

Saint-Henri and the Urban Uncanny:
A Comparative Analysis of Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962), and
Shannon Walsh's *Saint-Henri The 26th of August* (2011)

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of two documentary films made in and about the Montreal neighbourhood of Saint-Henri. Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) and Shannon Walsh's homage, *Saint-Henri The 26th of August* (2011), are at the centre of my investigation, which is concerned with the multifaceted ways these films represent, and sometimes, create uncanny effects in Saint-Henri. Its mediated uncanniness is discussed in psychological, technological and architectural terms. I explore the various methods used by the directors in their respective modern and postmodern approaches to represent the physical spaces of Saint-Henri, as well as the people who inhabited this post-industrial (1962), and now quickly gentrifying (2011) neighbourhood. Produced almost fifty years apart, these films exemplify transformations in both documentary film and community studies during this period. An examination of the connections between film, geography, economy, and the social and architectural make-up of neighbourhood, this thesis is a study of a community that, I argue, has been consistently under threat.

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Preface

It is only after you have come to know the surface of things
[...] that you can venture to seek what is underneath. But the
surface of things is inexhaustible.
– Italo Calvino¹

Henri Bergson tells us, “There is no perception which is not full of memories. With the immediate and present data of our senses, we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience.”² He continues, “What you have to explain (...) is not how perception arises, but how it is limited, since it should be the image of the whole, and is in fact reduced to the image of that which interests you.”³ Accordingly, my perception as author is limited, as I do not live in Saint-Henri, the neighbourhood that is situated at the centre of this analysis, nor have I ever lived there. I was raised in a region folded into downtown Toronto, and spent much of my youth fascinated by the public processes of a corner of Toronto that I felt belonged to me. I came to understand that I was only able to see the city (really see, not just look at) through the viewfinder of a camera. Perhaps this is why I have felt inspired to closely examine Saint-Henri through Hubert Aquin and Shannon Walsh’s focused cinematic portraits. Like them, I am an outsider to Saint-Henri, and cannot claim to have experienced the gestures, contradictions, elisions, and ruptures that have taken place there, except through the vehicle of cinema and on a series of afternoon walks. That said, I assume that my position as an outsider is similar to that of most people who have seen these films. Akin to the act of documenting, a close study of

¹ Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*, (Orlando: Harvest Book/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 55.

² Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* [1908] Trans. Nancy Margaret Paul & W. Scott Palmer. (Edinburgh: The Riverside Press, 1929), 24.

³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 34.

these films will contribute to an understanding of the filmic history-writing and truth-telling about this working-class neighbourhood on the edge of the Lachine Canal.

Introduction: The Methodology of Visualizing Saint-Henri

But even if life is tough, and the weather is harsh
Even if we're hungry and we're cold and we're out of work
Even on those long endless days on welfare, dragging our feet, we don't
worry
So hats off! Cause we can still laugh in Saint-Henri.
– Raymond Levésque, “À Saint-Henri”
(Theme song from *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre*)

Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962)⁴ and Shannon Walsh's *Saint-Henri The 26th of August* (2011) are documentary films produced by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), a governmental film producer and distributor established in 1939. Both films depict a neighbourhood of Montreal that was once a suburban frontier of Canadian industry. The documentaries, which I will refer to succinctly as *le cinq septembre* and *The 26th of August*, were made in and about the once post-industrial and now rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood of Saint-Henri on two late summer days, bookending almost half a century. By way of introduction, I discuss the socio-historical and economic beginnings of Saint-Henri, and its development from a thriving industrial community into a gentrifying and divided post-industrial space. I then provide descriptions of these films that, beyond simply portraying a community, create a psychogeographic landscape.⁵ In their entirety, Walsh and Aquin's films can be seen as small fragments of the temporal whole of Saint-Henri, and as pieces that fit together to

⁴ In fact, there are two versions of Hubert Aquin's 1962 film *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre*. The French-language version is 41 minutes long, while the English film is a condensed 27 minutes. The English-language picture is shorter because extended periods of French dialogue have been cut out.

⁵ This term is taken from Guy Debord's writings on psychogeography and the potential mapping of journeys in Paris. Debord explained that cities become “after-images” absorbed and internalized through mediums such as film, joining cinema with Situationist cartography. Giuliana Bruno also employs the term, and argued that “The erotics unleashed by the architectonics of lived space escalates in the metropolis, a concentrated site of narrative crossings that bears even deeper ties to cinema's own spatial (e)motion.” In Bruno's *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, (New York: Verso, 2001), 67.

form a montage of community. Ultimately, this thesis examines how socio-historical realities of Saint-Henri were depicted in Aquin and Walsh's films, with the intention of demonstrating how an in-depth analysis of these films can uncover the causes and effects of shifting perceptions of space and the positions of people within it.

To fully comprehend and effectively compare the two most influential documentary films made about Saint-Henri, it is necessary to begin this study with an analysis of the socio-historical realities of Saint-Henri as a geographic region and culturally unique community. Therefore, this study starts with a historical description, focusing on the 1960s and the 2000s, when Aquin and Walsh's films were planned and produced. The beginnings, expansion, and contemporary landscape of the neighbourhood will also be explained, as well as the economic and social risks Saint-Henri has faced during these focal moments. Saint-Henri's perseverance, despite being a neighbourhood in a continual state of threat, will be outlined in the preliminary section 'A Post-Industrial Palimpsest.' This section will include a discussion of the outdated Fordist capitalist model of growth, which was established in Saint-Henri's industrial golden age, as well as the neighbourhood's shift from a site of consumption to one of production. In this conversation, Serge Latouche's book *Farewell to Growth* will help to substantiate my argument for qualitative development, which does not involve the mandate of material growth. Furthermore, Henri Lefebvre's writings on discursive and social space, and the everyday, as well as more contemporary and applied studies from Edward Soja and Fran Tonkiss provide a comprehensive context from which to assemble an analysis of the shifting physical and social spaces in Saint-Henri. This initial historical, geographical and spatial examination will prepare the reader to enter Saint-Henri through the films.

A comparison of two documentaries with half a century of time, but no space between them, creates a window through which to observe varying modes of perception and identity formation. An account of *le cinq septembre* and *The 26th of August*, closely related in content, but so different in terms of timeframe and technique, follows in a section entitled ‘Documenting Saint-Henri.’ Beneficial to this discussion is the collection of Hubert Aquin’s essays published in *Liberté* in the 1950s and 60s, an intellectual French Canadian magazine concerned with issues of Quebec’s sovereignty. Aquin’s writings offer insight into the politics and principles of *le cinq septembre*’s director, who was also a major figure in Québécois politics during the Quiet Revolution.

A synopsis of each film, followed by a comparative interpretation, in the section entitled, ‘Documenting Otherwise,’ will gesture towards my central argument on the uncanny effects of documenting community, as well as of those initiated by shifts on the urban landscape. These notions will be expanded upon in the section “‘Uncanny Effects,”” which details the effects of filmic documentary practice, as well as the uncanny physical nature of the community itself, which I refer to as the ‘urban uncanny.’ Architectural historian Anthony Vidler has established and developed the history and theory of unstable and unhomey vital spaces in *The Architectural Uncanny*, a book that has served as a central reference in this investigation. Vidler defines the architectural uncanny as combining of aspects of fictional history, psychological analysis, and cultural manifestations⁶ that collect around the idea of the home. Defamiliarization and estrangement from the home, often conflated with metropolitan conditions of agoraphobia and historical amnesia, are rooted in an unease that arose in modern

⁶ Anthony Vidler, *The Architecture of the Uncanny*, (London: MIT Press, 1992), 11.

environments first identified in the late eighteenth century.⁷ For Vidler, the body is inscribed into architecture, but as he shows, from Vitruvius to the present, the distancing of the body from buildings has created alienation from built spaces. In turn, Vidler argues that the “house has become an instrument for generalized nostalgia.”⁸ In this study, Vidler’s reading of the Freudian ‘uncanny’ will be discussed, along with a review of Freud’s thoughts about the ways in which the ‘uncanny’ may arise. Giuliana Bruno’s book *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, and her innovative writings on film, architecture and urban space have helped me to connect architecture and cinema as networks of physical, filmic, and imagined realities in Saint-Henri. As discussed below, the design and representation of physical space, whether ceremonious or haphazard, relates directly to one’s passage through it, perception of it, and if it is a vital space – a home – to the perception of self. Correspondingly, Tom Conley’s writings on cartography and cinema also help me to structure my examination of the mapping of Saint-Henri through the medium of film. Conley’s text elaborates on how events that occur in cinema are not isolated, unlinked islands, but connected archipelagos defined by the space in which they take place. Both texts have heightened my awareness of the films’ haptic and psychic effects and interpretations of this urban space.

As power relations are deeply ingrained in both urban processes and in cinema, this thesis will approach these two discursive spaces as intrinsically connected. Inspired by Michel Foucault and others, this study will incorporate a discussion of the ways in which documentation and surveillance constrain behaviour and indirectly subjugate those depicted on screen. Furthermore, the philosophy of political theorist Hannah Arendt helps

⁷ Ibid, 3.

⁸ Ibid, 64.

to balance the analysis of the nature of power this discussion, namely of the projected and perceived nature of Saint-Henri and its inhabitants. Although Aquin's and Walsh's films create knowledge, they also mediate and constrain it. As Mark Shiel explains, "The city is a site for changing networks of power. Power relations are not only inscribed in spatiality, they are also spatially inscribed into cultural texts, like cinema."⁹

Correspondingly, the writing of media and urban studies theorist Scott McQuire, who has argued, "Instead of treating media as separate from the city, let's think about a co-constitution between architectural structures and urban territories, social practices and 'media feedback,'¹⁰ is influential to this formulation. Although these two films share a subject, and depict similar patterns and events, the differences in their style and tone are palpable. Hence, this comparative study, which traces the development of both neighbourhood and documentary techniques half of a century apart, will also be an examination of power rooted in the different documentary practices.

An inquiry into the meaning that can be gleaned through documenting and scrutinizing the constantly shifting Montreal community of Saint-Henri, this thesis is concerned with domains of possibility in post-industrial space, and identity formations that happen within it. Indebted to the seminal writings of Walter Benjamin, who believed that the ordinary, or that which is largely ignored, might contribute to greater meanings,¹¹ this thesis is a study of films that document the banalities of daily life in order to critique and reveal larger processes across both space and time. In his essay "On the Concept of History," Benjamin wrote, "Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing

⁹ Mark Shiel & Tony Fitzmaurice eds., *Cinema in the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 5.

¹⁰ Scott McQuire, *Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, (London: Sage, 2008), intro.

¹¹ Fran Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 125.

it the way it really was. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger.”¹² Accordingly, Aquin’s lament for a dying neighbourhood, and Walsh’s tribute to perpetual motion, despite urban-decay and its semi-erasure, converge to create a kaleidoscopic image of community constantly underwritten by threat. My in-depth examination of the socio-historical context of Saint-Henri, Hubert Aquin’s *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) and Shannon Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August* (2011), as well as the uncanny processes present in and produced by both films will illustrate how each documentary came about in a Benjaminian “moment of danger.”

A Post-Industrial Palimpsest

Saint-Henri was erected in spite of its population, in an unceremonious renunciation of Aristotle’s laconic proclamation: “Towns should be built so as to protect their inhabitants and at the same time make them happy.”¹³ Although industry was quickly established in Saint-Henri, the infrastructure needed to foster the construction of a social community was not. In his thesis, “Industry and Space: The Making of Montreal’s Industrial Geography 1850-1918,” Robert David Lewis explains that Saint-Henri was hindered by a “massive program of tax exemptions for industry which was harnessed to a policy of minimal provision of basic infrastructures and control over the working-class habitat.”¹⁴ Subsequently, while Saint-Henri was a profitable industrial area up until the mid-1900s, it lacked a community-based identity. The neighbourhood was

¹² Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” In *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1940), 391.

¹³ Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), 683.

¹⁴ Robert David Lewis, “Industry and Space: The Making of Montreal’s Industrial Geography 1850-1918,” Unpublished MA Thesis Department of Geography, McGill University, Montreal 1992. 428.

appealing to industrial firms because of its ideal transportation connections to the rest of Montreal and its easily accessible and cheap labour force. Saint-Henri's distinguishing factor, however, was the availability and malleability of space.¹⁵ As Lewis further contends, "Saint-Henri, in contrast to middle-class suburbs such as Notre Dame de Grâce, Westmount and Outremont, established a set of municipal policies which favoured business interests over those of their residents."¹⁶ Therefore, when factories began to close in the late 1950s and the Fordist model of capitalism waned and collapsed, the inhabitants of Saint-Henri were faced with a two-fold disadvantage. The failure of industry left the citizens of Saint-Henri without satisfactory comfort or sufficient capital.

Neighbourhoods in Montreal are some of the most unequal and segregated in Canada, in terms of income.¹⁷ Of these, Saint-Henri is an example of the "other half" of Canadian society, and was at one point listed amongst the worst inner-city slums in North America.¹⁸ Once the epicentre of Canadian industry, thick with refineries, mills and factories, Saint-Henri was prosaically referred to as "Smokey Valley" because of the ubiquity of manufacturing in the area. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Saint-Henri was a small tanning and shoemaking village where production was conducted in artisanal workshops. After 1850, however, land was subdivided and industrial and transport infrastructure was established. Numerous tanneries emerged in this industrial suburb, and soon workers followed and would attempt to forge a community in Saint-Henri. By the 1880s, there were ten boot and shoe enterprises, two tanneries, and one

¹⁵ Lewis, "Industry and Space," 461.

¹⁶ Ibid, 349.

¹⁷ Pierre Gauthier, Jochen Jaeger, Jason Prince eds, *Montreal at the Crossroads: Superhighways, the Turcot and the Environment*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009)

¹⁸ Lewis, "Industry and Space," 351.

factory for making saddlery.¹⁹ In contemporary Saint-Henri there is a mixture of public housing projects, re-fashioned loft spaces, Montreal's typical walk-up apartments, and private speculation in the form of condominiums. In contrast to its earlier iterations, the majority of economic emphasis in contemporary Saint-Henri is placed on real-estate development. The totality of this shift has marred the visual heritage of the neighbourhood, cutting off links to the past through the demolition of buildings, and limiting the expressions of individuality through the construction of condominiums that vary only slightly from each other. As the densest metropolitan area in Canada,²⁰ Montreal has the numerous hidden cultures and sites of imagination. However, the high density of the city contributes to over fifty percent of its population being tenants,²¹ and to many people living in unaffordable housing.²²



(Figure 1. Construction cranes in Saint-Henri. Film still (01:14) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

The model of economic development that prevails in Saint-Henri is one of exponential growth. In the course of its history, Saint-Henri has grown from a small

¹⁹ Ibid, 432.

²⁰ Martin; Vandermeulen and Wilson, *Montreal: Sustainable Development*, (Montreal: www.cca.qc.ca, 2006), 28.

²¹ Ibid, 29.

²² Ibid, 32.

village, to the centre of Canadian war production and distribution,²³ into an area dominated by speculation and foreign investment in real estate. An accelerated model of economic progress was set in place in the earliest stages of Saint-Henri's development, thus placing importance on monetary production rather than quality of life in the area. Latouche claims that in the current model of non-reversible development and built-in obsolescence, "human beings are becoming waste products of a system that would like to make them useless and do without them."²⁴ Hence, Latouche proposes a radical critique of development and argued for a model of de-growth, in which society could be allowed to abandon the goal of growth in favour of one of sustainability. Although Montreal is one of the oldest cities in North America (in Canada, only Quebec City is older; in the United States, only St. Augustine, New York City and Boston have seniority) it was not until April of 2005 that the city of Montreal launched its first strategic plan for sustainable development. The current model of growth in Saint-Henri lacks historical continuity, ignores sustainability and has little respect for the needs of the community's citizens and the protection of their inherited landscape.

Spatially, Saint-Henri is bordered on its south side by the Lachine Canal, which was built in 1825 to link Montreal's harbour to Lac St. Louis, bypassing the Lachine Rapids. The canal also flows through the unpretentious communities of Point-Saint-Charles and Little Burgundy, and was originally a navigation route and power source for the factories that bordered its banks. With the opening of the Saint-Lawrence Seaway in 1959, the Lachine Canal was doomed to closure, thus sealing the fate of the factories that

²³ John Irwin Cooper, *Montreal: A Brief History*, (Montreal & London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1969), 172.

²⁴ Serge Latouche, *Farewell to Growth*, Trans. David Macey, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 8.

lined its banks. North of Saint-Henri is the sprawling neighbourhood of Westmount. Home to the upper classes, Westmount's factory owners and industrial entrepreneurs could look down from their mansions on the hill onto their employees and their humble homes, thus privileged with both an elevated site and line of sight, and ability to assert their authority as those who look as opposed to those who are looked at. No longer an Anglophone enclave, twenty-first century Westmount is still identified with its linguistic, cultural and economic roots. By contrast, sociologist Michel Blondin referred to the housing situation in the early 1960s (at the time Aquin made his film) in canal-side Saint-Henri as "depraved,"²⁵ while the city of Montreal more delicately stated that Saint-Henri "conveys the feeling of a neighbourhood built under difficult social conditions."²⁶ In 1961, a year before the NFB released *le cinq septembre*, French Canadians represented 66.5% of Montreal's population. According to the census from the same year, Saint-Henri had 52,284 inhabitants, while a much higher 81.7% were French Canadian and Catholic.²⁷ In terms of its economic climate, *le cinq septembre* was made just one year after Quebec had suffered a recession lasting from 1957 to 1961, and during the winter of 1960, the unemployment rate in the province topped 14%. Not surprisingly, between 1956 and 1961, the population of Saint-Henri decreased at a rate of 9.6%.²⁸ Beyond the financial crisis occurring at this time, there was simultaneously a larger cultural, social and political shift that was paralleled by the passage from a rural society to a modern and urban one. This Quebec-wide movement is referred to as the Quiet Revolution, a cultural

²⁵ Michel Blondin, *Le Projet St-Henri*, (Montreal: Le Conseil des Oeuvres de Montréal, 1965), 5.

²⁶ N.A., *Steps in Time II of IV*, (Montreal: Heritage Montreal, 1992), 8.

²⁷ Blondin, *Le Projet St-Henri*, 4.

²⁸ Jennifer O'Loughlin et al, "The Impact of a Community-Based Heart-Disease Prevention Program in a Low Income, Inner-City Neighbourhood," *American Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 89, No. 12 (December 1999): 1891.

turn that ushered in a secular and more open Québécois society. It can be argued that modern Quebec was born June 22, 1960, with Jean Lesage's election as premier, as his policies were at the heart of the Quiet Revolution. Protection of the French language, a shift from the control and omnipresence of the Catholic Church to a modern secularism, and the development of the ethos of nationalism were central themes of the Quiet Revolution. At this moment in Quebec's history there was an acute need to stimulate the art scene, so in 1961, the provincial government founded the Office du film du Québec, which together with the French division of the NFB, led to an outpouring of made-in-Quebec films. However, despite the emergence of this new Quebec cinema, which developed the themes of the Quiet Revolution and took a critical look at society, the inequalities they sought to expose only became more pronounced, and poverty did not go away.²⁹

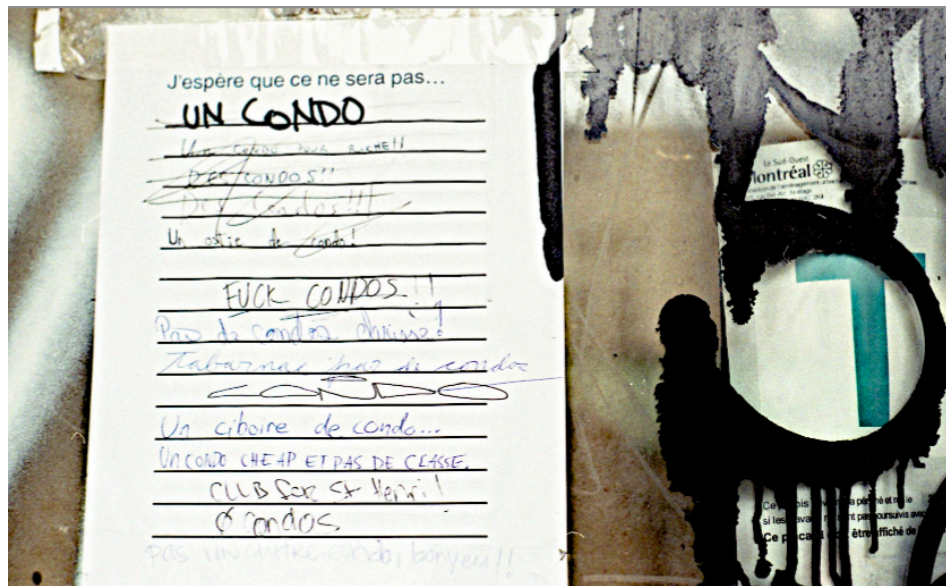
At the turn of the twenty-first century, Saint-Henri was a predominantly Francophone neighbourhood of 25,000 people, (less than half of the district's population in 1961) and was one of the most disadvantaged urban communities in Canada.³⁰ Compared to those living in other Montreal communities, persons living in Saint-Henri were more likely to be focused on day-to-day social and economic challenges.³¹ Today, Saint-Henri has a reputation as an "up-and-coming" neighbourhood, due to relatively low rents, the availability of post-industrial loft spaces, proximity to the plentiful Atwater Market, and the emergence of cafes, bars and restaurants meant to attract young professionals. Living on the banks of the Lachine Canal became fashionable in the late

²⁹ André Lortie, *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big*, (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 2004), 50.

³⁰ O'Loughlin et al., "The Impact of a Community-Based Heart-Disease Prevention Program in a Low Income, Inner-City Neighbourhood," 1891.

³¹ Nancy Dunton & Helen Malkin, *A Guidebook to Contemporary Architecture: Montréal*, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2008), 170.

nineties, ten years after the industrial buildings first began to be converted into artists' studios, and then, into expensive condominiums. For example, the former Stelco steel plant and the Belding Corticelli silk mills were converted into condos, followed by the Redpath sugar refinery, which was transformed in stages between 2000 and 2007. The Redpath refinery had closed in 1979 and stood derelict for twenty years, although its final transformation into condominiums was not what many community members had hoped for.³²



(Figure. 2. Sign posted on underused theatre in Saint-Henri. Photo taken by author, Jan 2012.)

Many residents believed a mixed-use conversion of the building, which could incorporate space for communal and artistic endeavours and services would better foster community. Saint-Henri's transition from booming industrial centre to a gentrifying post-industrial space is represented in varying ways in Aquin's and Walsh's films.

³² Ibid.

Documenting Saint-Henri

If the city is a work of art, it is also a life force...
– Alan Blum³³

This section is an inquiry into the cinematic representation of Saint-Henri, and more expressly, the depictions of personal, collective, and psychic spaces in this neighbourhood, and the threats posed to them. While the films reveal the nuances of living in Saint-Henri, they also provide a dialectic space from which to view the processes of change that have occurred in the neighbourhood. Poverty, decay, re-development, and uncertainty are revealed in Aquin's and Walsh's films, but these issues are left unresolved as the screens fade to black. Yet, *site-seeing*,³⁴ that is, the filmic viewing of Saint-Henri, a neighbourhood situated in the shadow of downtown Montreal, has the potential to activate space in a way that has a political and emotional impact on the viewer.

By dynamically reframing the spaces of industry and community in Saint-Henri, Walsh and Aquin created a psychogeographic portrait that serves as an introduction to the conditions of possibility in the neighbourhood. Benjamin argued that film beautifies and pacifies all things, but he also saw cinema as representative of social influences and traces of collective problems. Benjamin argued, “the historical importance of cinema was not simply its dislocation and reassemblage of the visible world, but rather its capacity to engender collective political awareness by mirroring collective action back to the

³³ Alan Blum, *The Imaginative Structure of the City*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press, 2003), 5.

³⁴ This is Giuliana Bruno's phrase, found in her chapter “Site-Seeing: The Cine City” in *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, (New York: Verso, 2001), 15-53.

masses.”³⁵ Thus, while the Saint-Henri films may produce visually beautiful spaces, they also produce highly politicized ones. As stated by Bill Nichols, documentary filmmakers hold political power in that they “speak for the interests of others, both for the individuals whom they represent in the film and for the institution or agency that supports the filmmaking.”³⁶

The Fifth of September

Aquin’s film begins with the sun rising over smoky rail yards, and with the kind of quiet that is particular to early morning. The observer’s tour of Saint-Henri begins immediately with the trailing of a milk bottle delivery truck, which zoomed through narrow streets with abandon and situates the viewer in the crowded south-western corner of Montreal.



(Figure 3. A milk truck gives a tour of Saint-Henri. Film still (02:38) from Hubert Aquin’s *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

In voice-over, Aquin’s narrator mentioned that this day was not chosen at random, but was the very important first day of a new school year. *Le cinq septembre* documented this

³⁵ Scott McQuire, *The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, 66.

³⁶ Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 3.

day from the early morning to late at night. No single character dominates *le cinq septembre*; instead images of energetic children, ambling teenagers, and unemployed and stagnant adults move across the screen quickly, so that the observer does not get a chance to really ‘get to know’ any of the characters. Aquin’s scenes are short in the English version of his film. By contrast, in the French version, a few characters such as an unemployed labourer are allotted ample time to speak about their hardships, or to simply be observed. Moments such as these become painful scenes of enforced stillness. Aquin’s film is a construction in which individual characters were encouraged to insert their personal troubles into the cracks in the mortar that hold its structure together. Families, individuals, and small groups are depicted in their homes, in barbershops, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and police stations, in schools and on the streets of Saint-Henri. The film is composed in the cinema-verité format, defined by Hubert Smith as a style that “gets as close as possible to the visual, aural, and kinaesthetic sense of actual presence. And it is a [style] that while compressing, re-arranging and juxtaposing the bits and pieces of reality, adheres to the truth of the story.”³⁷ Shot in black and white by twelve cinematographers, the film combines different points of view to create one united vision of the community.

Aquin’s nationalist leanings are not made explicit in his depiction of Saint-Henri, however, the film’s revelatory qualities lend it revolutionary attributes. Specifically, the film’s straight, documentary style and omnipresent narration create an undercurrent of authority and truthfulness. Aquin’s political ideas are fused with images of the hard-working yet ill-fated neighbourhood of Saint-Henri. In *Writing Quebec*, Aquin’s opinions are made clear: “the psychological implications caused by the awareness of the minority

³⁷ Hubert Smith, “The University Film Director and Cinema-Verite,” *Journal of the University Film Producers Association*. Vol. 19, No. 2, (1967), 58.

position [include]: self-punishment, masochism, a sense of unworthiness, ‘depression’ [...] and cultural fatigue.”³⁸ Aquin further states, “French Canada is a dying, tired culture.”³⁹ This sentiment is manifested in *le cinq septembre*, as stagnancy and unemployment are caught in images of stilled middle-age men, while the film opens with



imagery of men carrying a coffin and closes with the threat of late-night danger.

(Figure 4. A close up on a father’s idle pose. Film still (04:23) from Hubert Aquin’s *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

However, danger in Saint-Henri comes from both high and low; perhaps more frightening than the petty criminals are the policemen themselves. Authority is a constant theme in *le cinq septembre*, wherein sombre images of policemen loading their guns are juxtaposed with jovial portraits of young people socializing. In her book on the NFB, Zoë Druick explains that many NFB films are made with a pedagogical purpose, and show people in institutionalized settings.⁴⁰ However, in *le cinq septembre*, Aquin critiqued the institutions that patronized Québécois people, namely the government. This is overtly communicated in one of the more light-hearted scenes of the film, in which young men sit at a bar laughing emphatically, although the viewers are left out of the joke, as we are unable to hear the dialogue. The narrator then elaborates that it may be for the better that

³⁸ Hubert Aquin, “The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada” in *Writing Quebec*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988), 35.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁰ Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 26.

we cannot hear what these young men are saying, because they are laughing at the mayor of Montreal.



(Figure 5. Sharing a laugh at the mayor's expense. Film still (22:36) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

In *le cinq septembre*, students in black and white uniforms, knee socks and tunics in perfect order stand below the school's principal who delivers an obligatory welcome lecture. Children are very important in Aquin's film, for they serve to represent both the people of Saint-Henri, and their hope for the future. The narrator explains that one may expect the kids in Saint-Henri to be a grubby bunch, but they are well groomed and well behaved. However, the young students are restless as their strict principal delivers his first lecture of the year. Their eyes dart around the schoolyard with anxiety, curiosity, and boredom. The principal is one of the only people allowed to deliver a short monologue of sorts, accentuating Aquin's focus on authority figures in Saint-Henri. Because of the constant presence of disciplinary forces in *le cinq septembre*, a sense of impending doom is present throughout. At a different point, a fight breaks out, and bloodied, drunken men are thrown into the back of a police car. As a young man sits in a barbershop chair getting a shave, there is an uneasy sense that the razor may slip at any moment. The honking of

trains, factory whistles and police sirens typify the mundane struggle of life, while funerary bells annotate its ending. Danger and death are largely unseen but always felt.



(Figure 6. A study in isolation. Film still (05:10) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

Aquin saw French Canada as being stifled more by English Canada than the failure of the Fordist industrial complex. In turn, *le cinq septembre* should be read as a subtle iteration of decades of exasperation.

Nonetheless, Aquin's representation of Saint-Henri was multifaceted. He portrayed Saint-Henri as a shelter, a playground and a prison. The blowing reeds and slow-moving water beneath the electric poles, suddenly overcome by the hum of trains and cars, are quickly cut away from to display looming policemen and their weapons. An overwhelming feeling of isolation is communicated in Aquin's film. Sociologist Michel Blondin expressed a similar notion in 1965, when he stated:

This substantial strip of neighbourhood, long and narrow, is secluded from the rest of Montréal. Physical isolation is coupled with social isolation, because on both sides stand important social barriers. To the east is the financial heart of Montreal with its majestic buildings and streets full of

professionals and students. To the north, St. Henri lies in the shadow of Westmount.⁴¹

Chronic unemployment and physical isolation led to an existential condition of marginality in Saint-Henri.

Aquin's cinematographers shot primarily from low angles, used to represent the events that happened in private, intimate spheres. However, in Aquin's Saint-Henri, the private domain is not much more hospitable than the public one. In attempting to display the multicultural fabric of Saint-Henri, Aquin depicted the "Negro" minority at home. Images of crying children in a stuffed living room and an adjacent closet, with an apparently ineffective mother in the background are agonising to watch. Aquin's film represented the marginality of lives led by the denizens of Saint-Henri without frills, and put emphasis on the French Canadian-ness of the area, pointing out that the only English-speaking residents of Saint-Henri were Black members of the community. Most private spaces in *le cinq septembre* are overcrowded and run-down. These images go against Arendt's statement that "In a world where rapid industrialization constantly kills off the things of yesterday to produce today's objects, [the spaces of the home] may appear to be the world's last, purely humane corner."⁴² However, in Aquin's film, private spaces are made public, and in so doing, made much less humane.

With apodictic certainty and in the cinema-verité mode, *le cinq septembre* projected and constituted a single late summer day in Saint-Henri as the total reality of Saint-Henri. In the very first shot of Aquin's film, the camera looks down on a still asleep Saint-Henri densely packed with looming factories and small houses. This is one of the

⁴¹ Blondin, *Le Projet St-Henri*, 1.

⁴² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 52.

only elevated shots in *le cinq septembre*. Most views are from low perspectives and contribute to the impression that the filmmaker stood on the same ground as his subjects, both physically and socially. With his many camera-operators, Aquin was able to establish an all-seeing perspective that complemented the sombre tones of an avuncular narrator, who speaks in practiced, calculated sentences, each with its own fixed conclusion. In his seminal book *Documentary*, Erik Barnouw highlighted the effects of omniscient narration in documentary film in the mid-1900s. As he explained, “In the voice-over format, some narrators were characterized but most were abstract voices. Some were calm but most were resonant with authority, and backed by impressive music. These were becoming documentary clichés.”⁴³ *Le cinq septembre*’s narrative style coincides almost perfectly with Barnouw’s definition, as in both the French and English versions of the film, the narrator is unnamed, and seemingly all-knowing as he chronicles the lifestyles of the largely silenced people shown on screen. As Nichols has elaborated, “A filmmaker speaks and the audience listens. Documentary, in this sense, belongs to an institutional discourse or framework.”⁴⁴

Accordingly, the main subject of Aquin’s film was not the population portrayed, but the neighbourhood of Saint-Henri itself. In a travelogue fashion, Aquin brought the background, such as the streets and alleys of Saint-Henri, into the foreground of his film, and made the setting more important than the characters that traversed it. Set to a soundtrack of melancholy accordion in the morning scenes and swinging jazz in the evening scenes, portraits of the inhabitants of Saint-Henri were innovatively framed, fluidly edited together, and narrated so that they converged to create a patchwork quilt of

⁴³ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 131.

⁴⁴ Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*, 15.

community. *Le cinq septembre* is an example of Québécois cultural production that attempted to reinterpret and rewrite French Canada's story. It is also an instance of the *cinéma direct* aesthetic, where images on screen were seen as a clear reflection of Québécois national identity.⁴⁵

Aquin saw French Canada's narrative as having been written by its oppressor, English Canada, and perceived the nation as a site of a dialectic confrontation between two cultures. Most importantly, Aquin insisted on a "need for true dialectic, which alone can prevent conflict from degenerating into a 'dialogue of the deaf,'⁴⁶ in which people speak but no one actually listens. In turn, Aquin used film as a tool to expand the stunted conversation he observed. Aquin meant to rupture the balance between dominant and subjected cultures by documenting the banal. In a similar line of thinking, French cultural theorist Paul Virilio encourages individuals to:

To look at what you wouldn't look at, to hear what you wouldn't listen to, to be attentive to the banal, the ordinary, to the infra-ordinary. To deny the ideal hierarchy of the crucial and the incidental, because there is no incidental, only dominant cultures that exile us from ourselves and others, a loss of meaning which is for us not only a siesta of consciousness, but also a decline in existence.⁴⁷

Aquin believed language to be the most effective tool of action to reverse the negative effects on the psyche caused by the awareness of a minority position, a position that he considered to be that of all French Canadians. However, Aquin was in complete control of the ways his film used and interpreted the language of French Canadians. Ironically,

⁴⁵ Scott Mackenzie, "Société Nouvelle: The Challenge for Change in the Alternative Public Sphere," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/ Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques* Vol. 5, No. 2 (1997): 68.

⁴⁶ Anthony Purdy, "Introduction" in *Writing Quebec*, Xvi.

⁴⁷ Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 36.

Aquin wrote, “The real dialectic is in dialogue, not in two parallel monologues.”⁴⁸ Yet Aquin created a monologue about Saint-Henri that was characterized by consolation. For Aquin, the artist was a “professional of unhappiness” who struggled against dominant culture. Rather than something to get over, get through, or to fix, he saw unhappiness as a sign of deep commitment, of protest, involving a greater level of consciousness.⁴⁹ Perhaps this is why Aquin’s *le cinq septembre* is so melancholic, and portrays a largely mute majority, silenced by heavy-handed narration. The superimposed voice hovering over every action in Aquin’s Saint-Henri creates the feeling that what is being shown to the audience is on the brink of disappearance and must be memorialized. To illustrate the severity of this perceived reality to the rest of the country, Aquin attempted to reveal daily life in Saint-Henri in a revolutionary fashion. On its own, however, film can be both revolutionary and complicit with power.

Aquin’s narrator states that, “Saint-Henri is not paradise, but you can buy whatever you want here,” cryptically emphasizing the capitalist modes that have defined the tenor of the development of this borough since its inception. Police sirens usher in the end of the film, while moving pictures that resemble Weegee’s flash photography display a drunken wrangle and wide-eyed children gawk at the spectacle. It is possible to consider Weegee’s influence on Aquin’s documentary style, as his enigmatic, and often-vulgar images from the mid-twentieth century confronted viewers with tight cropping, vivid flash lighting and penchant for exposing the gritty underbelly of city life. Weegee

⁴⁸ Aquin, “The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada” in *Writing Quebec*, 20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

frequently focused on groups, thus allowing his subjects a certain protective anonymity,⁵⁰ just as Aquin did. For Aquin all of Saint-Henri was made up of groups, separated by their cultural and class backgrounds. No character is named in *le cinq septembre*, but its multicultural fabric is acknowledged. Two identified groups are the Greeks, who make Saint-Henri's pizza, and the English-speaking Blacks. The anonymity of the people in these groups is two-sided, as it also abstracts and strips the subjects of their individual identities, which will be discussed further in a subsequent section of this thesis. Edward Dimendberg explains about Weegee "[he] introduced a modern form of self-consciousness to the medium of urban photography. In his photographs we watch spectators watching themselves being photographed."⁵¹ In the same way, spectators of Aquin's film watch people's expressions change as they become aware that they are being filmed. This is especially evident in a street scene in which a befuddled-looking man is caught in the glare of either police-car lights, or lighting used by the crew of *le cinq septembre*. He looks directly into the camera with intensity and shock that communicate either extreme discomfort in being in front of the camera, severe intoxication, or both. (See figure 7.) Dimendberg goes on to state, "Well before the earliest films noir of the 1940s and the deep-focus cinematography of *Citizen Kane*, Weegee had perfected the techniques applied to his new photography from 1935 to 1945,"⁵² in which the camera represents the "common sense"⁵³ in a strange and dark world. Reminiscent of Weegee's *The Naked City* (1945), which Aquin references at the

⁵⁰ Christoph Ribbat, "Queer and Straight Photography," *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1, *Queering America* (2001), 35.

⁵¹ Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 49.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Ribbat, "Queer and Straight Photography," 35.

end of his film, in *le cinq septembre*, a lurking man makes catcalls at woman, she sets off at a run, dancers shimmy and sway in a busy club, and suddenly the film closes with Hitchcock-like mystery, lacking finality.



(Figure 7. Just before the police intervened. Film still (21:33) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

This ambiguous ending communicates Aquin's feeling of discontent and the raised political awareness that was so present in the 60s. As chronicled by André Lortie, at this moment in Quebec,

Union leaders, intellectuals and militants all sought to establish links with social movements. The deterioration in housing conditions, the absence of low-cost housing, and the inadequacy of social services fuelled the discontent that mobilized residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and spurred the creation of citizen action groups. Young people with degrees in the social sciences read Marx, discovered the "culture of poverty," moved into neighbourhoods like Pointe Saint-Charles and Saint-Henri, and became social activists.⁵⁴

Lortie forgot to mention that they also made documentaries about these neighbourhoods.

Cinema was only one of the many forms of cultural expression of Québécois artists during this period. Aquin's film was released fifteen years after Gabrielle Roy's celebrated novel *Bonheur d'occasion* (1945), published later in English as *The Tin Flute*

⁵⁴ Lortie, *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big*, 41.

(1947), which revolves around the fictional Lacasse family who typified the poor of Saint-Henri. Like Roy's novel, Aquin's film illustrates an inherited debility and deep poverty, combined with a desire to rise above the daily troubles shared by the inhabitants. *Le cinq septembre*, like Roy's *The Tin Flute*, harkens back to a bygone era while considering its relationship to a better future. Roy described the quickly changing physical space of Saint-Henri with a profound sense of melancholy, one that is shared by Aquin. She wrote:

At one time the suburb had ended here; the last houses of St. Henri look out on open fields, a limpid, bucolic air clinging to their eaves and tiny gardens. Of the good old days nothing is left now on St. Ambroise Street but two or three great trees that still thrust their roots down under the cement sidewalk. Mills, grain elevators, warehouses have sprung up in solid block in front of the houses, robbing them of breezes from the country, stifling them slowly.⁵⁵

Although *le cinq septembre* evinced nostalgia for a time when Saint-Henri was a thriving community and not a "working-class district poorer than most," as the film's narrator tells the observer in patronizing tones, it subtly applauds the resilience and strength of the neighbourhood's inhabitants. It is evident that Aquin did not intend to degrade the people of Saint-Henri. His representation and categorization of Saint-Henri's residents into what he considered to be their essence, however, stifled them, reinforcing hierarchies and normalizing power relations instead of disrupting them. While Aquin was highly influenced by Sartrean existentialism,⁵⁶ in which actions and peoples have no defined essence, in *le cinq septembre*, the residents of Saint-Henri were made to seem simple and subordinate by the effects of omniscient narration and montage in the cinema-

⁵⁵ Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*, Trans. Hannah Josephson. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1969), 16.

⁵⁶ Purdy, "Introduction" in *Writing Quebec*, xv.

verité format. Ultimately, *le cinq septembre* prompted anger and discontent from many of those depicted in the film.

The 26th of August



(Figure. 8. What else happened on August 26? Film still (05:40) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Inspired by Aquin's film but not beholden to it, Walsh's documentary is an homage that stands on its own. In 2011, Walsh conveyed an image of a Saint-Henri that had changed a great deal in fifty years since the making of Aquin's portrait in 1962. Walsh, however, did not make explicit reference to the inspiration she had taken from *le cinq septembre* until the final credits, so an observer who had not seen Aquin's documentary could sit through all of *The 26th of August* without knowing it to be an homage. Little hints are given to the knowledgeable observer: throughout she referenced the passage of time in subtle ways. While *The 26th of August* is structured around the 'shadowing' of characters, the shadows in Walsh's film appear to be erased. The film is so overexposed that the whites are blown out and the darks are without detail. Perhaps the heightened contrast that Walsh applied was meant to bring attention to the intense socio-economic contrasts in Saint-Henri itself. The heightened brightness of the picture makes Saint-Henri appear as a fantasyland. With this technique, Walsh transforms Saint-Henri

into a whimsical post-industrial playground. Walsh dedicates a significant portion of the film to exploring alternative nightlife in the neighbourhood, and documents audacious knife-throwing youth, a punk band performing in a dark venue, and the adventures of a designer bicycle gang made up of middle-aged men. Walsh's film overexposes in two senses; one can observe this more obviously in the film's appearance, but it also overexposes citizens of Saint-Henri, whose images can now be downloaded and re-viewed ad infinitum.



(Figure. 9. Observing Saint-Henri. Film stills (52:42) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Like *le cinq septembre*, Walsh's documentary had filmmakers shooting over a single day (Walsh had sixteen to Aquin's twelve) and begins on the first day of school. *The 26th of August* also documents a principal delivering a welcome to new students, who make up a much more culturally diverse group than those who gathered in the schoolyard in *le cinq septembre* of 1962.



(Fig. 10. The first day of school. Film still (04:13) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Soon Doris emerges on screen, the most dominant character in Walsh's film, and leads spectators through back alleys looking for empty bottles to trade in for small change.

Doris verbally explains Saint-Henri to observers and takes them on an alternative walking tour of the community based on her daily routine. The influence of Aquin's film on Walsh's is most evident in the early scenes of her homage. Like *le cinq septembre*, *The 26th of August* begins with Raymond Lévesque singing about the hardships of life in Saint-Henri, and the viewer is given a bird's-eye-view of the neighbourhood, but instead of images of cramped tenement housing and church steeples, they see the dilapidated Turcot interchange, construction cranes, transport trucks, and blocks of seemingly half-naked houses with unfinished siding.



(Fig. 11. The Turcot Interchange. Film still (00:57) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Walsh's audience is taken on a bumpy tour of the Saint-Henri from the passenger seat of a delivery truck, (the observer is in the truck in Walsh's version, not behind it, as in Aquin's) and therefore the observer is directly involved in the film's movement, and in

this way, they are inscribed into it. Bruno explains the significance of the spectator's movement within film in her seminal book *Atlas of Emotion*: she stated, "Relation between film and architecture requires an embodiment [...] for it is based on an inscription of an observer in the field."⁵⁷ Yet, in some moments in *The 26th of August*, the camera seems to float along without any human attachments. In one scene about an hour into the film, the whimsical piano playing of Montreal-based musician Patrick Watson creates an eerie soundscape for an uncanny landscape. After documenting young children who point to a house that was burnt down, and profess that now, they "see transparent ghosts passing by," the camera itself begins to float down the street, away from the children – it becomes the ghost that the young girl was speaking of. As it hovers above ground level, the camera documents boarded-up houses covered in vines, a man seated on a front step that has been scrawled with graffiti, and then crossed train tracks to show viewers a whole new landscape made up of polished-looking condos and manicured lawns. This sequence presents a neighbourhood in ruins being transformed into one that has been reformatted for efficiency and set up for gentrification. By mapping Saint-Henri cinematically, Walsh visits the neighbourhood like a tourist revelling in geographic dislocation. Conley explains how filmic mapping affects the imagination and thought processes of the viewer. He states, "A map in a movie provides information; it whets the imagination. It propels narration but also, dividing our attention, prompts reverie and causes our eyes to look both inward, at our own geographies, and outward, to rove about the frame and to engage, however we wish, in the space of the film."⁵⁸

Across the train tracks, two young boys emerge and brag that they know "a friend

⁵⁷ Bruno, "A Geography of the Moving Image" In *Atlas of Emotion*, 56.

⁵⁸ Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1.

who lives in the Chateau St-Ambroise,” once a textile factory that has been transformed into commercial lofts with an elegant French restaurant at its base. The more outspoken boy says of his friend: “He’s a millionaire, actually. I went to his place once, it’s really big.” They go on to explain that this privileged friend has a plasma TV, but so do they. “His is bigger,” they say, “but a plasma is a plasma.” In sequences such as this one, Walsh does not patronize her subjects or frame their lives in a negative manner, but allows them to speak out and deliver their stories in bluntly honest terms.

In both Aquin and Walsh’s films, residents of Saint-Henri speak to the camera and communicate their woes and their wonders, though in Walsh’s film, they are given much more freedom, and their unique personalities light up the screen. In Walsh’s film, Doris is heavily relied on for confessions that contribute to a narrative. An articulate gleaner and ex-convict who walks around Saint-Henri visiting friends and collecting bottles to recycle and food to share with other less than affluent members of her community, Doris constantly offers up pithy passages. She bluntly announces, “We’re all on welfare,” “The factories are all closed” and “Saint-Henri is not like it was.” By allowing Doris to speak in the confessional mode, and encouraging her to take the observer on a personal tour of the neighbourhood, Walsh avoids constricting Doris’s movement, her expression of self, and her expression of her neighbourhood. Other people speak for themselves as well. There is Mr. Lee the corner store (or *dépanneur*) owner, who speaks about his connections with his customers and his dreams for his children. In Mr. Lee there is a tension between personal development and connection to community, for although he is proud of the strong bonds he has with his customers, Mr. Lee does not want his son to have to work such long and hard hours at the store as he does. Mr. Lee

would like his son to grow up to be a doctor, lawyer, or work in the government, and in so doing, perhaps leave Saint-Henri as well.

Belinda, (see figure 12) a charismatic hairdresser who emigrated from Togo, discusses the difficulties of adapting to life in Canada and the racism her young daughter has encountered in Saint-Henri. Belinda says she that loves Saint-Henri despite its flaws. While she braids a young girl's hair at a spitfire pace, and with a casual attitude that suggests she has completed similar styles thousands of times, she states, "I know everyone, the kids...the students...everyone. And I don't think the neighbourhood is dangerous. Not at all. We've had some small issues, but that happens everywhere." Belinda is proficient at adapting to Saint-Henri's sometimes-difficult circumstances. When her daughter was mocked for her "frizzy, Black hair" Belinda quickly remedied the situation by doing up her hair in a flamboyant purple, thus silencing her daughter's critic. Belinda is fierce, determined to live in a safe and cohesive community, and willing to work hard to adapt and fit in to it.



(Fig. 12. Belinda recounting her daughter's experience. Film still (51:31) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Once night falls, the camera begins to follow a graffiti artist who leads the observer through alleys and parks, restoring and adding to the neighbourhood's artistic and gritty aesthetic. His face covered to protect himself from the fumes of glue and spray paint, the artist's anonymity is also preserved, although his iconic work is difficult to forget. He glues larger-than life images of women who resemble Nefertiti onto buildings and in alleyways, perhaps attempting to contribute to the visibility of difference in Saint-Henri. This character is an example of the creative sub-cultural activities in Saint-Henri that incorporate decay, impermanence and ephemerality into their practice.

In essence, allowing individual actors the power to narrate their own stories is the great difference between Aquin and Walsh's films. Walsh even manages to track down a gang of bike riders called the "Outriders," who explain that the human-powered machines they ride around Saint-Henri with are "more than just bikes, they're works of art," and complain that skull-imagery has become cliché. Walsh's film was primarily made in the confessional mode, in contrast to Aquin's explicitly ideological portrait in which individuals serve as, synecdoches pointing to the director's political beliefs.

Doris shares her memories of a Saint-Henri, in which factories were open and the churches were full. Yet by 2011, the era of industrial wealth and thriving religion in Saint-Henri had long since passed. Old, dilapidated, yet having to adapt to incursion and redevelopment, Doris embodies *The 26th of August*; she clings to nostalgia and deals with reality, while expressing hope for an improved future. Her hair is two-toned, with a grey stripe emerging from the centre of her plum-coloured shock. Her teeth hang delicately in

her mouth, while her skin has been turned leathery by the sun. As she rummaged through discarded fruits and vegetables at the Atwater Market, a background voice on the radio speaks prophetically:

In fact, there is a problem with time. We don't really want time to pass us by, but we delude ourselves into thinking it does. And that's the lie we tell ourselves. Time doesn't pass at all. We do. Time is what stays.



(Fig. 13. Doris at the Atwater Market. Film still (58:54) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

In 2011, much of Saint-Henri was standing in dilapidation, and may have appeared to an outsider as nothing more than an industrial wasteland. Examples depicted in Walsh's film include the Canada Malt Silos. They form an architectural sight distinctive and elemental to the skyline of Saint-Henri, tattooed with graffiti, squatted in, and climbed up. Rusty cylindrical structures simultaneously real and imagined, the Silos are intrinsic to the collective imagination of the community. Despite their historicity and imaginative possibilities, the Silos are set to be torn down and replaced with condominiums, contributing to an increasing estrangement with the past in Saint-Henri,

and to what sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to as the “colonisation of the future.”⁵⁹ However, by representing recognizable architecture in ruins, both Aquin’s and Walsh’s films project the present as highly fragile, and in their own ways, predict a precarious future. The inherent historicity of film – which transfers the present moment in Saint-Henri from a lived-in place to a historical moment in the space of cinema – plays a fundamental role in shaping the viewers’ aesthetic experience of temporality of Saint-Henri.



(Fig. 14. The Canada Malt Silos. Film still (1:01:50) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

In Saint-Henri, once-cheap rents are rising, and the social mix of the neighbourhood is drastically changing. As Doris explains, “it’s crazy, because there are the people who have money, and over here” as she gestures across the alleyway she is walking in, “the people who have none.” She goes on to say, “In Saint-Henri there is no middle class. You’re either rich or you’re poor, there’s no in between.” Doris’s observations coincide with Soja’s elaboration that there is a “new missing middle, or

⁵⁹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: The Late Self in the Modern Age*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 111

“dumbbell” shape to urban labour markets, which can be attributed to the technological, institutional and geographical forces intrinsic to post-Fordist economies, and intensified by declining role of unions and the weakening of the welfare state.⁶⁰ Thus, as Doris gives viewers a tour of her working-class neighbourhood, and disdainfully points out the side of the street where the rich people live, and the side that the poor people are confined to, she is upset, but resigned to the unfairness of it all.



(Fig. 15. Doris on Saint-Henri. Film still (10:15) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Soja draws our attention to the segregation between rich and poor and the negative effects it can have on community: “the Upper Professionals (or Yuppies) have become the most aggressive territorial in-fighters in the public domain of planning and urban policy, forming an army of ‘gentrifiers’ struggling to establish and maintain their distinctive lifestyles and lived spaces in the literal and figurative heart of the city.”⁶¹ Though Walsh chose not to document these “gentrifiers,” she skimmed the camera over the recycled industrial buildings along the canal, which from 2000 onwards, have been the site of

⁶⁰ Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 277.

⁶¹ Soja, *Postmetropolis*, 276.

sprouting condominium developments. Walsh focuses on immigrants, punks, young children, people at work, and those who have lived in the neighbourhood for decades, such as eighty-nine year old Edmée and her partner Robert. During a leisurely car ride down Notre Dame Street, Robert declares, “The alleyways used to be inhabited in Saint-Henri. Not anymore, they build condos,” as if to imply that the more crowded conditions of Saint-Henri of the past were still more desirable than the sense of disconnect brought about by ubiquitous condominium development. In Walsh’s film, characters and their actions are just as significant, if not more so, than the historical moment that they witness and represent. *The 26th of August* demonstrates capability for individual action and the domains of possibility in the absence of a traditional plot-driven narrative. In this way, Walsh empowers her subjects instead of reducing them to small parts of a whole, for in her film, each character has his or her own story, and despite the small size of Saint-Henri, few of these stories intertwine. *The 26th of August* and *le cinq septembre* have very different *modi operandi*, which correspond to the NFB’s mandate at the time of their production. Aquin’s film pre-dated the National Film Board’s *Société nouvelle* (*Challenge for Change*) program, but it fits within its directive to use film as “a catalyst for political action,”⁶² while Walsh’s documentary conforms to the more recent NFB mission to “provoke discussion and debate while reflecting Canada’s linguistic duality and multiculturalism.”⁶³

Documenting Otherwise: A Comparative Interpretation

Le cinq septembre and *The 26th of August* gaze at Saint-Henri from very different

⁶² Mackenzie, “Société Nouvelle: The Challenge for Change in the Alternative Public Sphere,” 68.

⁶³ Druick, *Projecting Canada*, 27.

points of view, and through the medium of film, they present critical reveries that are similar in content but highly divergent in technique. Walsh's *The 26th of August* rejects the Modernist aesthetic that promoted realism and truth telling, deals with contemporary history, and is postmodern in the sense that it is non-narrative, inconclusive, and focused on the discrete actions and ideas of a wide-range of individuals from different ethnic and social groups. In contrast, *Le cinq septembre* is modern in the sense that it is utilitarian and tied to the principle of justice, narrative and truth-based, populist and prophetic. As an homage, Walsh's film is a reflection of Aquin's decidedly modern picture, in that it adopts the same temporal structure. Aquin's modernist perspective created powerful and sometimes degrading portraits, and projected a common nature and future of the residents of Saint Henri. It is illuminated by McQuire, who argues about modern representations of cities, that their "ambition to treat the [neighbourhoods within the] city as unified space in which the relation between local parts was to be subordinated to the co-ordination of the whole."⁶⁴ In this vein, Aquin employed the filmic methods of montage and *cinéma vérité* to project a singular truth about Saint-Henri. Both he and Walsh shaped their projects territorially and temporally, collecting footage throughout a single day, paying close attention to the otherwise obscure, mundane, and ephemeral. The documentaries are not explicitly political, nor are they overtly based on historicism, economics, or even personal relationships. These films are therefore not empirical studies, but original representations of multiple perspectives of an ordinary day in Saint-Henri – attempts to film a neighbourhood with natural engagement. In her postmodern style, Walsh did not classify social groups or attempt to portray any innate-essence. Her film documents both Anglophone and Francophone residents, has no narration, and opts for English subtitles

⁶⁴ McQuire, *Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, 35.

over the French dialogue. Both films are critical: they expose the effects of poverty and social strife, and conclude with images of a community facing extreme threat. In *le cinq septembre*, that threat comes from economic recession and lack of industry. In *The 26th of August*, the challenge facing Saint-Henri is its transformation from community to commodity. Both filmmakers articulate the past in moments imbued with danger, from the ‘war on poverty’ of the 1960s to a contemporary class-based warfare characterized by a middle-class squeeze.

In Aquin’s documentary, Saint-Henri’s instability is artfully communicated through the cinematic method of montage. By piecing together fragments ranging from construction workers fixing a bridge to children jumping off of it and into the river, the spectator is allowed to create their own story – to interpret Saint-Henri through personal experience – thereby shifting from passivity to involvement. However, while the viewer’s perspective is enlarged through the technique of montage, this method can also be highly manipulative. In his influential treatise on montage, Sergei Eisenstein asserted that, “In themselves, the pictures, the phases, the elements of the whole are innocent and indecipherable. The blow is struck only when the elements are juxtaposed into a sequential image.”⁶⁵ To expand the viewer’s mindscape, Aquin distracts her with a barrage of images and messages. Walsh also employs montage, creates longer segments, focusing on each subject and object, providing the observer with larger and longer views of an ordinary day in the post-industrial palimpsest that they are meant to be discovering.

The mobilisation of ‘everyday’ imagery by Aquin and Walsh reveals the complex dynamics of the ‘everyday’ itself, a concept that must be deconstructed. Lefebvre explains that: “Except when society is defined exclusively by consumption (...) there is

⁶⁵ Sergei Eisenstein, “Montage and Architecture,” (1938) Repr. *Assemblage* 10 (1989): 16.

an awareness that consideration of isolated acts does not exhaust daily life, and that we must attend to their context: the social relations within which they occur.”⁶⁶ Therefore, in documenting social relations, both Saint-Henri films depict a *refusal* of the harsh conditions of daily life in Saint-Henri. Lefebvre goes on to state that this refusal “can be either heroic or ascetic, or hedonistic and sensual, or revolutionary, or anarchistic – in other words, new-romantic, hence aesthetic.”⁶⁷ Indeed, both Walsh and Aquin’s compositions reframe Saint-Henri, and transform the perception of the everyday by creating new kinds of aesthetic knowledge about it. Among de-population, disinvestment, and interruptive re-development, a collective feeling of optimism is communicated through playful, constructive and creative actions in the spaces depicted in *The 26th of August*, a strategy defined by Guy Debord as the basic Situationalist tactic of the *derivé*. In Aquin’s film, observers see people re-appropriating spaces, such as children who scale a bridge to use it as their diving board, and a backyard as their baseball field. In Walsh’s film, young people appropriate abandoned spaces to fraternize and practice knife throwing, graffiti artists use back-alleys as their galleries, a man does his afternoon laps in the canal, kids fish in it, a couple climb up an abandoned factory to get a good view of the city, and a woman walks through Saint-Henri’s sewage ducts for miles to discover new views: “fabulous or extraordinary; or walking for hours with tunnel vision,” as she says. These are examples of the creative, oppositional acts that Lefebvre contended could be “explicit manoeuvres, pitched battles, or little incursions into official territory.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life: Vol 3*, (London: Verso, 1991), 2.

⁶⁷ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life: Vol 3*, 1.

⁶⁸ Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 64.



(Fig. 16. Boy dives off bridge into the Canal. Film still (16:08) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)



(Fig. 17. Knife Throwing in Saint-Henri. Film still (1:19:13) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

I am inclined to return to Virilio's encouragement to show that which would not usually be seen, like the simple mechanics of walking to school or sitting on a porch, or the more bizarre acts of climbing abandoned factories, swimming in the canal, and walking beneath Saint-Henri through its sewage ducts. In his *Report on Post Modern Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard explains, "A remedy (for alienation and malaise) can come from changing the status of aesthetic experience when it is used to explore a living

historical situation, that is, when it is put in relation with problems of existence.”⁶⁹

Exploring a “living historical situation,” and “changing the status of the aesthetic experience” of Saint-Henri are driving concerns of both Aquin and Walsh’s films, but whether or not their works are successful in the endeavour to alleviate alienation is certainly subject to debate.



(Fig. 18. A Saint-Henri threshold. Film still (39:07) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Where Aquin’s film appears as a close study of stasis – demonstrated in an early scene in which an unemployed father of many sits idly in his rocking chair, tapping his foot instead of earning food for his family – Walsh’s film is an exploration of action. Walsh references the labour struggles of the past, particularly those of women, at a time when Saint-Henri was filled with the unceasing hum of work and activity. Her portrayal of a female performance group acting out a strike brings attention to the historical struggles of women at work in Saint-Henri. And while Walsh displays people at work in various settings, Aquin depicts adults longingly gazing out of windows, sitting in rocking chairs and on porches, and buying beer on credit. In Walsh’s film we hear a radio

⁶⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 71.

announcer quoting from Gabrielle Roy's poetic description of a seamstress's life, in which women worked "eleven hours a day in overheated sweatshops buzzing with the constant motor of machines."



(Fig. 19. Delivering goods to a local convenient store. Film still (41:56) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Furthermore, Walsh explores a variety of labour environments, such as men on the job at a garage, artists using colourful inks in a tattoo parlour, butchers making sausages, hairdressers and barbers socializing with their clients, a corner-store owner selling candy to a teenager who he has watched grow up from a baby, as well as employees stocking up the local food bank and residents tending to Saint-Henri's urban vegetable garden.



(Fig. 20. Community vegetable garden in Saint-Henri. Film still (27:38) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

The creative and non-commercial possibilities being uncovered in unexpected actions and places are what make these portraits interesting. While the failure of industry in Saint-Henri has led to de-population and dis-investment, it has also ushered in new entrepreneurship that coincides with the possibility of a new emotional connection to work and labour that brings workers satisfaction not often found in factories.

As mentioned earlier, Walsh filmed many of the same sights and sites that Aquin did in 1962, although without the same melancholy perspective. For example, the scene in which a man gets a shave in Aquin's film foreshadows death, while in Walsh's it is a jovial depiction of community members bonding.



(Figure 21. Getting a shave in Saint-Henri (I). Film still (06:57) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)



(Fig. 22. Getting a shave in Saint-Henri (II) Film still (27:38) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Correspondingly, the train tracks in Aquin's film threaten, as they are bearers of the ominous trains that ride along them. In *le cinq septembre* the train tracks seem to hold the residents of Saint-Henri captive, and the constant bells of the train discipline and warn. In Walsh's film the tracks are a dividing line between newly developed and run-down pockets of the neighbourhood, but a boundary that can be easily passed over.



(Figure 23. Waiting for the train to pass. Film still (15:26) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

While Walsh portrays queer men and their group of friends enjoying Saint-Henri's nightlife in a relatively safe setting, when the sun sets in Aquin's Saint-Henri, any feeling of safety or comfort is gone with it. The camera documents couples from behind with a shaky hand, following them as if a stalker would, and a woman who stands alone is filmed from an angle that suggests vulnerability.



(Figure 24. A woman stands alone. Film still (23:55) from Hubert Aquin's *À Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* (1962) Dist.: NFB. 27 mins.)

At this point, it seems that a confrontation between Marx and Freud must take place, which is to say, one between social reality and psychic reality. Which is the prime mover in the depictions of Saint-Henri? For Marx, that which is hidden from reason is the exploitive reality of the social system.⁷⁰ Contrastingly, for Freud, that which is concealed is the content of the unconscious mind. This study will contend that the psyche, as Marx would have it, reflects the mode of production of material life. In turn, the following sections will look toward the physical spaces in Saint-Henri, as represented by these films,

⁷⁰ Theodore Roszak, "The Dialectics of Liberation: Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown," in *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 84.

exploring their direct impacts on the psyches of those who have inhabited and observed them.

Uncanny Effects

A map can tell me how to find a place I have not seen but have often imagined. When I get there, following the map faithfully, the place is not the place of my imagination. Maps, growing ever more real, are much less true.

– Jeanette Winterson⁷¹

From the German *heimlich*, whose opposite is *unheimlich*, translated into English as the homely and unhomely, “the uncanny” is rooted in the conversion of an object, place, or person that was once familiar into something decidedly not. In his 1919 essay “The Uncanny,” Freud attempts to pin down the multiple etymologies and meanings of the uncanny, which he primarily identifies as being based on a theory of feeling rather than one of aesthetics. Furthermore, Freud linked the uncanny to the sensation of ambivalence.⁷² Following Freud, I discuss the uncanny in Saint-Henri in two segments: the first is concerned with the alienation engendered when subjects are confronted with a reflection of themselves, and the second is an analysis of the architectural and interruptive re-generation of Saint-Henri, transforming it from a familiar to an unfamiliar space.

As Benjamin argued, urban meanings are not only bound up in physical forms of the city. For him, these forms gave themselves to the subject at different moments and a sense of material space was filtered through experience.⁷³ Or in simpler terms, a

⁷¹ Jeanette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry*, (London: Vintage, 1990), 81.

⁷² McQuire, *Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, 8.

⁷³ Tonkiss, *Space, The City and Social Theory*, 120.

neighbourhood was defined by its subjects' experiences. Attuned to the same forces, urban planners borrow the psychological term 'cognitive mapping' to describe how people make their way around the city.⁷⁴ 'Cognitive mapping' is also used in film theory, as Conley does: "A film can be understood in a broad sense to be a 'map' that plots and colonizes the imagination and the public it is said to 'invent' and as a result, seek to control."⁷⁵ In a sense then, the 'mapping' of space in film does more than simply record places. It creates and re-creates them, often with an uncanny effect.

Freud famously contended that there is "nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else."⁷⁶ Aquin, for his part, explicitly disrupts the insular nature of the ego in *le cinq septembre*. The striking black and white images of the residents of Saint-Henri that Aquin compiled in 1962 are indications that point to the unnamed people who were included in and deeply affected by *le cinq septembre*. In this way, he fails his subjects, just as social documentarian Dorothea Lange failed to identify, and in turn, pay due respect to her "Migrant Mother" of 1936. In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag asserted that to photograph another's misery is to incite it: "Photography is a way of encouraging whatever is going on to keep happening."⁷⁷ One might add that under-explained images of individuals not only produce negative relations between subjects and the spaces they inhabit, but these images can create a gap between the subject's double on screen and the shifting nature of that person in life. Such cinematic after-images are doppelgängers that interfere with the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, 1.

⁷⁶ Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents" in *The Penguin Freud Library*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 253.

⁷⁷ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1977), 12.

reassuring symmetries of the self and other, of seeing and being seen. These conventions of viewing are thought of as dependable constructions that constitute the traditional human subject. However, when these conventions are disrupted, so is one's understanding of the subject, and often of themselves.

In *The 26th of August*, Walsh spends considerable time focusing on two queer, male, and Mohawk individuals who grew up in Kanawake (a Mohawk reserve across the river) and now live in Saint-Henri. These men sit around their dinner table with a friend and talk about what makes them who they are, and how they have continually lived as outsiders. They describe what it is like to be homosexual on the reserve, and then, what it is like to be a Mohawk person living in Montreal. They discuss the issues that they face in detail, and speak clearly to the camera. This seemingly straightforward scene is a complex moment of unveiling and a renunciation of the intimate. However, the new 'publicness' of their revelations turns a conversation into a lecture presented to an unknown and unresponsive audience. As such, the logic of memorialization that governs documentary practice reveals both a frozen mirror image of living people and a picture of their mortality.

In an example of the phenomenon of the doppelgänger, Freud recounts the experience in which he saw but did not recognize his own reflection. He wrote in "The Uncanny" that while travelling, he observed an elderly and unkempt man whom he thought to be an intruder in his railway compartment. However, upon second glance, the intruder was revealed to be Freud's own reflection, thus transforming the familiar into the strange and distorting our informant's sense of self. Freud's account illustrates the alienation and immobilization that arise when a subject is confronted with the illusion of

seeing the self from the position of the other. And though Freud admitted, “the same thing will perhaps not be acknowledged by everyone as a source of the uncanny”⁷⁸ the recitation of other people’s lives through documentary film has ample potential to create a crisis of identity in the subjects depicted. While much of the power of film lies in its ability to demystify and expose, often, however, there is a gap between what is articulated and what is legitimated by those described. In this sense, film creates an aesthetic of absence, for its focus on the external brings the subject closer to others, but divides him or her from his or herself. Freud wrote that when a person is confronted with his or her double, he or she may “become unsure of his [or her] true self; or he [or she] may substitute the other’s self for his [or her] own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged.”⁷⁹ The fallout in the wake of the screening of *le cinq septembre* was no exception to this rule. Filmmaker Fernand Dansereau elaborated that the response to *le cinq septembre* was “astonishingly violent.” He recounted:

[The people of Saint Henri] felt debased by our outsiders’ observations of them. Worse yet, certain people who played a role in the film felt deeply and personally hurt. One of the families that had been filmed, for example, was overcome with a sort of shame so strong that they decided to remove their children from the local school.⁸⁰

Aquin’s film exercised a kind of power over its subjects that deeply disrupted both their sense of self and community.

According to Foucault, power, however defined, is an inherent quality of all of our social relations. Foucault was opposed to Martin Heidegger’s reading of power as something that is hidden behind the façade of things and beings; he believed that

⁷⁸ Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 143.

⁷⁹ Freud, “The Uncanny,” 142.

⁸⁰ Mackenzie, “Société Nouvelle: The Challenge for Change in the Alternative Public Sphere,” 72.

repression was only one of the myriad ways in which power can express itself. For Foucault, there was no hierarchical, downward relation of power, and while power is a form of domination, it is also fundamentally productive and creates both networks and knowledge. Accordingly, Aquin's depiction of the working classes of Saint-Henri both repressed individual actors and created new networks of knowledge that had the potential to empower them.

Although Aquin's film appears as a requiem for Saint-Henri, and caused many of the residents of the neighbourhood embarrassment and disgrace, it left an expansive space for a documentary return to the same community, which Walsh filled with her postmodern homage. Referential and backward looking, Walsh's film can be equated to the notion of the once buried which reappears,⁸¹ which is attached to the two opposites of *heimlich*, *the unheimlich*, and the uncanny. American literary critic Frederic Jameson, who criticized postmodernism by arguing that its intense scepticism of metanarratives results in the colonization of the public sphere, suggested that the postmodern condition is characterized by a schizophrenic temporality and a spatial pastiche.⁸² However, in *The 26th of August*, Walsh vigorously attended to temporality and to local and spatial traditions – her film is the antithesis to Jameson's stern statement about the weightlessness of postmodern production.

Where Aquin's film intended a definitive and "authentic" narrative of Saint-Henri (Aquin himself wrote, "Knowledge is concerned with realities, not values"⁸³), Walsh's documentary leaves room for the existence of multiple Saint-Henris, and is self-reflexive

⁸¹ Vidler, "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime," *Assemblage*, No. 3 (July 1987), 11.

⁸² Giuliana Bruno, "Postmodernism and "Blade Runner," *October*, Vol. 41 (Summer, 1987), 62.

⁸³ Aquin, *Writing Quebec*, 43.

and aware of the impossibility of an objective reality. This is evident in a scene in which the camera crew seemingly floats down a street, and is reflected in the windows of homes, while a woman standing on her lawn then pauses and waves at the camera-operator. In a similar way, Belinda's daughter Kenya becomes nervous as she is unceremoniously placed in the limelight, and with a child's bashfulness, exclaims that she's shy in front of the camera and walks out of the frame.



(Fig. 25. A woman waving at the camera. Film still (08:35) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Subsequently, it is helpful to consider Arendt's investigation, *The Human Condition*, for its exploration of anthropological points of view like those propagated in and around Saint-Henri, most notably in *le cinq septembre*. Arendt presents strict and often problematic oppositions and categories, most notably the public and the private, and the social and political, however these categories create productive frameworks from which to observe human existence. Arendt maintains that the blurring of the line between the private and public has "changed beyond recognition the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and citizen."⁸⁴ In turn, by creating a spectacle of the intimate, Walsh and Aquin participated in a symbolic act of alienation that amounts to what Jean Baudrillard refers to as "the loss of the real." In his essay "The Ecstasy of

⁸⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 33.

Communication,” Baudrillard demarcated this loss as: “the end of inferiority and intimacy, and the overexposure and transparency of the world.”⁸⁵ He went on to explain,

It is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible, of the more-visible than visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret [...] The obscenity of the commodity stems from the fact that it is abstract, formed and light in opposition of the weight, opacity, and substance of the object [...] All secrets, spaces and scenes are abolished in a single dimension of information.⁸⁶

Baudrillard argued that the weight and substance of a subject will always be made lighter and frailer when projected on screen or captured in a photograph. To photograph is to aestheticize, and beautifying often promotes a romantic passivity instead of action. Thus, the aestheticization of the worn-down physical environment of Saint-Henri by both filmmakers contributes to its shifting meaning.

Arendt argues that actions must not be collapsed into the category of behaviour, and that the notion of the human condition is divided from human “nature” and is constantly being established and re-established. Most useful here is Arendt’s statement: “the human condition is not the same as human nature, and the sum of total human activities and capabilities which correspond to the human condition does not constitute anything like human nature.”⁸⁷ One of the more glaring problems with *le cinq septembre* is that it equates events and actions documented in Saint-Henri with elemental behaviour patterns, which sought to reveal the deep-seeded realities of its residents. For example, an extended scene in which an unemployed father sits dejectedly in his rocking chair reflects his behaviour instead of the difficult circumstances he was living through at that time. In his essay “Power/Knowledge,” Foucault explained, “Practices of surveillance, elicitation

⁸⁵ Baudrillard, “The Ecstasy of Communication.” in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 132.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 131.

⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 10.

and documentation constrain behaviour by making it more thoroughly knowable or known. These new forms of knowledge also presuppose new kinds of constraint, which make people's actions visible and constrain them to space."⁸⁸ It can be assumed that Aquin's film had a similar effect, for even if the unemployed father were to have gotten up out of his rocking chair and got himself a job the moment the camera stopped filming, he would always be known to the observer as the down-and-out dad, too lazy, incompetent or unfortunate to provide for his family.

The desire to represent the so-called basic elements of existence and the core of human nature in *Saint-Henri* was initiated in Roy's novel, and is underscored in the introduction of the English translation by Hugo McPherson. Of relevance here is that McPherson served as the Canadian Government Film Commissioner and the Chairman of the NFB from 1967-1970. As he wrote about Roy's approach to life in *Saint-Henri*:

Miss Roy sees in the problems of a particular age and locale an image of the timeless human enigma; the people of her Montreal slum illustrate piercingly what it means to be human. Yet despite her uncompromising awareness of the pain and imperfection of life, she is no pessimist to an age that has fallen on the thorns of various "isms" (including egotism, the ism of pride), she brings a profound tolerance and compassion. She is committed not to any exclusive patriotism, intellectual humanism or religiosity, but to a deep love of mankind.⁸⁹

While McPherson makes many heavily weighted statements in this short paragraph, he brings to light the central question that arises throughout both Aquin and Walsh's films, which is the question of the "nature" of the people inhabiting the "slum" of *Saint-Henri*. In an attempt to answer this question, Aquin's subjects were examined and cross-examined and their mug shots might as well have been taken and posted on telephone

⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, "Power/Knowledge" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, 2nd Ed*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: 2005), 96.

⁸⁹ Hugo Macpherson, "Introduction" in *The Tin Flute* by Gabrielle Roy (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1969), v.

poles along the main street, Rue Notre-Dame. In *le cinq septembre*, the residents of Saint-Henri were both the primary witnesses and victims, while nuanced events and characters were organized by type.

Perhaps the most glaring problem with Aquin's film is that it lacks pluralism and is a proponent of "Naturalism," which refers to the formation of distinct neighbourhoods or communities as "'natural areas,' based on 'peculiar selective and cultural characteristics', where ethnicity or language, economic interest or criminality."⁹⁰ Aquin's portrait is a typology of neighbourhood – wherein different ethnic and social groups are separated by behaviour, region, and language – even though Aquin insisted on minimizing difference. At one point in the film, Aquin's narrator said, "children do not see colour in Saint-Henri." While Aquin did depict variation in Saint-Henri, and purposefully pointed out the multicultural fabric of the neighbourhood, he attempted to deconstruct the people he documented into what he perceived as their basic elements. As Stephen Fuchs argued in his book *Against Essentialism*, "Allowing for [real] variation means dissolving natural kinds and their essential properties into relationships and forces."⁹¹ Walsh does precisely this when she focuses on the relationships that characters have with each other and with their community, or informally, what it is that 'makes them tick.' For Mr. Lee it is the connections he has with his customers, for Doris it is the desire to live an honest life and avoid going back to jail, for the two young boys whose fort has been usurped by drug addicts, it is finding a new place to play, and for Robert and Edmée it is about enjoying their ritual coffees at the Green Spot café and their daily

⁹⁰ R.D. McKenzie, "The Ecological Approach to the Study of the Human Community" in R. E. Park et al. (eds) *The City*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press [1925] 1967), 77.

⁹¹ Stephen Fuchs, *Against Essentialism: A Theory of Culture and Society*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 15

stroll along the Canal. As Edmée states with a youthful grin, “these are the best years of our lives.”



(Fig. 26. Daily routines. Film still (15:09) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)



(Fig. 27. A conquered fort. Film still (54:56) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

A lament for a dying community, Aquin’s examination articulated and exposed poverty existing in Saint-Henri, but was not implicated in it, nor did it interrupt it. Aquin worked in revelatory modes comparable to Jacob Riis’s fin-de-siècle photographic project *How the Other Half Lives* and the photographic works commissioned by the American Farm Security Administration in the 1930s. Both were disseminated to

demonstrate the value of the people pictured, but often did the opposite by exposing and inadvertently shaming the people they documented. In 1945, Gabrielle Roy was aware of this phenomenon. She identified the frightening effects of the reproduction and revelation of the poverty, writing that by exposing pain, one worsened it: “Poverty is like pain, dormant and not unbearable as long as you don’t move about too much. You grow used to it, you end up by paying no attention to it. But once you presume to bring it out in the daylight, it becomes terrifying.”⁹² Roy identified a need for distraction from pain that allows for the mind to open up to the larger world. Similarly, Benjamin believed that film itself was such a distraction, and that through the art of montage a series of incongruous moments could enlarge perspective, and create a suspension of disbelief. However, Aquin’s and Walsh’s films do not allow for disbelief or distraction. Although they do create expanded views about Saint-Henri, they also penetrate, with the utmost detail, into the stark and vibrant corners of Saint-Henri’s many realities, bringing observers with them.

In “The Uncanny” Freud established that while the double first emerges in our physical lives as a “reservation against extinction,” this double (in typically duplicitous fashion) soon reverses itself: “From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death. By captivating our image, immobilizing and framing it, the mirror reveals a picture of our own unthinkable mortality.”⁹³ Virilio expands on this idea with his technological uncanny, in which the overexposure of space threatens to create a world with no hidden aspects.⁹⁴ The incongruity of this technological exposure

⁹² Roy, *The Tin Flute*, 119.

⁹³ Freud, “The Uncanny,” 142.

⁹⁴ McQuire, *Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space*, 11.

creates an unnerving bond between the image and the referent, causing the subject to question their sense of security and self. And while cities – and especially, slums – have long been sites of surveillance, the attempt to reorganize metropolitan space through the exposure of the under-classes involves a drastic diminution of their self-images, and as Mike Davis points out, can create an “existential condition of marginality within marginality.”⁹⁵ A primarily Victorian, but in some ways, still current interest in the pathologies of urban spaces, in which the physical decay of the slum was equated with the moral decay of its residents, has created a structural way of thinking about the Otherness of certain places, like Saint-Henri. As Conley states, “identity can be defined in a narrow sense as the consciousness of belonging (or longing to belong) to a place, and of being at a distance from it.”⁹⁶ The significance of the spatial and psychological distance of Saint-Henri from the downtown, more prosperous area of Montreal is made very clear in both Aquin and Walsh’s films. Especially in *le cinq septembre*, Saint-Henri was depicted as an island within an island, as an isolated place where people are born, live out their lives and die. In *The Tin Flute*, the yearning felt by Florentine, the main character, for Montreal proper, is made painfully obvious in the first pages of the Roy’s novel:

She visualized St. Catherine’s Street in Montreal, the windows of the big department stores, the fashionable crowd on Saturday evening...plate glass, the brightly lit theatre lobbies...up toward the screen where the most beautiful pictures in the world are shown: all the most longed for, admired, envied swam before her eyes.⁹⁷

That cinematic imagery embedded into Florentine’s vision of the city

demonstrates film’s connection to perspectives of the Self, the Other, and of physical

⁹⁵ Mike Davis, *Planet of the Slums*, (London: Verso, 2006), 201.

⁹⁶ Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, 3.

⁹⁷ Roy, *The Tin Flute*, 8.

spaces. Cinematic imagery is passed down, and becomes embedded into narratives, thus affecting those inhabitants of cities at the time of the filmic production of them, as well as those who inhabit and visit those spaces many years later.

When considering Aquin's and Walsh's films, one grasps the passage of time in many ways, but most notable perhaps is in the changing physical landscape of Saint-Henri. Time must be aligned with space in order to recall it in the collective and individual memory, it cannot be understood except through the actions that have taken place during its passing, such as the development and re-development of architectural space. In the introduction to her book *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures*, Elizabeth Grosz defines the abstract nature of time: "Time is more intangible than any other "thing," less able to be grasped, conceptually or psychically."⁹⁸ By studying the Saint-Henri films side-by-side, the spectator is privy to a temporal distance of fifty years collapsed into two days and approximately two hours of screen time, wherein the physical decay of a once fertile industrial landscape speeds up, while ephemeral events are slowed down. Examining these two films not as separate entities, but as connected works, generates one long exposure lacking a clear narrative or finality, but filling a need for documentary and historical continuity. As cultural theorist Gaston Bachelard suggested,

When two strange images meet, two images that are the work of two poets pursuing separate dreams, they apparently strengthen each other. In fact, this convergence of two exceptional images furnishes, as it were, a countercheck for phenomenological analysis. The image loses its gratuitousness; the free play of the imagination ceases to be a form of anarchy.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Elizabeth Grosz ed., *Becomings: Explorations in Time, Memory and Futures*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999) 1.

⁹⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 59.

Interpreted in relation to each other, Aquin and Walsh's films counteract the ubiquitous placelessness of the contemporary globalized and often uprooted physical environment, while simultaneously creating an ocular-centric focus on site that transforms ambiguous space into place.

Vidler explained, "The uncanny as articulated by Freud is rooted in the domestic environment. It opens up problems of the self, the other, the body and its absence, relations between psyche and dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis."¹⁰⁰ As early as the 1850s in Saint-Henri, there were severe housing issues resulting from the effects of rapid industrialization, immigration and fires. Investment in housing tended to lag behind other sectors because it was seen as risky, the turnover of capital was slow, and most house-builders could not compete in money markets with commercial and industrial investors.¹⁰¹ According to city planner James Ewing, by the end of the Second World War, living conditions in industrial Montreal were appalling:

We find, owing to unregulated and uncontrolled development, (...) factories springing up promiscuously all over the place, leading neighborhoods to ugly, malodorous and grimy conditions, forcing up the cost of land but depreciating residential values with the inevitable consequence that buildings fall into disuse, decay and dilapidation, and the foul reeking cankerous slum is created.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Vidler, *The Architecture of the Uncanny*, x.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Lewis, *Industry and Space*, 348.



(Fig. 28. A negative perspective on Saint-Henri. Film still (33:10) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Descriptions from planners like Ewing must have led to the interruptive regeneration of the 1960s, which consisted of totally demolishing neighbourhoods and rebuilding them from the ground up, but also, to some very pessimistic contemporary views about life in dense urban spaces. One character in Walsh's film that works in Saint-Henri (figure 28) is disillusioned with the state of the neighbourhood, and recounts with intensity that he lives on Nun's Island where it is calm and peaceful, in contrast to Saint-Henri. This character is angry. He is upset with government corruption, with the crumbling status of the Turcot interchange, and even with the falling rain that "ruined his day." Although this character has disdain for Saint-Henri, he is depicted as a combative person with strong views about everything, and in the minority when it comes to his hatred for Saint-Henri.

In Tonkiss's history, "From 1960s onwards (...) the inner city was set up as a space that must be pacified, whose commerce must be cleaned up and spurred on, and whose social and physical environment must be regenerated."¹⁰³ The massive changes that occurred in Montreal in the 1960s are comparable to the reorganization of Paris by Baron

¹⁰³ Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 84.

Hausmann in the mid 1800s, in which medieval streets and homes were cleared away to make room for wide boulevards and multi-story apartments. Pierre Gravel describes a similar condition in Montreal, in his 1969 book *À Perte Des Temps*:

Concrete, glass and steel girders. Twenty, thirty, fifty stories high. To tell the truth, the city didn't exist. In its place, a big, huge, monstrous thing that had never been given a name sprawled around a mountain and ended by dwindling into suburbs: east, west, north, a few scattered slums... In the centre, glass and girders. An artificial heart (...) it was hard to talk about it as a city. And in fact, people didn't talk about it: they lived in it.¹⁰⁴

This kind of unpleasant regeneration is echoed in Vidler's discussion of the uncanny. Vidler reasoned, "The Uncanny can be found in the transformation of something that once seemed homely into something decidedly not,"¹⁰⁵ and went on to explain that the uncanny erupts in "the wasted margins and surface appearances of post-industrial culture."¹⁰⁶ Such "interruptive regeneration," coined by Mike Davis in his book *Planet of the Slums*, has "systematically destabilized the livelihood of the urban poor, removed their right to the city, and contributed to an existential condition of marginality."¹⁰⁷ One condo project, called *Bassins Du Havre*, located in Griffintown, just east of Saint-Henri, advertises their condominium as a lush oasis in the middle of an urban wasteland.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Gravel, *À perte de temps*, (Toronto: Anansi; Montreal: Parti pris, 1969), 26.

¹⁰⁵ Vidler, *The Architecture of the Uncanny*, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Vidler, *The Architecture of the Uncanny*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, *Planet of the Slums*, 64.



(Fig. 29. Robert commenting on architectural developments. Film still (9:30) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

This company, among many others, markets dwellings to the well-compensated bourgeoisie and creates what Michael Dear dubbed “communities” – shorthand for commodified communities¹⁰⁸ – created expressly to satisfy and profit from upper professionals who often live in Montreal only part time, thus creating ghost-like communities. The *Bassins Du Havre* pamphlet states:

Outstretched buildings look like they've been carefully placed on the water. Back from your daily ride on the famous Lachine Canal bike path, stop for a moment and take in the fine architectural details reflected in the water. You're surrounded by a relaxed atmosphere and away from the concrete jungle...and yet, just minutes from downtown!

This structuring of lived-in space holds the risk of missing the creative activity, symbolism, and play that exist on the level of the ground in Saint-Henri. It is true, as

¹⁰⁸ Dear is referenced in: Anna Klingman, *Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), 286.

Bachelard has affirmed, “Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past...”¹⁰⁹ But perhaps at the cost of community.

Both filmmakers present the community of Saint-Henri as the main character, and it is evident in both Aquin’s and Walsh’s depictions that the main character has come upon hard times, or has been junked, if you will. For Bruno, the uncanny exists in postmodern junk-space. Bruno summarized, “the effects of the postmodern, industrial condition are: wearing out and waste.”¹¹⁰



(Fig. 30. Doris sifting through the refuse. Film still (5:17) from Walsh’s *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

She outlines the aesthetics of the postmodern condition as resulting from discontinuous signifiers and erosion. Correspondingly, the unfettered construction of condos in Saint-Henri represent such discontinuous signifiers and the wearing away and removal of industrial and residential buildings in the community point to erosion of historicity. Much of the physical space in Aquin’s and Walsh’s films can be looked at through Bruno’s lens, and perhaps more so in Walsh’s depiction of gentrification and decay. Evidence of Bruno’s junk-space exists in Walsh’s representation of the crumbling Turcot Interchange, which was set for reconstruction at the time when *the 26th of August* was being made.

¹⁰⁹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 61

¹¹⁰ Bruno, “Ramble City: Post-Modernism and Blade Runner,” 64.

However, the Interchange's reconstruction would have required the demolition of a significant portion of the Village des Tanneries neighbourhood on the Western edge of Saint-Henri, which caused much controversy and brought Saint-Henri further into the realm of the architectural uncanny. In Walsh's film the Interchange looms over Saint-Henri with its dark grey, brutalist-like form. While one character states that the enormous waste of money caused by the Turcot Interchange was "the worst shit he's ever seen," he also states that if it were up to him, he would apply a fresh coat of white paint and be done with it.



(Fig. 31. Commentary on the Turcot Interchange. Film still (32:27) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

The gentrification of Saint-Henri is illustrated in Walsh's trailing of Doris, who seems disoriented by her environment. She leads the camera out to the front of a large apartment building, and calls up at an unnamed balcony-dweller, "Does Charles still live here?" The man addressed seems to have no idea who Charles was and turns Doris away.



(Figure 32. Doris' uncanny spatial experience. Film still (21:07) of Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

This sequence suggests that Saint-Henri is a home in which its inhabitants are constantly having to re-orient themselves towards an ever-shifting, uncanny space. In both Saint-Henri films, the directors have portrayed an occurrence of the uncanny that meets Freud's definition: "a condition of intellectual uncertainty (...) and an area in which a person is unsure of his way around."¹¹¹ The children's discussion of a house that had recently been through a fire has this quality. On a website called Vanishing Montreal¹¹² I came across an image of the same house, as well as one in which the house, along with the beautiful tree in front of it, had been erased, perhaps pushing this neighbourhood further into the realm of uncertainty, or uncanniness. Buildings are artefacts of cultural heritage, and signposts that help inhabitants know where they stand in the city. Buildings are landmarks, little red arrows on a city map exclaiming, *You are here*. When personal landmarks disappear, the subject's position in space becomes unstable.

¹¹¹ Freud, "The Uncanny," 125.

¹¹² "Changing Face of Saint Henri" <http://www.vanishingmontreal.com/p/changing-face-of-st-henri.html>. Accessed Feb. 15, 2013.

Many of the homes depicted in Aquin's *le cinq septembre* emerge as worker's tenements, which were initially defined in 1858 as "House(s) or apartment building(s) divided into and rented in such separate residences, usually in a city and usually built for the poor; historically could be overcrowded and run-down, but with laws and inspection meet minimum standards for sanitation, safety and relative comfort."¹¹³ Rarely do observers see interiors of these homes.



(Fig. 33. A Saint-Henri interior. Film still (12:33) from Walsh's *Saint-Henri the 26th of August*. (2011) Dist.: NFB & Parabola Films. 85 mins.)

Viewers are more privy to images of people congregating on thresholds, challenging what it means to be at home, and symbolizing the connection that the inhabitants of Saint-Henri have with their exterior environment.

In the 1960s, Hubert Aquin did not live in Saint-Henri, but in the francophone intellectual quarter, a square kilometre within the Plateau Mont Royal.¹¹⁴ As an outsider to Saint-Henri, Aquin's attempt to "harness the power of cinema to promote identity, and "allow the voiceless" of society to produce their own representations of themselves, was a top-down approach. The intention to bolster a sense of community while providing the

¹¹³ Andrew S. Dolkart, *Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street*, (New Mexico: Centre for American Places, 2007), intro

¹¹⁴ Lortie, *The 60s: Montreal Thinks Big*, 17.

silenced with a means to address larger publics”¹¹⁵ did not necessarily empower. Even if Aquin had lived in Saint-Henri, as some of his cinematographers did, Sontag would contend that in the act of documenting, they too would become outsiders. Sontag’s challenge was that “The camera makes everyone a tourist in other people’s reality, and eventually in one’s own.”¹¹⁶ Like writers who travelled to exotic sites of ancient ruin, both Aquin and Walsh were faced with the responsibility of filming for an audience that would likely not have the same experiences. As a result, the similarities between the directors’ respective documentaries and travel writing contribute to the uncanny effect of the films. However, unlike the descriptions of affluent and comfortable places to visit that can be found in mainstream guidebooks, Aquin and Walsh focused on the abandoned, the disintegrating and the re-appropriated.

Much like the act of travel-writing, Aquin used film as a tool to aid the expression of a deep-seated desire to step into the experience of others, and in turn, out of the self. In a similar vein, Bruno analysed the film *Caro diario* (*Dear Diary*, 1993) by Nanni Moretti, in which the Italian author/actor wanders the streets of Rome on a scooter. Bruno calls this film autobiographical fiction turned filmic memoir, and argues that in the act of filming Roman facades, Moretti expressed a yearning to inhabit them. As Bruno maintains,

(Moretti) wants to be housed, craves the places others live in, curious about the lives led inside the apartments of strangers. He wants to live (and live in) them...As Moretti wonders what it would be like to occupy that space, the authorial dream meets spectatorial practice. Such is the pleasure of haptic wandering experienced by the film spectator: one

¹¹⁵ Mackenzie, “Société Nouvelle: The Challenge for Change in the Alternative Public Sphere,” 69.

¹¹⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, 57.

imagines oneself residing in a space, in someone else's place, and tangibly maps oneself within it.¹¹⁷

Not only does Moretti want to get inside the lives of others, but also he craves the experience of existence inside their homes, to inhabit their vital spaces. Perhaps Aquin wanted the same.

Conclusion

Described by Aquin as “a little island, surrounded by water, railroads, and the industrial wealth of other men,” Saint-Henri has been subject to an isolation that has created the conditions for internalized exile. However, these isolating conditions also encourage forms of alternative engagement with space that rupture the rules for living laid down by governments, developers, and police forces. Rebellions against these institutionalized powers occur in the space of the city itself, *not* in film, a medium capable of only instantiating and disseminating the fragments of the urban experience. As spatial theorist Lefebvre has asserted, “Physical space has no ‘reality’ without the energy deployed within it.”¹¹⁸ There is another reality, however, one in which creative and psychological processes reign supreme. In this space, Aquin's and Walsh's brief screenings of the palimpsest that is Saint-Henri create a platform of knowledge and a rich source of material from which to further the discussion of the representation and lived experiences of neighbourhood which include multitudes of tensions, values and uses. Sometimes, these uses are highly contested, for example, the ubiquitous development of condominiums which threaten to permanently alter the landscape of Saint-Henri, the disintegrating Turcot interchange and the Turcot Yards, and Village des Tanneries which

¹¹⁷ Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, 36.

¹¹⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 13.

hang in the balance. Nonetheless, the perceived openness of Saint-Henri (as a post-industrial space) has engendered the expectation that the neighbourhood be creative, inventive and intuitive. This new desirability and perceived openness, however, has created a socio-spatial polarization between the new affluent population and the poor in the community, as is described in Walsh's film. Built-for-the-poor tenements are being replaced with built-for-the rich condominiums that can only contribute to the community's spatial and social divisions.

Aquin's and Walsh's compositions protest against spatial and visual hegemony, and create new kinds of aesthetic knowledge about Saint-Henri, thus interrupting the perception of the everyday. In a similar way, I have tried here to enter their dialogue with my own concerns about the connection between the provocative filmic visualization of Saint-Henri, the conditions of everyday life in this neighbourhood, and questions of the emotional, physical, and psychic experiences of Saint-Henri. I hope to have heightened awareness of these varying experiences of the landscape of Saint-Henri, as well as the effect of documentary film on a community in an extended moment of danger.

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