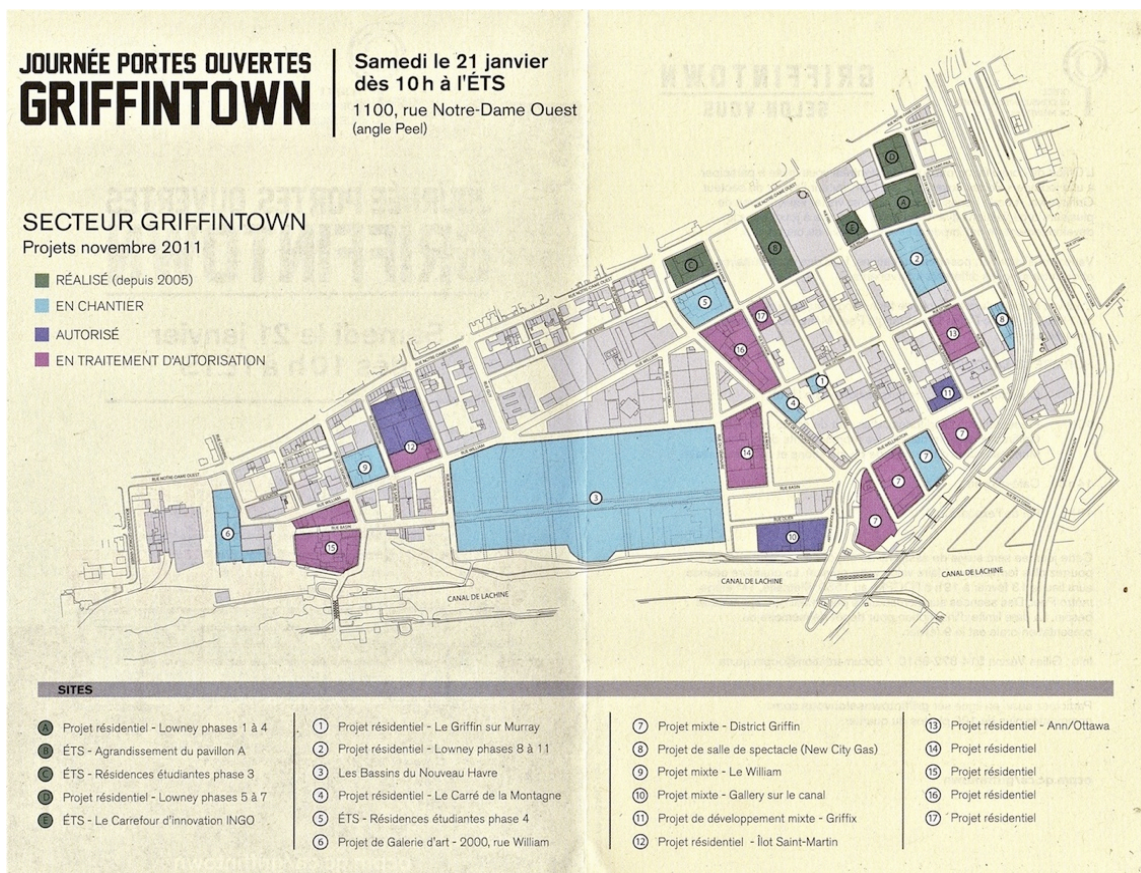


Figure 21: Map from Journée portes ouvertes Griffintown January 21st, 2012.

In 2012, I discussed this point with historian Jean Belisle, who confirmed that there was no initial community or civic plan for Griffintown and that the current and proposed condo projects tend to attract double income couples with no children. He

believes that because of Griffintown's proximity to the city centre, developers have strategically made these condo units attractive to the short-term buyer rather than long-term investors. Some of the condo projects have resulted in expensive ground-level rental space, possibly for chain stores whose owners can afford the high rents. It is Belisle's view that this real estate approach will create a transient community who tend not to invest in their homes for the long term because many of the condo spaces are too small to accommodate their future families.

What is worth noting of the new Griffintown is that the city and developers have placed value on the capital of the condo projects versus the capital of its residents, their homes, civic buildings, history and community. Essentially, this places value on property rather than on human, historical and cultural intangibles. Now that developers have bought the choice parcels of land and building is well underway, Griffintown and the City of Montreal are confronted with the quandary of making a viable urban plan to integrate the missing infrastructure that Barlow (2012) and Belisle (2012) both noted. Incredibly, eight months after the public consultation *Griffintown Selon Vous*, the city announced that they have a plan for the missing infrastructure. In an October 19, 2012 article, the *Montreal Gazette*, Lynn Moore quoted then-executive committee president Michael Applebaum and Sud-Ouest borough Mayor Benoit Dorais:

The city of Montreal's urban plan for Griffintown includes six new public green spaces and \$93 million in infrastructure spending over the next four years. The plan for the former Irish working-class neighbourhood that is already awash with major condo projects will be subject to public consultations before year's end, executive committee president Michael Applebaum said. "It is not easy to rebuild

a city within a city,” Sud-Ouest borough Mayor Benoit Dorais told reporters at Thursday’s unveiling. The challenge is to create a sustainable neighbourhood with a mix of residential units and a streetscape that favours cyclists and pedestrians, while also ensuring it is a pleasant and vibrant community, the men said. About 8,000 residential units are slated to be built in Griffintown, along with 150,000 square metres of commercial or office space, reporters were told.

Such afterthoughts on the part of the City of Montreal and borough are suspect when most urban plans should be put in place prior to cheap lot acquisitions by developers, especially given the Charbonneau Commission¹¹ inquiry. The 2012 commission was an investigation into corruption and collusion in the management of public contracts to real estate and construction companies by City of Montreal officials. During this investigation, Gérald Tremblay, the Mayor of Montreal was forced to step down from his post. Then Applebaum left his Vision Montreal party to become an independent, before being appointed interim Mayor of Montreal in November 2012.

In reflection, and after three years of research on Griffintown, it is clear to me that the City of Montreal missed the opportunity to create an ethical, affordable, beautiful, innovative and sustainable plan for the new Griffintown prior to breaking ground, as Vision Montreal leader Louise Harel states in Moore’s (2012) article, “We welcome the (plan), but it should have been done... Land prices have gone up ... and the city will have to pay considerably more for the (park) land now.”

¹¹ <https://www.ceic.gouv.qc.ca/la-commission.html>

In addition to documenting the Merciers' life histories, this thesis research also became a meditation on the dilemma of capital over people. Jacobs' (1961/1992) work on gentrified cities, the *Quartiers Disparus-Lost Neighbourhoods* (2012) exhibition and the Charbonneau Commission are compelling evidence that collective testimonials can be wise reflections for urban re-development. All have clearly documented the lack of respect and empathy by city officials for those who have fewer resources to protect themselves from so the so called "progress" of the post-war era and the "austerity measures" we now live in.

American Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Chris Hedges (2012) states in his book review of John Haidt's book, *The Righteous Road to Ruin*,¹² that moral behavior is determined by our treatment of the weakest and most vulnerable among us. He argues that we are now living in a time of "neo-feudalism", essentially the erosion of the middle classes through outsourcing, deregulation, and tax break breaks for a 1% class of elites who are enabling our conservative governments to erode the middle class and the very social-democracy for which our grandparents fought.

In Canada we have a history of immigration and with it came a first generation of immigrants who sacrificed for their children's future, in an effort to give them a better life. This was often the case in Griffintown, as many families were motivated to improve their lot in life by moving to wealthier neighbourhoods in Montreal when they could afford to do so. As Lise Mercier states, "What happened was, when we got married, we left the house and then after our wedding, we would move to places like Verdun, LaSalle, N.D.G."

¹² Quote by Chris Hedges in his June 28th, 2012 book review on Jonathan Haidt's book, "*The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*" in Truthdighttp://www.truthdig.com/arts_culture/item/the_righteous_road_to_ruin_20120628

What is remarkable now is that the middle and wealthy classes are moving into the formerly poor, working class neighbourhood of Griffintown, in place of the current condo projects that have now filled in the empty lots and old buildings. Surprisingly, Lise and Claude have also moved back since their retirement, which makes them unique witnesses to the changes that have swept over Griffintown. Lise Mercier states:

So it is a completely different life. We can see some bricks that date from a very long time ago, but still, it's a new world, a world of condos in Griffintown.

Imagine if the people from 40 or 50 years ago, if they came back to see this, they would be very surprised (laughs)... But people are all coming back. Griffintown, wow! Before you would not even mention the name Griffintown. It was not well seen then and now it's posh.

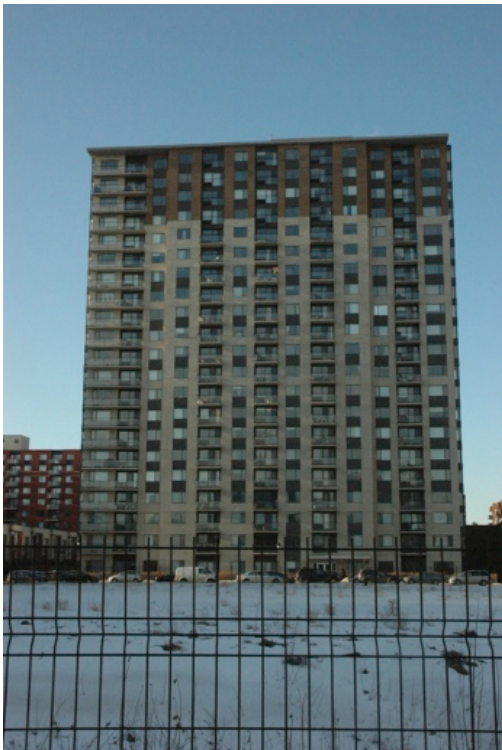


Figure 22: Lise and Claude Mercier's current home on the 21st floor of this condo on Jean D'Estrées Street in Griffintown February 2nd, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

The Merciers currently live in a condo on the 21st floor of a building at 650 Jean D’Estrées Street, which towers above their two former family homes on Ottawa and de la Montagne Streets. From their bird’s eye view in the new condo, Lise and Claude recounted rich stories of their former community life in the ‘old Griffintown’. It was remarkable to interview and film the Merciers on the couch in their living room, in front of their window, which looked over the ‘new Griffintown’ under construction. Claude said, “We see buildings going up every day, one week after another, with floors added.” It was moments like these that gave credence to the oral history work we were doing together.



Figure 23: New Development in Griffintown Horse Palace site on Ottawa Street Griffintown March 5th, 2013. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

The Griffintown that the Merciers describe in the documentary is what Marc Augé (2008) writes about in his book, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*: “Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten” (p.64). What one sees and hears in the Mercier’s *In Griffintown* (2013) documentary is a place being reconstructed from the vestiges of the Merciers’ memory. This is what author Nora (1989) refers to as “Places of Memory”. In his article “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire”, he writes that, “What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history. What we take to be flare-ups of memory are in fact its final consumption in the flames of history. The quest for memory is the search for one’s history” (p.13). Nora’s statement supports my approach to use audio recording and images as a means to document and elicit responses from the Merciers. He goes on to state, “Modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image” (p.13). I believe that this process helped my collaborators Claude, Lise and Stefan as they consistently expressed the sentiment that they have not been heard and, in effect, have been marginalized. Thus they agreed to invite me the researcher, reader and the viewer, to explore their French Canadian story of Griffintown as they deeply wished it to be told in sounds and images for future generations. Lise Mercier echoes this thought in her support of the use of photos for a potential museum or historical panels in public settings: “You know, even in museums now, you can have digital photos. They could put lots of photos in it.”

In photos and interviews, the Merciers' were able to elicit their oral histories, which in turn gave me the data and content for both life history documentaries. I used a photo elicitation methodology with Mercier family photographs, because I believe it successfully elicited their personal memories of Griffintown. I referenced Harper's (2002) *Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation*, and used an arts-informed research methodology for my three interviews and photo elicitation process that triggered the Merciers' memories and stories about their homes and community life as French Canadians in Griffintown. For example, when Lise Mercier describes her elementary school life while holding up her class photograph, she said:

And here I am on Montfort street where there used to be a French Canadian school called St. Helene's school. Girls and boys each had their own schools. We shared the same school yard anyway. I am here (laughs). Formerly, it was the nuns who taught us. They ran the school and lived there. We wore uniforms then. They were black dresses with plastic collars in the month of June, and with thick stockings, oh they were warm (laughs).



Figure 24: Lise Mercier at the site of the old St. Helene's School Griffintown June 9th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod



Figure 25: Lise Mercier second desk on the left 4th grade at St. Helene's School Griffintown in 1950s.
Photo: Mercier archive

When the Merciers' elicited their stories via their personal photos in front of the empty lots and remaining buildings from their past, I was struck by their sense of dignity and community pride. Through the photos, the Merciers' exhibited a particularly strong connection to their homes, and the places and events they referenced while they were filmed. A perfect example of this was when Claude Mercier described a former hangout in front of an empty lot, where he once learned to dance to rock-n-roll:

Presently, I am exactly where Chez Willie's restaurant was. It belonged to the father of one of our friends. It was the tradition, especially every Saturday night... We had a big jukebox right here, with all the songs by Elvis Presley, Fats

Domino. It was in the era of Rock ‘n’ Roll, and it was here that I learned how to dance Rock ‘n’ Roll.



Figure 26: Claude Mercier eliciting his Chez Willie’s story corner of Ottawa and Murray streets Griffintown June 9th, 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

Harper (2002), states that, “at the other extreme of our continuum photographs portray the intimate dimension of the social-family or other intimate social group, or one’s own body. Elicitation interviews connect ‘core definitions of the self’ to society, culture and history” (p.13). He continues, “researchers felt that the photos sharpened the informants’ memory and reduced the areas of misunderstanding” (p.14). Harper also believes that the process of photo elicitation is a “dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher” (p.15). I experienced this often when the Merciers’ recounted their stories of Griffintown.

Remarkably, they never wavered or were moved to tears but proudly stood up in

front of my camera with photo in hand telling their stories. I found the photo elicitation process the appropriate method to initiate the Merciers' stories, as it enabled deeper reflection when writing this thesis. The photos and locations created an entry point to strike up their memory, which in turn elicited their life histories and provided a frank contrast between the former and current Griffintown. For example, when Lise Mercier stood in front her former home at 1165 Ottawa Street, with a photo of her and her father from the 1950s, she shared a very touching reflection that depicted the close relationship she had with her father. The power of returning home and reliving this experience in front of the camera was a ceremony that illustrates her deep affections for her family. Lise stated, "My grandmother lived with us because she took care of me after my mother died... He [Georges Jetté] remarried a woman from Quebec City, Jeanne Caron, who lived here until 2007. This is a picture of me and my father in the 1950s."



Figure 27: Lise Mercier with her father Georges Jetté inside their home on 1165 Ottawa Street Griffintown 1957. Photo: Mercier archive

Chapter 6: Arts-Informed Film

6.1 Film Treatment

I had special effects artist Jo Meuris rework the Merciers' photos in Photoshop and special effects program (After Effects). We then integrated the photos into the picture frame as accents to the Merciers' stories. This was particularly effective when the buildings no longer existed as it illustrated community life in the Griffintown of the Merciers' past.

My mission as film director was to help Claude, Lise and Stefan Mercier develop their life histories through their own personal research via their family archives, photos, letters and souvenirs of Griffintown. From this collected material and my research data, I translated their life stories into a documentary.

Researching and filming the Merciers' personal histories on site in Griffintown was vital in helping me understand and contextualize their life histories in this area of the city from a distinctly French Canadian perspective, a history which has not been researched or discussed at any great length by Burns (1998), Burnman (2003), Barlow (2009) and Driedger (2010), as their work focuses primarily on the Irish community of Griffintown. Effectively, this thesis tries to demonstrate what Barlow (personal communication, 15th of February, 2013) imparted to me, "as the Irish have so successfully laid claim to Griff that other ethnicities no longer exist in the popular memory of Griffintown. I also argue the Irish *could* lay claim to Griffintown because other ethno-religious groups already have their own neighbourhoods."

This life history documentary project gave Claude, Lise and Stefan Mercier the opportunity to go through a process of self-reflection and to gift their French Canadian

story to the viewing public. Our collective goal was to give the public tangible insights into the lives of everyday working people who lived in the once thriving industrial community of Griffintown.

6.2 Film Influences

Over the years I have studied feature works from countries like Australia [*The Chant of Jimmy Black Smith* (1978) by Fred Schepisi]; Ireland [*The Secret of Roan Inish* (1994) by John Sayles]; and New Zealand [*Whale Rider* (2002) by Niki Caro]. I've also studied animated works from Israel including *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) by Ari Folman, and works from Canada including *The Man Who Planted Trees* (1987) by Frédéric Back, and *The Danish Poet* (2006) by Toril Kove. I have been influenced by these animations and films because they share cross-cultural and allegorical themes and it is my aim to produce a story of equal caliber. While doing my research with the Merciers on Griffintown it is my hope to experiment with live action footage and animation and recognize other cultural groups in Griffintown, illustrating the differences as well as the strong symbolic similarities in their lore, history, language and music.

6.3 Animations

The Merciers' photos gave me the opportunity to employ my pencil animating technique, which was well received in my previous life history documentary, *After the War with Hannelore* (2009). Many viewers told me that these animations enhanced the stories and made the documentary more aesthetically pleasing.

My aim with the animations was to explore and experiment with various drawing, photo and collage media. For this project, I broke with conventional animation and explored new directions, including the work of South African artist and animator William

Kentridge.¹³ Like Kentridge's short animation *Felix in Exile* (1994), I use the same surface for each animation. Rather than a series of multiple drawings to illustrate a particular building in the film, I simply shot the illustration at the various stages in its creation. And, instead of using charcoal on paper like Kentridge, I used water-based graphite and colour pencils on Mylar (a material once used by architects) as my primary medium, adding water to bring the drawings to life. The Mylar sheets were taped to my glass animation table underneath my tripod and digital camera. The drawings were photographed in stages, while backlit beneath a frosted glass table with a series of four angled lamps. The series of JPEG files from each drawing were later assembled in QuickTime sequences to be assembled and edited into the storyline.



Figures 28-31: Animation sequence of *Chez Willie's* graphite on Mylar 2012. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

¹³ William Kentridge was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1955. He attended the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (1973–76), Johannesburg Art Foundation (1976–78), and studied mime and theater at L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq, Paris (1981–82). Having witnessed first-hand one of the twentieth century's most contentious struggles—the dissolution of apartheid—Kentridge brings the ambiguity and subtlety of personal experience to public subjects that are most often framed in narrowly defined terms. Using film, drawing, sculpture, animation, and performance, he transmutes sobering political events into powerful poetic allegories. In a now-signature technique, Kentridge photographs his charcoal drawings and paper collages over time, recording scenes as they evolve. Working without a script or storyboard, he plots out each animated film, preserving every addition and erasure. <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/william-kentridge>

Conclusion

Significance

An issue that came forward from this thesis project is my own personal quest for a secure physical space and sense of home, identity and community. This issue has been at the forefront of my life since I lost my own home after my parents died (my mother when I was 13 and my father when I was 17). At 18, I was forced out of my home and rented my first apartment in St. Anne de Bellevue during my second year of CEGEP (college). In subsequent years in Montreal, I lost several painting studios to condo development projects and lived through the insecurity of being an artist in commercial spaces with no residential lease. Over a 25-year period I moved 15 times. These forced moves had a terrible impact on my personal life and business, and they inform my interests in urban settings, displacement, loss of home, language, culture, and community.

Upon reflection of my early years as a student and artist living in the borough of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce in Montreal, it was both an Irish family from Dublin now living in Montreal and a family who was originally from Griffintown, who became my surrogate Irish families in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. I was an orphan who had no immediate family of my own in Montreal and over two decades I was invited into their homes, ate at their tables, celebrated birthdays and holidays and intimate family moments with both of these families. I was not unlike the many Irish orphans that were adopted by French Canadian families who came through Grosse-Isle¹⁴ quarantine station during the famine years of

¹⁴ Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site of Canada commemorates the importance of immigration to Canada, particularly via the entry port of Québec, from the early 19th century to the First World War. Grosse Île also commemorates the tragic events experienced by the Irish immigrants at this site, primarily during the typhoid epidemic of 1847. <http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/qc/grosseile/natcul/natcul1.aspx>

the 1840s. I was accepted as one of their own, appreciating their survivor humour and learning about their collective working class experiences and poverty in Dublin and Griffintown. Like Griffintown boxer Marcel “Rocky” Brisebois, I was immersed in my newly adopted Irish culture and community in Montreal, where I learned about the Irish diaspora, famine years, Grosse-Isle, and took part in traditional Irish music sessions, St. Patrick’s Day Parades, and took on many of the cultural attributes of my adopted culture.

This shared knowledge gave me the capacity to empathize and not judge the poor but rather show compassion for those who lived on the margins. It was a tragedy to lose my parents, home, entitlement and culture so young but there was valuable life experience that followed, which helped me reclaim what I had lost.

Limitations

Cost and production time limited the scope of this life history documentary, and without scholarship funding I took the initiative to create a fund-raising platform with an on-line kick-starter company called *Indiegogo*.¹⁵ With its support I created a short video outlining my thesis project and the documentary costs and the crew involved. I emailed this short video to my network and secured 80 per cent of my \$10,000 goal, which made the thesis project feasible. This fundraising process added an extra three months to my thesis project and a third year to my degree. To make up the 20 per cent gap in my funding goal, I used other cost cutting alternatives including Hexagram,¹⁶ a facility that provides camera equipment to graduate students at Concordia University. I also sold

¹⁵ *Indiegogo* is an international crowdfunding site where anyone can raise money for film, music, art, charity, small businesses, gaming, theater, and more. www.indiegogo.com

¹⁶ Hexagram was established at Concordia University in 2002 with grants from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation and the Québec provincial government to provide state-of-the-art equipment, labs and technology infrastructure for faculty and graduate research, Hexagram-Concordia has evolved into a dynamic environment for research-creation and knowledge mobilization. <http://hexagram.concordia.ca/about>

some of the animation drawings at my thesis exhibition to help pay for my exhibition and film costs.

Creating an affordable educational research template that students and scholars could use for their own research posed a second challenge. Fortunately, for this element of my thesis project I received a small scholarship from the University of British Columbia's THEN/HiER Graduate Student Projects Program,¹⁷ which facilitated the web design element of this thesis project. This on-line feature provided an important and practical method of sharing the Merciers' oral histories and my research template with the greater community.

I met the third challenge of this project—dissemination of both the platform and the documentary content to the greater public—by establishing an affiliation with The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University.¹⁸ This centre has an excellent facility for research and production as well as a web-based presence through which affiliates can share their research and process. Taking their workshops and becoming an affiliate helped me with my research, interviews and technical process. It also provided a forum that connected me to other graduate students and researchers in the oral history community.

¹⁷ THEN/HiER is the first pan-Canadian organization devoted to promoting—and improving—history teaching and learning by bringing together the multiple and varied constituencies involved in history education: academic historians; public historians in museums, archives and historic sites; practicing teachers; researchers based in faculties of education; and curriculum policy makers. Our goal is to stimulate an active, participatory dialogue among these various communities of history educators, a dialogue that explores how best to improve history education in all its forms through more research-informed practice (from kindergarten to graduate school) and more practice-informed research. <http://www.thenhier.ca/en/content/about>

¹⁸ The Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling serves as a centre for collaborative digital historical research, teaching, and publishing among faculty and students at Concordia University, as well as members of local, national and international communities. <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/>

Website

The THEN/HiER Graduate Student Projects Program from the University of British Columbia is a multimedia initiative to design and to help disseminate research findings to the broader public via the development of educational websites. The initiative helped make *Dans l'Griff-In Griffintown* available for public and institutional use. Creating an educational template outlining my research and production process, and making the film available on line in English at www.ingriffintown.com and in French at www.danslgriff.com are the goal of my websites. These two sites display project data and the answer the initial thesis question, giving the public the opportunity to become more familiar with the Griffintown of yesterday in contrast to the Griffintown of today. This educational research template is now available to students and scholars interested in informing their own enquiries about public spaces, buildings and communities. I believe that arts-informed research projects on the web are important methods of discovering the narrative histories of people, buildings and community in an effort to develop a deeper interest in preserving and sharing industrial history, architecture and cultural landscapes of communities like Griffintown.

Art Education

As a result of this research, one possible implication in the field of art education is to create a framework and template for researchers, documentary filmmakers and art educators to follow when documenting people, their homes and neighbourhoods.

After creating this documentary and educational materials, I intend to share how I documented the Jetté and Mercier homes and Griffintown through my research and data collection via photographs, video, drawings, animations and self-guided on-line tour.

This was done in an effort to encourage others to use arts-informed and life history research as methods to document and discover their own neighbourhoods and cities.

McLeod (2009) supports this new area of research in art education by stating that, “despite the fact that art education is typically rooted in notions of community and traditions of celebration of the immediate, my topic holds significance because the field of art education is expanding to embrace such research” (p.4). In other words, art education is enriched and expanded when it incorporates the full breadth of human experience of place, family, self, history, and more.

Like McLeod (2009), I have also tried to break into new areas of research and have expanded from my painting practice into educational film projects, such as my three other film projects, *After the War with Hannelore* (2009), *The Saga of Murdo MacLeod* (2012) and *The Abenaki* (2013). In these three research and film projects I designed teaching tool sections for educators and students in the DVD extras, including downloadable PDFs in French and English. Based on the National Film Board of Canada’s educational model, I created a “Learning Guide” PDF, which has questions to be asked before and after screening the video, and a list of suggested follow-up projects. I designed the second PDF as a “Production Notes and Research Guide” with photos illustrating an overview of my research and filmmaking process, with additional filmography, bibliography and related web links.

I have been encouraged to continue this work based on the positive feedback from teacher conference participants in Montreal and Berlin. In 2010 I presented my Cold War documentary and paper *After the War with Hannelore* (2009) both at the Quebec Provincial Association Teacher conference at Palais de congress in Montreal, and in 2011

at the 6th International Conference on the Arts in Society at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, in Berlin, Germany. Based on the feedback from both workshops, I found that there was a need for these types of teaching tools. In a chapter I wrote in, *Wisdom: Life Writing as Empathic Inquiry* (2012) I state:

I was committed to producing the DVD as a transformative educational tool but found it difficult to find a forum for discussion and distribution, save for the festivals and cultural centre network. I believe that the single biggest problem I faced was disseminating the completed film to teachers and members of the public interested in this type of educational tool. At the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers in 2010, I presented a workshop on our film and I heard directly from teachers who stated the need for educational content via digital media. As a filmmaker and educator, I believe creating positive educational content in digital platforms is essential for people to use every day, as we are confronted with violent gaming content and war on an ongoing basis, which in my view will only engender violence and endorse war even further (p.86).¹⁹

With my educational animation project, *The Saga of Murdo MacLeod* (2012), I conducted a mini pilot project with Mary Opalinsky, a teacher from St. Georges High School, Montreal, Quebec. Our aim was to see how effective educational DVDs with additional PDF's could be with teacher and students in a classroom setting. Mary presented my video to her grade 9 class and again I received positive feedback. She states:

¹⁹ As stated in my chapter on Memory Work, titled "After the War with Hannelore", in *A Heart of Wisdom: Life Writing as Empathic Inquiry*, Edited by Cynthia M. Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Carl Leggo, Anita Sinner (2012).

Thank you for the education guide, I am sure to put it to good use! Also, I had great feedback from my students (grade 9s) who felt that using illustrations gave the experience more depth. They felt a great deal of empathy for how the settlers were treated both at home in Scotland and in their new home as well - something many immigrants share!²⁰

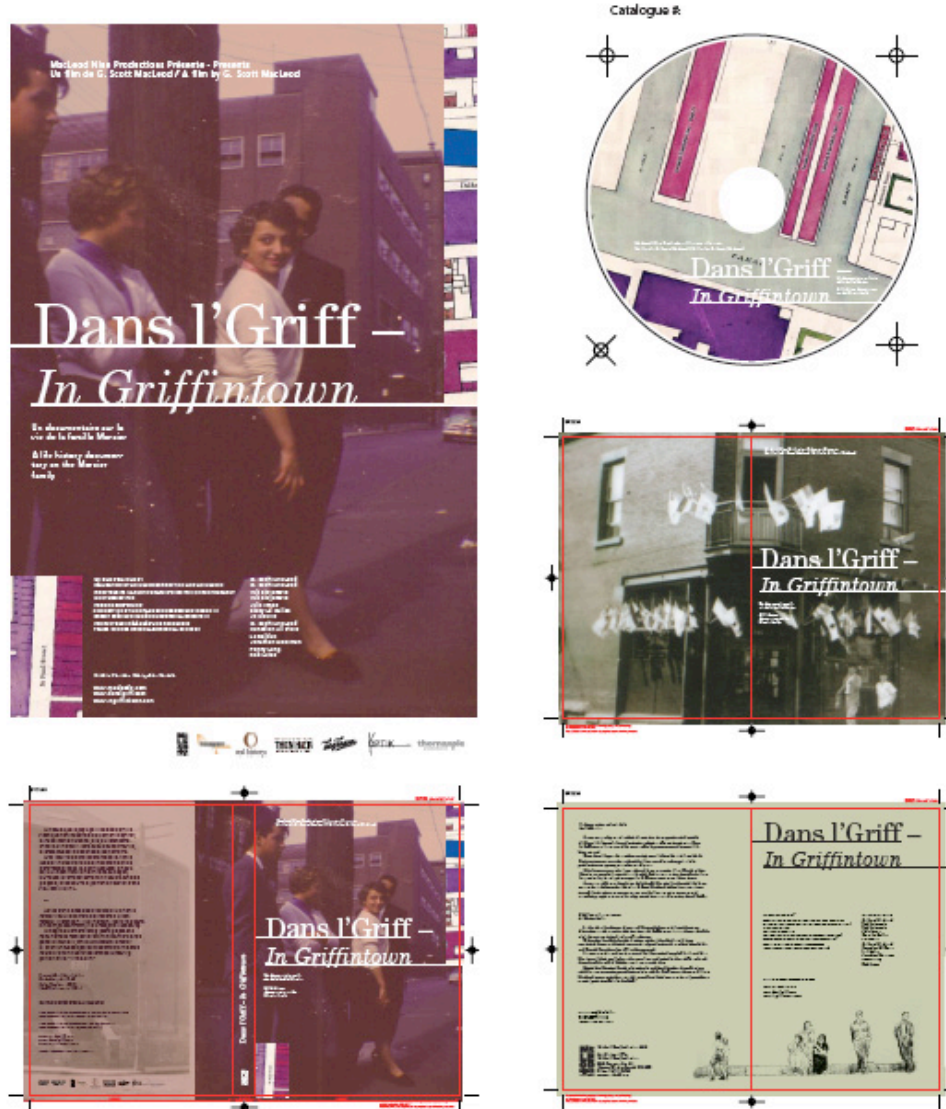


Figure 32: DVD Graphics by TagTeam Studio.

²⁰ Quote from Mary Opalinsky, a teacher from St. Georges High School, Montreal, Quebec. After viewing *The Saga of Murdo MacLeod and his first contact with the Abenaki* (MacLeod, 2012) with her grade 9 students.

These positive experiences and feedback have encouraged me to explore new digital art and educational platforms and directions in my practice during the last three years of grad school. As a result I have evolved as an artist, educator and person. I am extremely grateful for the opportunities given to me in this direction and feel a renewed optimism as I leave my former self, “the independent artist as struggling painter” and use my training to inform my filmmaking and animation practices. As a result of this shift, I now have an opportunity to flourish as both filmmaker and educator.

I felt that this research was important because as a filmmaker and art educator I am interested in making life histories accessible to the public via DVDs and web platforms for educational use. In both the documentary and website I have respectfully and artfully tried to make an educational project that pays homage to the Merciers’ story and in return affords us the privilege of being witness to Lise, Claude and Stefan Mercier’s life experience in Griffintown.

Directing, animating and composing music for my film projects has helped me realize the range of my interests as a multimedia artist. I believe that fusing these multiple interests, which include animating as well as the various components of filmmaking, will contribute to this new phase of my artistic development from visual artist to filmmaker- animator and educator. As I have with my other productions, I will seek to distribute, exhibit, broadcast and sell this work for educational purposes.

I feel fortunate to be producing documentaries and animations at a time when new forms of technology and media can provide artists with unlimited possibilities to innovate and create interesting work. The film and animation field has enabled me to expose my work to a broader audience, contrary to my 2D fine art mediums, which were limited to

gallery and museum settings. This is an exciting change for me—to be without the bulk of material work that comes with large painting exhibitions, (e.g. framing, shipping, studio and storage costs). Due to new, affordable technologies now available to artists and smaller production houses, I can do world-class projects with less of this material burden, and will be able to disseminate my work on web-based platforms more cost-effectively to the educational market and the greater public.

One of the benefits of the digital age is having greater access to the public through the Internet to share these educational tools. I now feel like my work is accessible and relevant enough to offer forums for exchange between teacher, student, artist and public.

Conclusion

During this thesis project I discovered that the Merciers' former community and values are no longer extant in the current condo skyline of Griffintown. What I saw and experienced during the two years of research was moneyed individualists bunkered in overpriced and unimaginatively designed air-conditioned buildings, with the functional accouterments of underground parking, rooftop swimming pools, sports and activity rooms. All of these luxury condos services are no doubt wonderful and expected with the high price tag, but it has created an internalized gated community within the buildings.

The 'new Griffintown' being advertised by developers would seem to be the antithesis of the outward community life Lise and Claude recounted to me on the streets of their old Griffintown. When reflecting on their stories of community life in Griffintown, I surmised that it was something that the Merciers and their neighbouring families cultivated with care and out of necessity due to the economic factors and times during which they lived in this former working class community.



Figure 33: Condo showroom in Griffintown August 3rd, 2010. Photo: G. Scott MacLeod

I also noted that Lise and Claude represented a post-war generation with a working class view, versus the mainstream self-involved baby boomer “me generation” approach to life. They are grateful for what they had and not prone to behaving as victims despite their loss of place and community. Indeed, their stories may not have the drama of reality TV but they do offer us the opportunity to meditate on lives whose value and wealth were situated in community. Most of their stories center on their interactions and dependence on one another, rather than on their individual status and material trappings.

Over four years—from 2010 to 2013—I watched developers build and promote this borough with their “District Griffin” billboards reflecting the ethos of “build it and they will come”. Just because the real estate billboards stated that Griffintown was new and improved, it did not mean that the initiative to restructure Griffintown in this way

was in keeping with the real needs of the community. After the public consultations, however, the city did amend plans to include green spaces, infrastructure, and services.

Now that the land is mostly spoken for, developers are well into building the new Griffintown which may, over time, get its green spaces, community centres, day cares, restaurants, mom and pop shops, small businesses, trades people, artists, and artisans. The \$93 million may create a new Griffintown free of its once historic poverty and downtrodden populace, and this would be a good thing. But equally good would be the cultivation of the sort of community-based “social capital” upon which the residents of the old Griffintown relied. Meanwhile, one can only hope that Claude and Lise’s dream of a small museum or centre to commemorate and memorialize the former public spaces, buildings and communities of the old Griffintown is realized. One such effort to commemorate Griffintown is the work the Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation www.griffintownhorsepalace.com. On their website they state that: “Constituted as a non-profit organisation, the objectives of the Griffintown Horse Palace Foundation are to offer people in Montreal an environment in the city where they can tie again with the history of Griffintown and in that way maintain the thousands of years old bond between man and horse.”²¹

My research suggests there is an opportunity to learn from our elders’ oral histories, even if their cadence is slow and their buzzwords are few. While they live we

²¹ The organisation plans to purchase the Griffintown urban stable property which is situated at 1204, rue Ottawa in Griffintown, Montreal and restore it and install a museum for showing the history of the former working neighborhood in Griffintown. The Griffintown Horse Palace will continue to serve as a stable for the horse-drawn carriages tours in Old-Montreal and has accepted to participate in the project and given permission to the public too assist them in their daily work. <http://griffintownhorsepalace.com/english/>

have the opportunity to record and listen to them closely, before, with their passing, “their libraries burn”. I found that their life histories are part of our patrimony—our social wealth—and that their lives contain vital lessons about what has worked and what has failed in our former communities, cities, countries, continents and beyond. We are still faced with the challenge of valuing different types of capital effectively—the capital of material and physical wealth of properties and land with the intangible wealth of community relationships and the life histories of individuals and families—their memories, choices, insights, and wisdom. Claude and Lise Mercier’s lives in Griffintown are a testament to why that balance is important, and what can be gained by all of us in appreciating how their lives and histories relate to our own.

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