

David Marvin's Griffintown:  
An archival exploration of a ghosted neighbourhood

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## Abstract

David Marvin's Griffintown:  
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This thesis explores an archive of photographs by Montreal-based photographer David Wallace Marvin and its potential for reimagining Griffintown, an historically working class neighbourhood and industrial district located near Montreal's downtown waterfront. Drawing upon sociologist Avery Gordon's "haunting-as-method," I examine how David Marvin's photographs bear traces of a community left out of the histories of Montreal currently in circulation, revealing the imaginative and geographical displacements brought about by more than two centuries of municipal neglect and isolation, eviction, and gentrification.

**Key words:** haunting; photography; photographic archives; public histories; visibility; memory; blind field; ghosted community; cities; urban displacement; community-based organizing; working class histories; gentrification

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## I. PREFACE

I first came to Griffintown in 2008, not long after I moved to Montreal. Within a few months, I started playing with a couple of bands in a space called The Pines, a recording studio built in an old CCM bike factory loft on Murray Street. During breaks in rehearsal, I often took the studio dog for walks along the canal or circled the loop of rowhouses and empty lots between William and Ottawa streets. I started noticing things during these walks – old facades exposed by new construction, cobblestones that suddenly appeared beneath the asphalt during the spring thaw, building foundations whose outlines were still visible in an overgrown lot. Meanwhile, I gradually became acquainted with the social life of the neighbourhood at that time: the elderly Polish carpenter who lived in an unheated flat next door; the late night punk shows at Friendship Cove; the makeshift homeless camps at the bottom of Peel Street and in the bushes near the postal depot. Eventually, I started coming to Griffintown almost every day and began documenting my walks through photographs and sound recordings. I wanted to know if investigating the landscape in this way might tell me something of the neighbourhood's past that I hadn't yet been able to learn through its written histories or maps.

This thesis is but one of several paths I could have taken in my research of Griffintown and David Marvin's photographic archive. When I first envisioned this project - when I first began thinking of what I was doing *as a project* – I imagined a place-based exploration of Griffintown's landscape, something that would directly engage with and reanimate the traces I encountered during my time there. During my undergraduate studies at the University of

Alberta, I trained as a classical archaeologist, with a particular focus on landscape archaeology and religious iconography, and it was this training that first drew me to thinkers such as E.V. Walter, whose chorographic investigations sought to convey the multiple and interconnected registers of meaning and experience that make a place whole (Walter 1987), as well as the photographer Mark Ruwedel, who has suggested that photography can be a form of social inquiry that reveals the material landscape as a dynamic “historical archive” (Ruwedel 1996). I was searching for a field where I would be encouraged to draw upon a range of literatures concerning memory, photography, landscape, and place, that might help me account for something that seemed to be conspicuously absent from the imaginary of the city that I had encountered so far. I wanted to find a way to approach Marvin’s photographs that would allow me to account for what E.V. Walter describes as the “feelings, symbols, memories, dreams, myths, and the subtle energies that go into... the most human region of urban life” (Walter 1987, 16).

David Marvin’s photographs shifted the course of my exploration. I found myself confronted by thousands of images of Montréal. Some of these images corresponded to the traces I had encountered in my Griffintown walks; others did not. For the next several years, I returned to the McCord Museum almost every week to review the images and work to identify the location and dates for each image, with a particular eye for images of Griffintown. The archival research that followed involved 6000 images, three institutional archives, nearly a dozen interviewees in four cities (each with their own stories and leads), as well as frustrating financial and logistical barriers to image reproduction and magnification. There were also

uncanny coincidences and clues along the way: an interviewee whose friend's life story directly inspired storylines in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* and *The Emigrants*; the sudden appearance of the Labre House van on the highway in front of us during a lengthy conversation in the car about Marvin's life; the word "Albédo" scrawled on a notebook in Don Bell's archive. There were also painful lacunae and dead ends: missing notebooks and newspapers, house fires, and the deaths or dementia of potential interviewees. Others shared with me stories that I ultimately decided were not mine to tell, at least not at this time.

Avery Gordon's writing on haunting became important for me because of its concern with the social life of images and haunting, which offered a way of writing about the missing and absent that acknowledges their material afterlife and the ways in which the past remains to disturb the present. I felt that Gordon's work might be able to help me respond to David Marvin's photographs in a way that would allow me to speak about the ways in which structural forms of violence, including poverty and gentrification, shape urban life in ways that are visible, but not always obvious.

There is something inherently ghostly about the way photographs trouble the relationship between seeing and knowing and between the visible and the unseen. They seem to "belong" to their referents more closely than any other visual medium, offering a seemingly objective representation of past realities.<sup>1</sup> When we look at photographs, however, their most powerful significance lies not in the images themselves (the surface), but in the network or

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<sup>1</sup> Olin 2011, 99.

community of identifications through which the viewer comes to relate to the image.<sup>2</sup> Looking at a photograph entices us to fabricate our interpretations, and often our memories, with the photographic index as our alibi: we are only “seeing” what is there. But of course, the photograph’s referent is not *there* – it *was* there, a distinction often overlooked in the presentation of photography as evidence.<sup>3</sup>

There is a paragraph early on in *Ghostly Matters* where Gordon questions whether scholars (and sociologists in particular) “have truly taken seriously that the intricate web of connections that characterizes any event or problem *is the story*” (Gordon 20). In a sense, it’s the story, the web of connections, that I am attempting to explore in this thesis. I want to understand what forces lead to the erasure of a neighbourhood and how the photograph is a site where these connections, these stories, are made visible.

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<sup>2</sup> Olin 2011, 114.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Morris 2011, Sontag 2008.

## II. INTRODUCTION

And so they are ever returning to us, the dead. At times they come back from the ice more than seven decades later and are found at the edge of the moraine, a few polished bones and a pair of hobnailed boots.

- W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants*



Figure 1. The Ship's Fever Monument, Pointe-Saint-Charles, 1942.

### 2.1 The Black Rock

At the north end of the Victoria Bridge, where Bridge Street stretches toward Pointe-Saint-Charles, a large rock sits on a small grass island in the middle of a four-lane highway. Across the highway on one side sits a vast parking lot; on the other, a raised embankment for the CN rail

line. The rock sits there, mysteriously, fenced with wrought iron and surrounded by a small, overgrown garden. From the west (the rail side), it's just a rock – from the east (the parking lot), an inscription is barely legible: something about “THIS STONE.”

It's an odd monument, placed here in the middle of a highway. The only way to read the stone is to sprint across two lanes of traffic – no easy task even outside of rush hour. The speed limit here is 50 km/hr, and traffic swings quickly around a blind curve from the bridge. If you do manage to cross the road and reach the stone, its inscription reads:

To preserve from desecration the remains of 6000 immigrants who died of ship fever A.D. 1847-8 this stone is erected by the workmen of Messrs. Peto, Brassey and Betts employed in the construction of the Victoria Bridge A.D. 1859.

I first visited the Black Rock in 2009 while walking through Griffintown and what used to be Goose Village (now a Costco parking lot). I'd often heard a story that when the Victoria Bridge was built in 1859, workers had unearthed a mass grave of typhus victims at this site. The typhus outbreak of 1847 had claimed more than 6000 lives, Irish immigrants, mostly, but also those who nursed them, including local nuns and the mayor of Montreal at the time. The story goes that the bridge workers, many of whom were also recent Irish immigrants, were so horrified by their discovery that they erected the Black Rock to ensure the grave would be remembered and protected from future ruin. But it seemed to me, when I visited the site with this story in mind, that what the stone represented was not so much a memorialization of the dead as it was a moment of realizing that something had been forgotten, something that had never been fully known.

## 2.2 In Search of David Marvin

Not long after I made my first visit to the Black Rock memorial, I came across a mysterious photo caption on *Spacing Montreal*, a local urbanism and architecture blog that was covering the news of the Devimco project, a controversial proposal to establish a mega-development in Griffintown in the mid-2000s. The caption mentioned “the late David Marvin who documented the history of Griffintown” and accompanied a grainy film still of a man walking across an overgrown lot.<sup>4</sup> At the edge of the lot stood a three-storey rowhouse, its brick siding stenciled with the shapes of rooms and staircases of a building long since torn down. I recognized the lot, at the corner of Ottawa and Young streets, because it was around the corner from the music studio where I rehearsed between 2008 and 2011. At the time, I had begun my own documentation of Griffintown through audio field recordings and photographs, and as I explored the area on daily walks, I witnessed the demolition and transformation of several of the site’s former industrial spaces and began tracing the remains of its earlier uses. I wanted to know what communities may have persisted or disappeared during the site’s transformations. The sudden appearance of Marvin’s name in my research was a welcome, if unsettling, surprise: here, it seemed, was a fellow surveyor and a potential (but posthumous) archival companion.

The *Spacing Montreal* caption led me to the CinéRobothèque, the former National Film Board (NFB) multimedia space, where I viewed *Albédo*, a 1982 NFB film by Jacques Leduc and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://spacing.ca/montreal/2008/02/19/griffintown-news-roundup-3-feb/>

Renée Roy directly inspired by David Marvin's life and work.<sup>5</sup> It is a strange, surreal, and sometimes deeply upsetting film that I will discuss in further detail in section 6.1 of this thesis. The film credits for *Albedo* led me to the McCord Museum, where I found an archive of nearly 6000 photographs of Montreal taken by David Marvin during the 1960s and early 1970s that have remained largely unknown since their archival deposit in the late 1970s.



*Figure 2. Spacing Montreal caption mentioning David Marvin.*

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<sup>5</sup> The NFB was forced to close the CinéRobothèque in 2012 due to federal budget cuts, in spite of significant protest from the local community. Its name was derived from the robotic arm used to retrieve selections from more than 10,000 NFB films for viewing in individual screening booths.



This thesis is a study of Griffintown as seen through the David Marvin photographic archive, which features extensive and intimate documentation of daily life in Montreal. Marvin's photographs document the people, places, and architecture left out of the city's ambitious redevelopment during the 1960s and 1970s: ageing factories and obsolete infrastructure; the homeless, elderly, and working poor; Victorian-era taverns, seedy hotels, and wooden working class tenements; declining religious orders; draft dodgers, students, and loitering youth. It is an archive full of fascinating and troubling juxtapositions, of a city occupying multiple eras simultaneously, and of struggling but often resilient communities for whom there was little room in the utopian, modernist future promised by Expo 67.

David Marvin, as I would uncover in the course of my research, was born in 1930 in Kentville, Nova Scotia, the seventh in a family of ten children. Deaf from the age of 10 as the result of scarlet fever, he was orphaned in his early teens and came to Montreal shortly afterward to live under the care of his older sisters.<sup>6</sup> He was a gifted student, but discrimination toward his deafness prevented him from receiving a scholarship that would have allowed him to continue his studies beyond high school.<sup>7</sup> Faced with ongoing discrimination as an adult, he struggled to find work, and eventually spent several years living homeless in Montreal's waterfront neighbourhoods before finding a position as a newspaper proofreader sometime in

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<sup>6</sup> Conversation with John McLeod, February 10, 2015. I do not refer to Marvin's deafness as a "disability" in this thesis, because I have yet to find any evidence that he described it in such terms. In fact, in one of the only direct statements I've found by Marvin about his deafness, he says, "I don't like to dwell on my deafness much... It is more a problem for other people than for me. I've become reconciled to it. But it seems to make a lot of trouble for them" (Bell 1975, D1).

<sup>7</sup> Bell 1975, D1.

the late 1950s. Around this time, he also began taking photographs. For nearly 15 years until his death in 1975, between night shifts at the *Montreal Star*, he photographed the city's streets on foot, with a special regard for its architectural and social revolutions. The resulting archive is a remarkable chronicle of Montreal during some of its most significant urban transformations.

I have chosen to focus on a selection of images Marvin took of Griffintown, a former industrial quarter bordering the Lachine Canal and the western edge of Montreal's Old Port. Marvin took a particular interest in Griffintown: his photographs include extensive documentation of the neighbourhood, including detailed portraits of its homes, factories, and alleyways; the traffic and industrial debris of the Lachine Canal; and, perhaps most importantly, the social life of its streets and community spaces.

Marvin's connections to Griffintown date from at least 1953. Laid off from a low-wage job in a newspaper mailroom, he was forced to move into a rooming house on the edge of Griffintown and Little Burgundy.<sup>8</sup> Less than three months later, having run out of unemployment insurance, he found himself living on the streets of Griffintown and the Old Port, where he would remain for the next several years.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the 1960s and into the early 1970s, he maintained a connection to the neighbourhood through his photographic practice, which involved near-daily walks through the area, as well as his contributions to *Unity*, a Griffintown community newspaper published by Labre House, a local Catholic organization.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Marvin 1975b, D1.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin 1975b, D4. The McCord Museum's brief archival biographical entry on Marvin also mentions that he "spent several years drinking, and living as a bum on Montreal's waterfront."

<sup>10</sup> Marvin 1970, Marvin 1975a.

Marvin's writings, as well as his photographs, suggest that his work was intended to draw attention to the unjust neglect of the communities living in the so-called "city below the hill."<sup>11</sup> The archival materials I have collected so far, however, provide tantalizingly few descriptions of his actual photographic practice, and nothing to indicate exactly when and how he first began taking photographs. The accounts I have found are second-hand, shared with me by former Griffintown community workers like Robert O'Callaghan, or recorded by the *Montreal Star* reporter Don Bell in his conversations with Marvin during the early 1970s.<sup>12</sup> "What I'm trying to do is to avoid clichés. I don't like gimmicks in photography," Marvin told Bell in 1974. "I like to show the absolute truth. I'm not looking for pretty pictures."<sup>13</sup>

In the McCord Museum's biographical notes, David Marvin is referred to as an "amateur photographer," a term generally used to describe someone who practices photography in their spare time, without professional training or employment. As far as I have been able to ascertain, he was self-taught and rarely received payment for his photographic work.<sup>14</sup> For Marvin,

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<sup>11</sup> Marvin 1970, Marvin 1975a. For more on the "City Below the Hill," see the discussion of Herbert Ames on page 33 of this thesis. Marvin mentions Ames in his own history of Griffintown (Marvin 1975). For more of Marvin's writings on Griffintown, see my discussion of the *Unity* newspaper on pages 91-93 of this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Bell 1974. Don Bell mentions that most of his conversations with David Marvin consisted of Marvin speaking while Bell wrote back to him on notebooks. The Don Bell archive at Concordia University, donated after Bell's death in 2003, includes several dozen notebooks written by Bell during his research and reporting work, but having searched them carefully, I have yet to identify any of these notebooks as being used in his conversations with Marvin. In fact, they seem largely personal in nature, including story ideas, rough drafts, and task lists, much like any writer's notebook cache.

<sup>13</sup> Bell 1975, D1.

<sup>14</sup> Bill Ewing, quoted in Bell 1975: "[Marvin] was never schooled in the genteel traditions of fine art photography." Pamela Miller, however, a former archivist at the McCord Museum, mentions that Marvin had been hired by McGill University's School of Architecture at some point in the late 1960s to conduct research on Griffintown. It is unclear whether this work may have involved taking photographs as well (conversation with Pamela Miller, January 17, 2013).

however, like many so-called “amateur” photographers, photography was no casual hobby. His daily routine, as described by former McCord archivist Pamela Miller, sounds grueling: following his nightly shift at the *Montreal Star*, Marvin walked to the McCord Museum on Sherbrooke Street, where he conducted research in the museum’s McCord family papers and other Griffintown materials from 7am until noon.<sup>15</sup> In the afternoon, he would walk for several hours, photographing various neighbourhoods across Montreal, including Griffintown, Côte-des-Neiges, Le Plateau, Ville-Marie, Pointe-Saint-Charles, and Lasalle. At the time of his death in 1975, Marvin was on the verge of presenting his first-ever solo photography exhibit at Galerie Optica, a small venue attached to the Centaur Theatre in Montréal’s Old Port.<sup>16</sup> A posthumous exhibit was launched in August 1975 instead, under the direction of Bill Ewing, then director of the gallery.

By the time Marvin managed to get off the street and find regular work as a newspaper proofreader in the 1950s, he was alcoholic and his health had been permanently damaged. Sometime in the early 1960s, he underwent surgery to remove a damaged lung, only to learn afterwards that his doctors had removed the wrong lung. The subsequent corrective surgery left Marvin with only half a lung for the remainder of his life.<sup>17</sup> In late 1974, he underwent additional surgeries to remove painful gallstones. He committed suicide on June 6, 1975 at the age of 45, a few months after learning that cancer had reappeared in his remaining half-lung.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Conversation with Pamela Miller, January 17, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> Don Bell 1975, D1.

<sup>17</sup> Conversation with John McLeod, February 10, 2015, and personal correspondence with Duncan Marvin, November 20, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Bell 1975, D1.

### *2.3 The David Marvin photographic archive*

The David Marvin photographic archive contains approximately 5771 black and white 35mm photographic negatives, four colour 35mm negatives, and nine large albums containing 617 gelatin silver prints, all of which were donated in 1978 by David Marvin's widow, Mavis Taylor Marvin ("Mrs. David Marvin"). 241 of Marvin's negatives, including the colour negatives, were donated in a slender, 100-page blue album. The remainder of the photographic negatives were received in reportedly poor condition (many of them, according to senior cataloguer Nora Hague, appeared to be "stained with red wine"), and were later cleaned, cut, and organized in storage binders by museum staff.<sup>19</sup> Some of the print album pages are blank, with 47 photographs noticeably removed, leaving behind empty photographic album corners. Some of these missing images were kept by David Marvin's son, Duncan, and were not included in the original donation.<sup>20</sup>

The curator of the Notman Photographic Archives, Stanley Triggs, met Marvin through his volunteer work at the museum in the late 1960s and later acquired Marvin's photographs for the McCord Museum because he felt they were "strong" images that provided a unique point of view of Montréal.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his tenure at the museum, Triggs worked to expand its existing image collections to include a broad range of Canadian historical photography, as well as the

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<sup>19</sup> Conversation with Nora Hague, January 30, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Personal correspondence with Duncan Marvin, January 30, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Conversation with Stanley Triggs, January 19, 2015.

work of promising local artists throughout the 1970s and 1980s, particularly documentary photographers such as David Marvin, Claire Beaugrand-Champagne, and Clara Gutsche.<sup>22</sup> The museum's official accession numbers suggest that the archive was donated in its entirety by Mavis Marvin, David Marvin's widow, in 1978. However, my interviews with Triggs, and my correspondence with David Marvin's son, Duncan, suggest that the donation may have taken place over several years and from multiple sources, between 1975 and 1982.<sup>23</sup>

In 1982, the McCord Museum received a grant to clean and catalog the negatives, from which the museum staff produced 180 corresponding sheets of contact prints.<sup>24</sup> As of 2014, only five of Marvin's nearly six thousand images have been digitized for public viewing on the McCord Museum's online gallery. Two of these photographs were displayed as architectural illustrations for the museum's extensive 2009-2010 multimedia exhibition, *Being Irish O'Quebec*, while the remaining three have been incorporated into *Montréal: Points du Vue*, a permanent exhibition on display since 2011.<sup>25</sup> Until now, no comprehensive analysis of the collection has been undertaken.

There are hundreds of historical photographs of Griffintown in the archives of the McCord Museum and other Québec heritage institutions such as the Bibliothèque et Archives

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., and personal correspondence with Duncan Marvin, November 14, 2014. Triggs could not remember the specific date (or dates) of the donation, but he could recall meeting with David Marvin several years before his death to discuss acquiring his photographs for the museum's collections.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Nora Hague, January 30, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Two additional photographs were also included, but not digitized, for display as part of the McCord's *Reveal or Conceal?* exhibition from 2008-2009. At least 24 additional images by Marvin will soon be digitized, however, for the museum's first-ever solo exhibition of Marvin's work, to take place June 12-October 18, 2015 in downtown Montreal, and of which I am co-curator, along with McCord archivist Hélène Samson.

nationales du Québec, but Marvin's photographs are unique because they document the ongoing inhabitation of Griffintown from the perspective of someone intimately familiar with its social life, at a time when the neighbourhood is often described as "dead," "destroyed," or "abandoned" by historians.<sup>26</sup> His images appear to counter these descriptions, rendering visible experiences that have so far remained overlooked in Montreal's histories.

The photographs I have chosen to present in this thesis date between 1969 and 1972, at least two years after Expo 67 and more than five years after the bulldozers arrived to clear the way for the construction of the Bonaventure Expressway.<sup>27</sup> The image selection process was challenging. The precise chronology of David Marvin's photographic negatives is unclear: the contact sheets of his negatives were prepared by McCord Museum staff using cut film strips of 2 to 7 images each. The individual strips provide a clear chronology and some context for the images they contain, but the contact sheet order of the strips themselves, however, does not necessarily (and frequently does not) reflect the original order of the frames on the 35mm film rolls. The images themselves lack fixed titles or dates, since none were provided with them on deposition; any titles or dates attributed to them since have been created by McCord Museum staff for the purposes of public exhibition.

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<sup>26</sup> Barlow 2009, Burman 2003, Driedger 2010, Hustak 2005. As recently as 2012, Wikipedia's article on Griffintown described the area in the past tense, noting it as "the former southwestern downtown part of Montreal... which existed from the 1820s until the 1960s" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Griffintown>, accessed October 4, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> All of the photographs presented in this thesis are new, digital reproductions made directly from negatives by Marilyn Aitken, the McCord Museum's staff photographer and photographic technician.

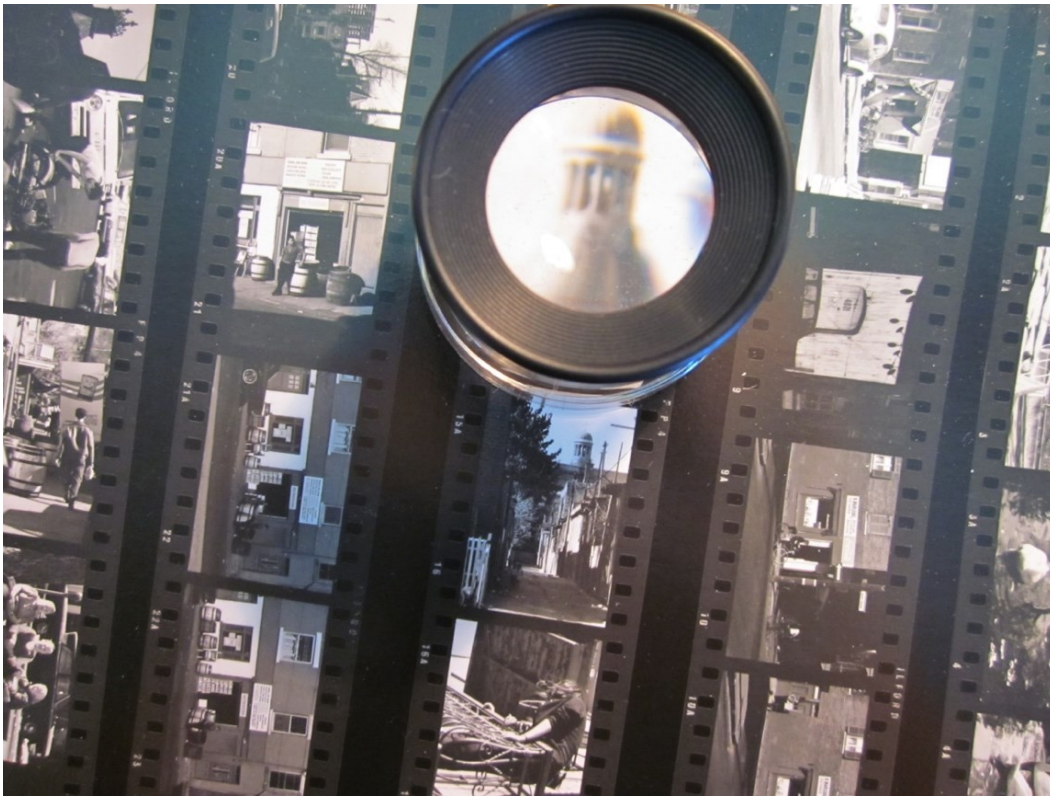
Since the vast majority of Marvin's images have yet to be digitized and relatively few of his Griffintown photographs appear within the archive's selection of prints, my examination of these images has taken place primarily through a magnifying loupe, using the original 35mm photographic negatives or the contact sheets prepared by the McCord Museum's staff during the 1980s.

Looking through a magnifying loupe is a lot like looking through a periscope: a circular, somewhat myopic point of view. The photograph comes into focus one detail at a time, often distorted, and never quite magnified enough. It was only in early 2015, during my involvement as the guest curator for an exhibition of Marvin's street photography at the McCord Museum, that I was able to view any of his images as high quality, large format reproductions and refine my selection process.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, some of the images selected were initially chosen because they were the most readily identifiable as views of Griffintown, either through the magnifying loupe or because they had been printed elsewhere in a context that tentatively identified them as belonging to Griffintown (an issue of the a community newspaper, for instance, or a photographic print in the possession of one of the individuals I interviewed in the course of my research).

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<sup>28</sup> The reasons for these constraints were both logistical and financial: all digital reproductions and enlargements for the Notman Photographic Archives must be carried out by the museum's photography technician. Currently, each image costs \$20 to reproduce for personal use and there are additional fees, per image, depending on its intended publication use. The McCord Museum hopes to eventually digitize at least part of its David Marvin collection, but its current budget cannot accommodate such an undertaking at this time.





*Figure 3. David Marvin's photographs, seen through a magnifying loupe.*

Many of the images discussed in this thesis, however, only became recognizable to me as views of Griffintown after extensive research and comparison with other archival images (including Marvin's own), as well as interviews with individuals familiar with David Marvin and the topography of the neighbourhood during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>29</sup> These interviewees include former Griffintown residents and community workers (Joanabbey Sack, Gerry Pascal, Robert O'Callaghan, Rick Battistuzi), as well as students and professors involved in the Griffintown Community Design Workshop from 1970-1972 (Joe Baker, Sandra Marshall), independent researchers (Patricia E. Nolan), McCord Museum staff members who met David

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<sup>29</sup> Approval for the interview component of my research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Communication Studies, effective February 1, 2012.

Marvin through his volunteer work in the archives (Nora Hague and Pamela Miller), and David Marvin's son, Duncan.<sup>30</sup>

### III. METHOD

My method? A kind of accretion.  
- Erin Moure, *my beloved wager*

#### *3.1 Haunting as method*

The images in the Marvin archive haunt me. But there is also a sense in which the images themselves “objectively” document a kind of collective haunting. They seem to adumbrate experiences that until now have remained hidden, quite literally, from view, and whose delayed appearance carries the potential to unsettle our understanding of Montreal's past.

I borrow the term “haunting” from Avery Gordon, who uses it to describe the ways in which the legacy of oppressive systems of power make themselves known in the present (Gordon 2008). Haunting constitutes the reappearance of events which have been suppressed in our histories, signaling the ways in which the past remains to shape and disturb the overlying order of social life.

In order to access the significance of haunting for the “sociological imagination,” as Gordon puts it, it is important to address the complex legacy of narratives, and current discursive practice, that still shapes our understanding of Griffintown and Montreal. We need

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<sup>30</sup> David Marvin's son, Duncan Marvin, reached out to me through the McCord Museum in early 2012, not long after I began my master's program at Concordia. His insights and memories of his father's work have been invaluable to this project.

to ask certain political questions, for example: what are the stakes of these narratives and how might they prevent other narratives from being told? My aim in reviewing this material is not to “set the record straight” about Griffintown, but rather to suggest how its radial path of stories forecloses some of the experiences represented in the Marvin archive—in short, to trace the very dynamic of marginalization and oppression that, according to Gordon, produces the haunting effect that I wish to explore. In this sense, the Marvin archive is also a Foucauldian archive. It is a manifold “text,” tracing the lineaments of “power,” requiring a kind of “archeology” of the “enigmatic” (Laplanche), or what Derrida called “hauntology.”<sup>31</sup> In cultural theory, this work can be related to the psychoanalytic investigation of phenomena related to the trans-generational transmission of trauma, notably described as a kind of psychoanalysis of the “crypt” (Abraham & Torok), or the “unrepresented” (Botella & Botella).<sup>32</sup>

In her seminal work on the sociological significance of haunting, Gordon makes the following statement:

... it seemed to me that haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Derrida 1995, Laplanche 1989.

<sup>32</sup> See Botella & Botella 2005, and Abraham & Torok 1994 in particular.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon 2008, xvi.

In this way, haunting constitutes the reappearance of events that have been suppressed in our histories, signaling the ways in which the past remains to shape and disturb the overlying order of social life. As Gordon explains, it is a heuristic that helps us “to understand and write evocatively about some of the ways that modern forms of dispossession, exploitation and repression concretely impact the lives of the people most affected by them and impact our shared conditions of living.”<sup>34</sup>

Haunting constitutes “one way [in which] we’re notified “that what’s been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present, messing or interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression ceaselessly directed towards us.”<sup>35</sup> It occurs when what was once oppressed can no longer be contained. It demands recognition, “a something-to-be-done,” as well as the possibility of a “livable future.”<sup>36</sup> Haunting is not the unknowable or unspeakable, but rather the reappearance of the repressed, visible at last because the structures of power that once contained them can no longer fully do so (if they ever really could). Haunting as method, according to Gordon, therefore holds a powerful emancipatory potential:

To be haunted and to write from that location, to take on the condition of what you study, is not a methodology or a consciousness you can simply adopt or adapt as a set of rules or an identity; it produces its own insights and blindnesses. Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon 2011, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon 2011, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Gordon 2011, 2.

visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.<sup>37</sup>

My understanding of haunting, like Gordon's, is informed by psychoanalysis, a field borne out of the communicative possibilities of haunting, memory, and ghosts. As Cadava, Baer, and others have compellingly argued, photography and memory, particularly how we have come to conceive of memory in the western world, share a profound and reciprocal relationship to psychoanalytic thought.<sup>38</sup> (The camera and the photographic negative in particular, for instance, have come to be one of the primary metaphors of memory).

The French psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok suggest a fluid boundary between haunting and the haunted. Their concept of the "crypt" describes a psychic gap formed within the analysand that can also manifest within the listening analyst. The crypt holds "a memory... buried without legal burial place, ... that for some reason has become unspeakable – a memory thus entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection."<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the form of haunting described by Gordon, the crypt ensures its phantom remains hidden, its existence overwritten by a fantasy that allows the subject to pretend that everything is as it was before, prior to some undisclosed trauma. The psychic crypt secures "a 'repression' before the fact" – as Gordon puts it, this conceptualization of haunting defines what "binds you not to the repetition

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon 2008, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Cadava 1997, Baer 2005, Didi-Huberman 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Abraham and Torok, 2.

of a memory... but to the repression of it.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the crypt fails to produce a *something-to-be-done*. While it is generated by the same traumatic conditions that give rise to a haunting, it cannot provide an escape from these conditions and in fact works instead to ensure their continued concealment.

Toni Morrison, whose work is repeatedly invoked in Gordon’s writings, links the act of remembering with that of writing, providing a material marker of how the events of the past continue to re-enact themselves in the present. In her essay, “The Site of Memory,” Morrison describes how she uses fiction to unearth occluded narratives:

It’s a kind of literary archeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image – on the remains – in addition to recollection to yield up a kind of truth. By “image,” of course, I don’t mean “symbol”; I simply mean “picture” and the feelings that accompany the picture.<sup>41</sup>

This method traces the outline of a cryptic trauma through the haunting remnants left in its wake, in order to imagine not only the conditions that have created it (in Morrison’s work, this involves an intimate engagement with the violent legacies of slavery and racism), but also the lived experiences of those who may or may not have survived its effects.

Contemporary trauma theory suggests that what haunts us in the wake of trauma is not just the traumatic event itself but also the delayed realization of that event (Caruth 1996). Like

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<sup>40</sup> Gordon 2011, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Morrison, 302.

photography, trauma challenges the relationship between seeing and knowing: both involve what Ulrich Baer describes as “a disorder of memory and time.”<sup>42</sup> The emergence of trauma studies over the past two decades has refocused attention on the limits of historical knowledge and the fragmentary nature of testimony (Felman and Laub 1992, LaCapra 2000, Leys 2013). The evidentiary power of the photograph and its potential as a “visual record” of disputed events has played a central role in these discussions, drawing into question the capacity of photographs to testify in the absence of, or contrary to, human witnesses (Roth 2012, Baer 2005). Recent debates regarding the ethics of representation and trauma also highlight an urgent need to reconsider the role of images in shaping our relationship to the past (Wacjman 2001, Didi-Huberman 2008, Hirsch 2009). But while the literature on trauma and photography has grown significantly, to date there has been little discussion of the ways in which photographs speak to the traumas of community displacement, challenging notions of memory and belonging in urban space (Segre 2001, Hoelscher 2008, Hirsch 2010).

As images of experiences elided in the official histories of Montréal, the Marvin photographic archive appears to be a unique and significant manifestation of the photograph’s traumatic potential for unsettling the past. Accordingly, my thesis asks two key questions: (1) How might David Marvin’s photographs allow us to witness the ways in which a city remains haunted by those excluded from its histories?; 2) As traces of unrecounted community events, can archival photographs such as Marvin’s help stage an ethical intervention into evolving narratives of urban space and belonging? While taking into account psychoanalytic accounts of

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<sup>42</sup> Baer 2005, 9.

traumatogenesis, my examination of the Marvin photographic archive follows in the spirit of Gordon's work by considering what forces could lead to the erasure of a community from historical memory, and how a photograph can be a site where these connections, these stories, are made visible.

### *3.2 Haunting in practice*

Haunting, Avery Gordon readily admits, is not a "rule book" of practices or a method of analysis that can be readily prescribed; instead, it's a paradigm intended to guide a range of possible practices that might offer "a method of knowledge production and a way of writing that could represent the damage and the haunting of the historical alternatives" to abusive systems of power.<sup>43</sup> In *Ghostly Matters*, for instance, Gordon draws upon novels, diaries, photographs, and feelings in the hope of finding alternative ways to engage with and write about the ghostly matter specific to racial capitalism, the troubled roots of psychoanalysis, and Argentina's Disappeared. Her approach is interdisciplinary by necessity, developed specifically for each haunting as she seeks a way to see beyond the disciplinary boundaries she believes have failed to account for haunting: "social life, especially when so fraught with ghosts, does not obey our rules of method and our disciplinary organization of it."<sup>44</sup>

For this reason, while haunting and the "something-to-be-done" it demands have provided both a guiding paradigm and a moral compass for this project, I have had to seek out a range of practices that might allow me to account for the surprising fact of Marvin's

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<sup>43</sup> Gordon 2008, 24.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 and 27.



photographs. I use “surprising fact” here to refer to the catalyst of abductive reasoning first proposed by the semiotician Charles Peirce and further elaborated by communications scholar Peter C. van Wyck in his chorographic investigations of atomic legacies in the Canadian North (van Wyck 2010): “... one tries to work backward. Not to build theory in order to find things to apply it to. But rather, starting with something, and then trying to figure out what state of affairs, *if* it were to be the case, would make the surprising fact less surprising.”<sup>45</sup>

Griffintown is a site of multitudinous, often contradictory stories. Accordingly, my method of research, too, has been heterogeneous, drawing upon my own observations, photographs, and field notes of Griffintown gathered between 2008-2014, as well as archival research, interviews, and literature related to Griffintown’s history and status within the urban landscape of Montreal.

To begin with, I will trace the existing landscape of stories of Griffintown through archival research and textual analysis, drawing upon published histories, municipal reports, archival photographs, newspaper articles, and contemporary real estate advertisements. Walter Benjamin, in one of his notebooks, describes memory as “not an instrument for exploring the past, but rather a medium.... of that which is experienced, just as the earth is the medium in which ancient cities lie buried. ....genuine memory must... yield an image of the person who remembers, in the same way a good archaeological report not only informs us about the strata from which its findings originate, but also gives an account of the strata which first had to be

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<sup>45</sup> van Wyck 2010, 80.

broken through.”<sup>46</sup> In tracing the historical context surrounding the viewing of Marvin’s Griffintown photographs, I will attempt to describe some of the forces that have worked to conceal, but also work towards a countermemory of the site that might account for the scenes represented in the Marvin archive.

John Berger’s call for alternative photography provided an initial methodological framework for this project which continues to resonate with Gordon’s attentiveness to the social life of ghosts.<sup>47</sup> In his essay, “Uses of Photography,” Berger argues that in order for photographs to resist hegemonic narratives of events, they must be addressed to those they depict, and be actively reincorporated into a living social memory:

For the photographer this means thinking of her or himself not so much as a reporter to the rest of the world but, rather, as a recorder for those involved in the events photographed. The distinction is crucial.<sup>48</sup>

Marvin’s efforts to document the lives of Griffintown’s residents and his attempts to reincorporate them into Montreal’s public histories suggests that his work seems to have anticipated in practice what Berger theorized as “alternative photography.” Evidence for this can be found in Marvin’s writings, which call for direct solutions to issues of housing and infrastructure in Griffintown, such as subsidized public housing, rather than charity: “Griffintown needs schools, a community centre and all the rest of a community infrastructure,” he wrote in a *Unity* editorial decrying the destruction of yet another

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin 2005, 576.

<sup>47</sup> Berger 1980.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

neighbourhood school. “What it needs is land used for housing, parks and community services.”<sup>49</sup> Marvin’s photographic practice further illustrates his integrity and ethical commitment to those he photographed, most notably his methods of communicating and sharing his images with Griffintown’s residents.

Berger conceived alternative photography as a practice that depends on both photographer and viewer to contextualize images within social memory:

Photographs are relics of the past, traces of what has happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would acquire a living context... It is just possible that photography is the prophecy of a human memory yet to be socially and politically achieved. ...The task of an alternative photography is to incorporate photography into social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of any such memory.<sup>50</sup>

In this sense, my thesis is also intended to take up, in part, the open-ended task of an alternative photography begun by Marvin more than a half-century ago.

Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s analysis of photographs of city life in Cernowitz (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine) offers but one valuable example of how photographs can reconfigure our understanding of the past.<sup>51</sup> Hirsch and Spitzer use the term “incongruous images” to describe photographs and other visual materials that convey ambiguities and disjunctions that complicate

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<sup>49</sup> Marvin 1970.

<sup>50</sup> Berger 1980, 57-58.

<sup>51</sup> Hirsch & Spitzer 2010.

our existing accounts of the past.<sup>52</sup> These images “refuse to fit expected narratives and interpretations, revealing both more and less than we expect,” challenging “the ‘before, during, and after’ timeline that . . . we have come to accept as a given.”<sup>53</sup>

Photographs, however, even incongruous ones, do not speak for themselves. Like Hirsch and Spitzer, I have relied in part on interviews with former residents and workers from Griffintown during the late 1960s and early 1970s, specifically individuals who knew David Marvin or those with whom he had collaborated on social justice projects such as *Unity*, a community newspaper published by Benedict Labre House, or the Community Design Workshop attempted in Griffintown under the guidance of McGill architect Joe Baker, projects which I will discuss in later sections of this thesis.<sup>54</sup> The stories and experiences shared with me during these interviews provide an introductory but vibrant oral history of Griffintown in the 1970s, reanimating the people and places depicted in Marvin’s photographs, contextualizing them within a still-living, if brittle, social memory.

Originally, I had hoped to uncover Marvin’s journals and photographic logs in my search, documents that would answer many of my lingering questions about his life story and photographic practice. When did he begin taking photographs, for instance? How did he come by his first camera? How did he overcome homelessness in the 1950s and find steady work again? To date, these questions remain unanswered. Two years into my research, I learned that Marvin’s personal papers and notebooks were destroyed in a basement fire less than a year after

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<sup>52</sup> Hirsch & Spitzer 2009, 20.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> For more information on the history of Benedict Labre House, see Nolan 2001.

his death. His son, Duncan Marvin, believes that among the papers lost in the fire was a completed manuscript about Griffintown by his father, as well as additional photographs, journals, photographic negatives, and autobiographical writings.<sup>55</sup>

The record of David Marvin's life, so far as I have been able to access and reconstruct it, is a confusing nexus of hints and clues. In the course of this study, I will recount some of these fragments, derived from various sources, because they have served me as reference points for my intuitions of haunting in his photographic work. Recent communication studies scholarship demonstrates the potential for this kind of fieldwork to navigate the often bewildering meeting place of landscape, theory, and story (van Wyck 2010, Kin Gagnon 2006, Bordo 2004). Biographical research also provides a helpful guide in such navigations. Indeed, when one's own research uncovers the work of an investigative predecessor—as I claim modestly for my relationship with the Marvin archive—then research can become a kind of trans-generational dialogue, or what Monika Kin Gagnon has theorized, in a felicitous, powerfully evocative phrase, as “posthumous collaboration.” Gagnon defines posthumous collaboration as “a kind of communing with the dead through the idiosyncratic materiality of their idiosyncratic archive-traces.”<sup>56</sup> In the case of the Marvin archive, these traces are both the surviving remnants of one man's life, but also the haunting remainders of a place, a community, left behind in the wake of Montreal's late modernization.

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<sup>55</sup> Personal correspondence with Duncan Marvin, January 30, 2012.

<sup>56</sup> Gagnon 2009, 23.

#### IV. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Montrealers knew Griffintown was there, somewhere.

- David Marvin, “Griffintown: a brief chronicle”

##### *4.1 Locating Griffintown (The Irish Question)*

In 1975, a few months before his death, David Marvin published an article entitled, “Griffintown: A brief chronicle.”<sup>57</sup> In this essay, Marvin argues that Griffintown had been almost entirely overlooked in previous accounts of Montreal. “It was poor,” he explains, “so little has been written about it and what was written was almost always incidental – and negligible.”<sup>58</sup> Marvin believed that the silence of the historical record reflected the ongoing marginalization of Griffintown’s residents, whose struggles for safe, affordable housing were repeatedly ignored by Montreal’s municipal leaders:

The trouble was that although Griffintown’s commerce and industry had made many people prosperous, the community itself remained static. Montrealers knew that Griffintown was there, somewhere. But they associated it mainly with St. Patrick’s Day parade rallies and stage-Irishmen... They did not seem to care that the area was poor, nor did the city government seem to pay much attention to the fact that the buildings were getting older, that the landlords were ignoring building bylaws and that the streets were in poor condition... Generally, whatever Griffintowners got, they had to get for themselves. □<sup>1</sup>

The name “Griffintown” first appears on Montreal’s maps in 1805, shortly after Mary Griffin, the wife of a local soap manufacturer, divided a parcel of land along the western edge of

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<sup>57</sup> Marvin 1975a.

<sup>58</sup> Marvin 1975a.

Montreal's port district into lots for factories and housing for workers.<sup>59</sup> Griffin had acquired the lease illegally while its current leaseholder Thomas McCord was travelling abroad. By the time McCord returned and successfully sued to recover ownership, the industrial quarter of Griffintown was already well-established. At its most expansive, the boundaries of this mixed residential-industrial neighbourhood stretched from Guy Street to rue McGill from west to east, and between Notre Dame to the north and Wellington to the south—a significant segment of central I geography.

While its shape has varied over two centuries of complex urban and cultural transformations, the neighbourhood has consistently remained in a politically marginalized state, largely neglected by those with power and authority for anything other than its exploitability and profitability. As if to suggest that this fate was socially inscribed in Griffintown from its inception, it is noteworthy that the nuns who had originally leased the land to McCord also took a cut from the fraudulent Griffin deal, pocketing a percentage of all rent she collected from the property.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Marvin 1975a, 4; Hanna 2007, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Marvin 1975a, 4.

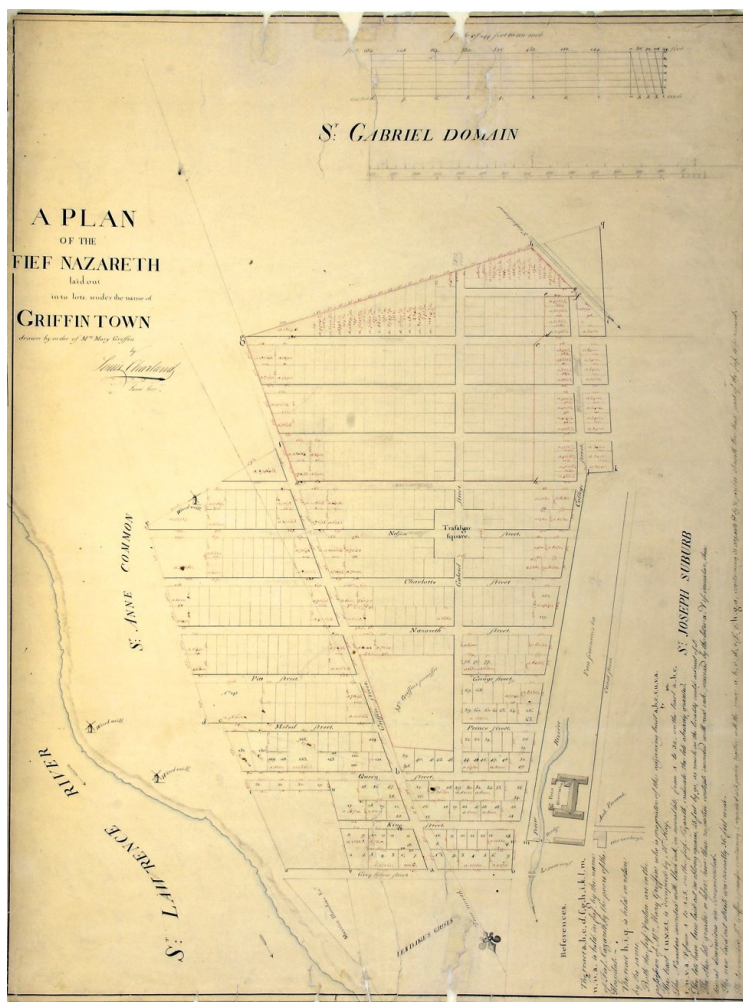


Figure 4. Plan of the Nazareth Fief (“Griffintown”) by Louis Charland, about 1804, McCord Museum, M18463.

Popular histories of Griffintown typically link the neighbourhood’s downfall with the departure of its Irish residents and the arrival of bulldozers to clear a path for the Bonaventure Expressway in the mid-1960s.<sup>61</sup> While these accounts generally overstate the Irish presence in

<sup>61</sup> Burman 2003, Burns 1998, Driedger 2010, Hustak 2005. As Hustak himself points out, however, most Irish-Canadian histories of Griffintown, including Driedger’s, ignore the gradual exodus of Irish Montrealers to the suburbs during the 1950s and 1960s: “[Driedger’s book] ends in the 1970s, about the time Driedger left Montreal, with a rather mythical account of how Griffintown disappeared. She buys into the notion that Jean Drapeau put an end to the community. In fact, the Irish abandoned the area after the war, moving up in the world to more affluent neighbourhoods long before Drapeau was elected mayor” (Hustak 2010).



Griffintown by this time, there is truth to the perception that the construction of the Bonaventure marked a grave intensification of the area's already long-standing pattern of marginalization and neglect. During the period 1964-1965, work on this new inner city highway effectively carved up the neighbourhood (not for the first time), destroying several dense blocks of industrial works and housing, as well as the remains of Collier Square and Haymarket Square.<sup>62</sup> The area to the east of the Bonaventure Expressway (from Duke to McGill Streets) became absorbed into the Old Port and continues to be referred to by that name today.

One notable exception to Griffintown's history of exploitation and neglect was Herbert Ames, a Montreal city councillor and philanthropist who commissioned the first in-depth sociological study of the city's working poor at the end of the nineteenth-century. Unusually for his time, Ames believed that poverty was an escapable social condition caused by underemployment and low wages, compounded by miserable living conditions. To substantiate his theory, he compared in-depth the working conditions and wages, family composition, overall household income, housing costs, population density, and mortality rates of "the city below the hill": the working class neighbourhoods of Montreal's industrial Southwest, along the Lachine Canal. His book, *The City Below the Hill: The Slums of Montreal*, details the squalid,

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<sup>62</sup> Hanna 2007, 8, 22, 25, 66, 84. Hanna states: "cette fois-ci vidant tous les îlots entre les rues Nazareth et Duke avec la perte de plus d'une centaine de logements et quelques usines" (Hanna 2007, 25). Earlier construction and expansion of infrastructure, including the Lachine Canal, the Grand Trunk railway, the CN railway and viaduct, the Windsor rail station, the Bonaventure rail station (both old and new), all resulted in the demolition of Griffintown spaces (including public parks, homes, and businesses) and reduced residents' access to surrounding neighbourhoods and municipal services. See also Marvin's own account of the Bonaventure Station amalgamation (Marvin 1975a, 7).

overcrowded living conditions of these areas, including Griffintown.<sup>63</sup> At the time, Montreal had one of the highest mortality rates of any major city in Europe or North America, outstripping even the infamous slums of London.<sup>64</sup> Ames' research demonstrated that Griffintown's sanitary conditions were particularly dire: in addition to low wages, high rents, and unsteady employment, only 1 in 4 homes had access to water or toilets, relying instead on communal sewage trenches Ames described as "that insanitary abomination, the out-of-door-pit-in-the-ground privy."<sup>65</sup> In 1898, Ames designed and sponsored Diamond Court, one of the earliest social housing projects in Montreal (if not North America), which featured indoor plumbing, gas lighting, a shared garden courtyard, and an on-site janitor.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, Ames was unable to convince other business owners to sponsor additional projects in Griffintown. Diamond Court was demolished in 1965, a mere decade after the death of its founder, Herbert Ames, in 1954.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *The City Below the Hill* was originally published as a series of articles in the *Montreal Star* between 1895-1896, before its publication in book form in 1897. The 1972 reprint of Ames' book by the University of Toronto Press includes a lecture given by Ames on November 22, 1897, outlining his plans for the first social housing project in Griffintown, Diamond Court.

<sup>64</sup> Ames 1972 (1897), foreword by P.F.W. Rutherford, xv.

<sup>65</sup> Ames 1972 (1897), 31. As David Marvin points out, Ames' commitment to improving Griffintown's sanitation made him the subject of public mockery when the Montreal press began referring to him as "Privy-pit Ames" (Marvin 1975a, 8).

<sup>66</sup> Marvin 1975a, 8, Ames 1972 (1897), 113 (see also Ames' blueprints on pages 108-109).

<sup>67</sup> Hanna 2007, 111. In fact, the only other attempt by an employer to invest in Griffintown workers' housing took place more than six decades after the construction of Diamond Court, when the Norton Steel Co. successfully renovated a row of Victorian-era homes on Mountain Street in 1967 (Marvin 1975a, 8).



parking lots and scrapyards able to produce higher municipal tax revenues than tenement housing.<sup>71</sup>

Michel Régnier's 1972 film *Griffintown* provides a brief glimpse into the struggles of the neighbourhood at this time, beginning with a snowy laneway in Griffintown, where McGill University architect Joe Baker and his student Ken Hampson describe the neighbourhood's marginalized status and the unreasonable living conditions endured by its dwindling population, who had begun to organize themselves demand recognition and improved living conditions. Régnier shows McGill architecture students as they brainstorm ways to revitalize Griffintown through the restoration of basic services and community housing, as well as a meeting of local residents and community workers discussing the challenges of living in the neighbourhood and the changes they hope to achieve by participating in the community initiatives introduced by Baker and his students. In spite of these efforts, several important Griffintown community spaces were demolished between 1970-1971, including two of the neighbourhood's remaining churches, St. Ann's and Ste-Hélène, the Griffintown Boy's School on Ottawa and Young streets, and St. Ann's Kindergarten on Eleanor Street.<sup>72</sup>

David Marvin's "brief chronicle" was published in the Canadian housing journal *Habitat* in early 1975, and may be the first history of Griffintown ever written.<sup>73</sup> While other histories of Montreal written before 1975 mention Griffintown in passing, Marvin's is the first to provide a coherent overview of the site's origins and development into a dense, mixed

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<sup>71</sup> Marvin 1975a, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Marvin 1975a, 8, Hanna 2007, 26.

<sup>73</sup> Marvin 1975a.

industrial and residential quarter.<sup>74</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marvin had volunteered in the McCord Museum's archives, slowly piecing together Griffintown's history from the institution's textual holdings, including the McCord family papers.<sup>75</sup>

The histories written about Griffintown since 1975 have focused primarily on the neighbourhood's Irish inhabitants, situating Griffintown as a key site (if not *the* site) of Irish history in Canada. Written by self-described members of the Irish community, these works are primarily origin myths and heroic labour narratives of the Montreal Irish and their struggles to overcome famine, epidemics, and harsh working conditions.<sup>76</sup> They seek to remedy the marginalization of Irish working-class experiences within Canadian history, particularly in Montreal, and emphasize the important contributions of "the Irish" to the building of Montreal and the Canadian nation-state.<sup>77</sup> As John Matthew Barlow points out, such memorializations relate to a desire to re-fashion Irish identity as an overlooked cornerstone of Canadian history and multicultural identity, particularly in Montreal in the wake of the failed 1995 referendum in Quebec.<sup>78</sup> Prior to this time, Barlow argues, Irish-Canadian identity had been strategically

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<sup>74</sup> See Leacock 1942 (quoted in Marvin 1975a): "... the area west of McGill Street, between the new railway and the new canal. This wretched area, whose tumbled, shabby houses mock at the wealth of Montreal, was the first of our industrial 'slums', the gift of the machine age..." (172) and "The unhappy settlement of Griffintown... built on low-land for the working class, who must take what they can get..." (209).

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Pamela Miller, former McCord Museum archivist and David Marvin's supervisor, January 17, 2013. Marvin's work for the museum is how his photographs came to be known to the McCord's photo archivist at the time, Stanley Triggs, who later requested that the photographs be donated to the McCord after David Marvin's death in June 1975 (Interview with Stanley Triggs, January 19, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> cf. Burman 2002, Driedger 2010.

<sup>77</sup> cf. Burns 1998, Doyle 2010.

<sup>78</sup> Barlow 2009, 6.

incorporated into a monolithic “Anglo-Canadian” nationalist identity, largely as a defensive response to linguistic and cultural conflicts associated with the rise of *québécois* nationalism in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>79</sup>

In 1990, seeking to rebrand the area in the hope of new commercial development, Montreal’s municipal government formally renamed the eastern half of Griffintown (between Mountain and McGill streets) “le Faubourg-des-récollets,” a name that recalled the site’s French-Canadian origins as a religious holding in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>80</sup> In response to the official renaming of the site, local priest Father Thomas McEntee rallied Griffintown’s former residents to gather for a “mass” for the ghost of Mary Gallagher, a woman murdered in her home at the corner of Murray and William Streets in 1879.<sup>81</sup> Sightings of Gallagher’s decapitated ghost, McEntee claimed, had been reported by Griffintowners every seven years after her death, with the most recent sightings taking place in 1928.<sup>82</sup> While earlier versions of the story involved fleeting, sometimes ominous ghost sightings, McEntee transformed the legend by encouraging Griffintowners to actively seek and welcome the ghost every seven years, claiming that if there were no more Irish left in Griffintown to greet her, Gallagher’s spirit would no longer find her way back to the site, instead forced to wander without a head or a home, forever.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Barlow 2009, 233.

<sup>80</sup> Sénécal, Malezieux, and Manzagol 2002, 146.

<sup>81</sup> Hustak 2005, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. and Fiske, “Leading lady in a gallery of ghosts,” Boston Globe, June 26, 2005.

[http://www.boston.com/travel/articles/2005/06/26/leading\\_lady\\_in\\_a\\_gallery\\_of\\_ghosts/](http://www.boston.com/travel/articles/2005/06/26/leading_lady_in_a_gallery_of_ghosts/)

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

By reinventing an old ghost story, McEntee rallied former residents and their families to reoccupy Griffintown's streets and symbolically reclaim the site as an Irish neighbourhood and reconnect as a community: "it's an opportunity for everyone who ever lived in Griffintown to get together for a reunion."<sup>84</sup> The renewed interest in Gallagher's ghost every seven years marked a renaissance in Griffintown's Irish history, providing an ongoing ritual through which memories of Griffintown have been collected and reimagined as part of a shared Irish-Canadian identity which emphasizes the essential role played by the Irish in the foundation of Canada and Montreal.

As much as these narratives of collective nostalgia seek to rehabilitate Montreal's Irish and working class histories, however, they also reinforce the notion that Griffintown vanished as a community during the late 1960s, as though the area could not continue to exist without its Irish inhabitants. Sharon Doyle Driedger's *An Irish Heart: How a Small Immigrant Community Shaped Canada*, for instance, concludes "with Griffintown disappearing as Montreal bulldozed streets and created highways for Expo 67."<sup>85</sup> Both Patricia Burns' *The Shamrock & the Shield: An Oral History of the Irish in Montreal* and Alan Hustak's *The Ghost of Griffintown* echo this sentiment, presenting Griffintown as a primarily Irish neighbourhood that met its end with the construction of the Bonaventure expressway and the movement of Irish working class families to the city's suburbs.<sup>86</sup> This narrative of Griffintown as the seat of Irish heritage in Montreal,

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid. This ritual has continued past McEntee's death in 2008, with the most recent "mass" taking place on June 27, 2012.

<sup>85</sup> John Doyle review, 2010: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/review-an-irish-heart-by-sharon-doyle-driedger/article4352224/>

<sup>86</sup> Burns 1998, Hustak 2005.

John Matthew Barlow argues, relies on the removal of “dissenting views”:

... in recreating Griffintown as an Irish Catholic neighbourhood, these other ethnic groups are effectively removed from the landscape, or else reduced to the background. What we are left with is a new view of Griffintown, manufactured by the Irish Catholic community of Montreal, one that is based upon the historical past, but has been carefully massaged and sanitised to serve the community’s needs today, which seem to be related to re-claiming what is regarded as the rightful place of the Irish Catholics in Montreal’s multi-cultural and multi-ethnic history and contemporary socio-cultural fabric.<sup>87</sup>

While Marvin’s “brief chronicle” may be the earliest history of Griffintown, Barlow’s doctoral dissertation provides the most extensive, critical history of community life in Griffintown yet written. Carefully tracing the repositioning of Griffintown as a cornerstone of Irish-Catholic identity, Barlow demonstrates how contemporary reimaginings of Griffintown as a cohesive and harmonious community have played an important role in resisting historical characterizations of the neighbourhood as a disposable and dangerous slum.<sup>88</sup> His focus on the Irish-Catholic community’s claims to the site, however, means that while he is critical of the exclusivity of Griffintown’s Irish-Canadian memorialization, his analysis nevertheless moves from the declaration of “the death of Griffintown” in the late 1960s directly to the nostalgic re-mythologizing of the site that begins in the early 2000s, and reinforces the narrative that Griffintown’s downfall was an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of Montreal’s urban

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<sup>87</sup> Barlow 2005, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Barlow 2009, 243.



renewal and industrial decline.<sup>89</sup>

#### *4.2 The Notman Photographic Archives*

The David Marvin archive is only one of a number of image collections located within the McCord Museum's photographic archives, which are collectively referred to as the Notman Photographic Archives. Named for the core collection of more than half a million photographs taken by William Notman and other photographers associated with the Montreal-based Notman photographic studios (1856-1935), the Notman archives were acquired by the McCord Museum in 1957 and contain a range of photographic genres, including individual and group portraits, rural and maritime landscapes, fashion, social documentary, architectural interiors and facades, staged tableaux, and industrial scenes, as well as an assortment of textual and other artifacts relating to the history of Canada and Canadian photography, particularly in Montreal and Quebec.<sup>90</sup>

The Notman Photographic Archives also contain a number of images relating to Griffintown. These images, produced between 1859 and 1935, have played a significant role in shaping the visual imaginary of Montreal's industrial corridor, including Griffintown. The most striking and recognizable image of Griffintown by Notman Studios is part of a panorama of Montreal taken from the roof of a railway power house in 1896 (Figure 6), which provides a

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<sup>89</sup> Barlow even goes so far as to suggest that "Depopulated and desolate, the Griff disappeared from the physical landscape of Montreal" (Barlow 2009, 236).

<sup>90</sup> Since the original 1957 acquisition, which took place while the McCord Museum was administered by McGill University, the Notman photographic archives have expanded to nearly two million images related to Canadian photography, with a particularly rich selection of documentary and landscape photography from Montreal.

bird's eye view of the city's waterfront from the basins of the Lachine Canal to the eastern edge of the Old Port.



*Figure 6. View of Griffintown, Notman & Son, 1896, McCord Museum, VIEW-2942.*

In 1903, William McFarlane Notman made a series of photographs of Griffintown houses, commissioned by a “Mr. Meredith.”<sup>91</sup> These black and white photographs document a selection of small, densely-built houses along Barré Street, mostly two-storey structures made

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<sup>91</sup> The reason for the commission is unclear: it seems plausible that Meredith owned buildings in Griffintown and requested the photographs as part of a survey to document and evaluate his properties.

of wood or brick with shingled roofs and unglazed, shuttered windows. In at least two cases, recent repairs appear to have been made to the buildings' roofs or siding. Residents of the homes rarely appear in the photographs, and when they do, their presence feels incidental: in one image (Figure 8), a woman leans against the windowsill on the second floor; in another, small children stand in the street near a brick shopfront, staring at the camera.<sup>92</sup> Open windows or doorways reveal only an impenetrable darkness, lending them a hollow, uninhabited feel.



*Figure 7. Houses for Mr. Meredith, 1903, McCord Museum, II-146719.*

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<sup>92</sup> Image II-146724, McCord Museum (not pictured).

As a researcher of Griffintown's history in the McCord Museum's archives with a long-standing interest in photography, David Marvin was likely well aware of the Notman images of Griffintown.<sup>93</sup> Several of the events and monuments Marvin describes in his history of the area are known through visual and textual materials found in the Notman Photographic Archives, including the Black Rock's dedication in 1859 and the historic floods that took place in Griffintown throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. What is not clear, however, is how these images may have influenced Marvin's own desire to document the neighbourhood and the lives of its residents. Marvin's images, as I will discuss in a later section of this thesis, also provide documentation of Griffintown homes, including some images that echo the lingering, claustrophobic feel of the area's streets as photographed by McFarlane Notman. Yet Marvin's archive, by contrast, contextualizes these homes within the social life of Griffintown's streets, with a distinct focus on its residents and their collective struggles to remain in the neighbourhood.

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<sup>93</sup> Without his notebooks or other direct evidence, Marvin's familiarity with the Notman photographs is difficult to determine. While I find it hard to believe that Marvin could not have been aware of the collection and the images of Griffintown it contains, the McCord Museum's senior cataloguer, Nora Hague, has suggested that the institutional divisions between textual and photographic materials in the McCord archives at that time, as well as the sheer volume of photographic images (more than 600,000), many of which were not as widely circulated in the 1970s as they are today, may have prevented Marvin from becoming familiar with them (conversation with Nora Hague, August 11, 2015).



Figure 8. Houses for Mr. Meredith, 1903, McCord Museum, II-146717.

### 4.3 From Griffintown to Condoville

If place is viewed simply as site, its 'secondary qualities' denied, then it becomes easier to destroy it; one cannot mourn what one denied ever being in existence.

- Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, *Art Works: Place*<sup>94</sup>

So far I have explored historical context of Griffintown through its popular and official histories, from its suspect origins as a mixed industrial-residential district in the early

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<sup>94</sup> Dean and Millar 2005, 20.

nineteenth-century to its postindustrial decline and supposed demise in the 1960s, to its retroactive refashioning as a cornerstone of Canadian Irish identity from the mid-1990s onward. In the following section of this thesis, I will consider how contemporary urban redevelopment on the site appropriates and resignifies the histories of Griffintown already in circulation, particularly how archival images and industrial histories are currently being used by condominium developers to rebrand the Lachine Canal, and Griffintown in particular, as an attractive heritage district. The ideological recuperation enacted by these contemporary processes of gentrification introduces yet another haunting register to the viewing of David Marvin's photographs, amplifying the dynamic of neglect and erasure that he recognized and attempted to document in his work.<sup>95</sup> At its heart, gentrification is intended to benefit someone other than an area's current inhabitants. It is a process of exclusion and replacement, whereby lower-income communities are pushed out, against their will, in order to make way for someone else – usually a 'someone else' seeking to repopulate and redevelop an area for a profit.<sup>96</sup>

In Griffintown today, new condominium developments have invoked the site's histories of working class habitation in order to craft a sense of legitimacy and connection to place, even as they contribute to the ongoing expulsion and exclusion of lower-income communities from

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<sup>95</sup> Marvin 1975a, 8; Marvin 1970.

<sup>96</sup> Sarah Schulman's definition of gentrification provides a helpful description of its social and political consequences: "To me, the literal experience of gentrification is a concrete replacement process. Physically it is an urban phenomena: the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from the central neighborhoods of cities, and their replacement by more homogenized groups. With this comes the destruction of culture and relationship, and this destruction has profound consequences for the future lives of cities" (Schulman 2012, 14).

the landscape of the neighbourhood. Le William’s marketing website, for example, deploys archival images of the Lachine Canal former industrial basins (including the Notman panorama described in the previous section of this thesis) in order to translate working-class communities into a “distressed” heritage in need of redemption – a redemption that can be achieved through the same processes of exclusion which contributed these communities’ decline.<sup>97</sup>

*Discover Griffintown*



As the first industrial district in North America, the 'Grif has long been the site of distress for Montreal's working class. Today, developments such as Le William give Griffintown a new lease of life and its destiny, transformed.

*Figure 9. Screenshot from the “History” page of Le William condominium website.*

The condominium developments promise their buyers full access to the site’s cultural heritage and environment. “With everything you do,” states Les Bassins du Nouveau Havre, “you’re taking ownership of your surroundings.”<sup>98</sup> Instead of ignoring the previous inhabitation of the site altogether, the condo developments appropriate past events into the creation of a heritage district, where working class experiences are repackaged to form the backdrop for new, wealthier inhabitants. The developers’ pitch serves as a kind of “false memory” of the past,

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.mongriffintown.com/griffintowns-history.html>

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.lesbassins.ca/en/caractere.php> (accessed July 12, 2011 - see <http://wayback.archive.org/web/20120101092645/http://www.lesbassins.ca/en/caractere.php> for a saved version)

displacing other narratives of the site's history and foreclosing the possibility of working toward alternate futures by occupying both its physical and imagined spaces. Irish narratives of survival and community are taken up as specimens for exhibition, invoked through archival images. The developments' marketing materials contrast photographs of the Griffintown's industrial period – primarily smoke-filled, bird's eye views of factory skylines and tenement roofs – with green, landscaped parkways and rooftop pools. The names and descriptions of these developments also evoke area monuments and landmarks: Le William, Canal 2, The Griff, District Griffintown. Les Bassins du Nouveau Havre, a development occupying the grounds of the Lachine's Canal's former industrial basins, takes its signage font and colour from the Farine Five Roses factory sign overlooking the Peel Basin.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes this form of gentrification as “museumification,” which begins with a staged mourning for the loss of a “real” place, thereby opening up the possibility of “converting a way of life into heritage.”<sup>99</sup> In this way, the Irish community's mourning for a “lost neighbourhood” is used to legitimize the site's refashioning as a desirable private housing development:

Heritage, in this context [of museumification], is the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct. Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life. This process reveals the political economy of display in museums and in cultural tourism more generally.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 149.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.



The promise of renewal at the site also carries a vague ecological connotation, as in the case of Le William, a new condominium development recently completed at the western edge of Griffintown. Plans for Le William emphasize the polluted legacy of industrialization and the creation of green space, while failing to provide a clear mission for environmental conservation or decontamination.

The expulsion of inner-city populations to make way for “green space” is certainly not a new phenomenon in the history of North American cities. The construction of New York City’s Central Park in 1854, for instance, relied on mass housing evictions, including the residents of Seneca Village, a thriving community of African-American freed slaves and Irish immigrants.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Halifax’s Africville residents were forced from their homes through willful municipal neglect and intimidation, including the denial of essential services and the relocation of the city’s dump to the neighbourhood, only for the site to be converted into a public park following the evictions.<sup>102</sup> Like Griffintown, Africville was demolished to make way for redevelopment, and the struggles of its inhabitants against eviction have, until recently, been largely neglected in public histories. In the case of Seneca Village, the racially-charged motivations for its demolition have, until recently, been largely concealed beneath the celebrated success and growing mythology of Central Park as an iconic, public space.<sup>103</sup>

Le William’s promotional site includes a “Neighbourhood” section, which reads:

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<sup>101</sup> Alexander 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Africville Museum, accessed May 2, 2015: <http://africvillemuseum.org/the-community-of-africville/the-story/>

<sup>103</sup> Alexander 2008; Blackmar and Rosenzweig 1993.

As the first industrial district in North America, the ‘Grif has long been the site of distress for Montreal’s working class. Today, developments such as Le William give Griffintown a new lease of life and its destiny, transformed.<sup>104</sup>

Such descriptions attempt to reduce the experience of working class communities (those who originally called the neighbourhood ‘the Griff’) to one of vague, long-lasting “distress,” while presenting a private condominium development such as Le William as a welcome relief to this legacy of suffering. (The role of large-scale redevelopment projects in contributing to working class distress, meanwhile, remains unacknowledged.) Le William is intended to be “an urban oasis,” offering “a genuine living space where nature meets city.”<sup>105</sup>



*Figure 10. The “urban oasis” imagined by Le William condominiums.<sup>106</sup>*

Accompanying these descriptions of an urban oasis are vibrant images of rooftop pools (Figure

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.mongriffintown.com/griffintowns-history.html>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.mongriffintown.com/pictures-videos.html>

10) surrounded by young, white condo dwellers in swim trunks and bikinis, and landscaped courtyards inhabited by anonymous, even spectral figures. These images, displayed in direct contrast to the sepia-toned, smog-filled factory photograph of Griffintown during its industrial heyday (Figure 9), craft a vision of a future accessible to only a select few. Notably absent from the development plans and heritage accounts are the residents who have remained in the neighbourhood since the urban renewal of the late 1960s and early 70s. For the past three decades, the neighbourhood has remained a home for a diverse array of low-income tenants: seniors who continue to live in the original tenement housing, a small housing cooperative of young families, and artists who have built studios in former industrial lofts. Until 2012, when new construction destroyed their seasonal camps, Griffintown also sheltered a sizeable homeless population who received support from Benedict Labre House, a local Catholic community organization that has operated in the area since the mid-1950s.



*Figure 11. Promotional sketch of Le William's landscaped courtyards.*

In her recent book on the links between AIDS and gentrification in New York City, Schulman writes about the gentrification not just of urban neighbourhoods, but also of social histories and activist movements, which disguises both the underlying conditions of community evictions as well as their ongoing effects. Gentrification, she argues, does not simply expel a community from its homes, but also works to erase its memory from public history.<sup>107</sup> Both gentrification and greenwashing rely on the concept of decontamination, an extension of 19<sup>th</sup>-century slum discourse, and continue to be mobilized as methods of excluding and evicting unwanted inhabitants of urban space.

In this way, Griffintown is not simply occupied in the present, but its past, too, is retold as one of inevitable decline and suffering, where “all the efforts that have been put in by the Irish community” lead to triumph in the form of private condominium development.<sup>108</sup> “If you listen closely,” one developer’s website declares, “you can hear the pulse of an environment that still tries to express its eagerness and its willingness to be. Quorum is proud to be part of the greater story of a new life, which is a promise of a place where past, present and future are the stepping stones to a brighter tomorrow.”<sup>109</sup>

In sections 4.1 through 4.3 of this thesis, I have attempted to describe the public histories of Griffintown currently circulating in Montreal that have potentially obscured other stories of the site, particularly in relation to the city’s rapid, if belated, modernization. At least four successive, and sometimes overlapping, waves of displacement have affected Griffintown:

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<sup>107</sup> Schulman 2012, 23.

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.mongriffintown.com/griffintowns-history.html>, accessed October 3, 2012.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

the site's social isolation and neglect (predicated upon theft and fraud); the evictions, both imaginative and physical, that accompanied Montréal's ambitious urban redesigns in the 1960s; the re-irishification of the neighbourhood from the early 1990s onward; and, more recently, the commodification of Griffintown's industrial working class as historical ornamentation in the promotion of the site's commercial redevelopment as a luxury residential district.

In the following section of this thesis, "Apparitions," I will begin to sift through Marvin's images themselves. What kind of photographs are they? What connections exist between Marvin's images, and how do they counter or confirm the landscape of stories I have described above? Who are these images for? Drawing on Avery Gordon's work, I will attempt to outline what kind of haunting is communicated through the Marvin archive, and how my own experiences of being haunted through my encounter with this archive might allow me to triangulate and describe the relationships between Marvin's images and the narratives told through and around Griffintown.

## V. APPARITIONS

Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us.

- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*<sup>110</sup>

History itself seems to evacuate the past, leaving behind only famous figures, events, places, statistics. Photography has acted against this tendency: it puts in front of us figures we can no longer discount, coming as if to reclaim their memory, to reach forward from the past and interfere with our perception of things.

- Clive Scott, "W.G. Sebald's Photographic Annotations"<sup>111</sup>

### 5.1 *The psychic caller*

During a visit to the McCord Museum in 2011, my conversation with one of the archivists was interrupted by a phone inquiry about Cabot Square, a public park on the western edge of downtown Montreal.<sup>112</sup> The caller identified herself as a psychic who had been a stonemason in Montreal in a past life. She was disturbed by a photograph she had seen recently of the square, which had somehow revealed what she viewed to be cataclysmic shifts in space and population in the city between her past and present lives: English people lived in Outremont now, and French in Westmount; the evangelical church at Cabot Square, she believed, had moved more than three feet in the past 200 years. She requested access to the museum's photographic archives in order to "verify" her concerns and "correct" the disorder she saw all around her. Hanging up the phone, the archivist sighed and looked at me. "Just another day at the museum."

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<sup>110</sup> Sontag 2003, 89.

<sup>111</sup> Scott 2013, 200.

<sup>112</sup> Conversation with Nora Hague, June 7, 2011.

My interest in David Marvin's photographs is not so very different from someone searching for photographic proof of past lives. In our own ways, both the psychic and I are unsettled by shifts in the landscape and community of Montreal over time, and attempting to account for and reconcile these shifts through photographs. At the same time, these photographs represent the source of our disturbance – jarred by what we “see” as out of place in these images, we struggle to make sense of what we think we know, or at least what we think we can know, about the past, and look once again to these images for validation of our obsessive hypotheses.

My first glimpse of David Marvin's photographs came when I watched *Albédo*, Jacques Leduc and Renée Roy's 1982 film, in one of the video booths of Montreal's CinéRobothèque.<sup>113</sup> It was a confusing and unexpectedly disturbing experience: the film's opening scene graphically re-enacted Marvin's suicide, followed by a rapid succession of images and storylines. While the film's voiceover narration recounted the history of Griffintown and Marvin's personal struggles on “skid row,” a parade of archival images depicting the history of Griffintown and Montreal beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries passed over the screen – etchings of the Black Rock monument, paintings of train station openings, maps of former religious fiefs, illustrations of industrial accidents, grainy film reels of newly arrived immigrants. Marvin's own photographs appeared in short bursts of black and white, amid

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<sup>113</sup> While the CinéRobothèque closed its doors in 2012, *Albédo* can now be streamed online or ordered on DVD from the NFB's website.

seemingly unrelated live action sequences – lone figures in doorways, boarded-up houses, wrecked cars, graffitied walls, graveyards, and empty storefronts.<sup>114</sup>

The storylines presented in *Albédo* include staged re-enactments of Marvin's domestic life, as well as contemporary (1982) footage of David Marvin's son – who remains unidentified onscreen - enlisting in the Canadian army, a discussion between workers at the Griffintown Horse Palace about documents from the McCord family archive, and a seemingly unrelated sequence that follows a young couple as they travel around Montreal, eventually ending up at a gallery show of Marvin's photographs. In addition, documentary footage from surgical procedures and excerpts from Denys Arcand's film *Entre chiens et loups* make an appearance. The film is saturated with symbolic meanings, sometimes to the point of incoherence. Nevertheless, without the film, I would likely never have encountered Marvin's photographic archive in the first place, or been able to trace so many threads of Marvin's life and work, many of which I later realized had been alluded to in the film, however cryptically. *Albédo* thus provides a flawed yet useful marker at the outset of this story.<sup>115</sup>

When I first set out to the McCord Museum in search of the original photographs, I hadn't expected to find an extensive archive of Montreal images. I simply wanted to know who Marvin was, where the images had come from, and to understand how the neighbourhood

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<sup>114</sup> Interestingly, despite the film's description and voiceover narration, both of which place a significant emphasis on Griffintown, most of the photographs by Marvin shown in *Albédo* appear to be taken downtown, along boulevard St-Laurent, or in the Old Port. Only a small minority of the images actually depict Griffintown per se. The photos used appear to be filmed directly from the album prints, rather than reproduced from his negatives (where the majority of Marvin's Griffintown images can be found).

<sup>115</sup> Curiously, Robert O'Callaghan even makes a brief appearance in the film, although he has no memory of participating. Email correspondence with Robert O'Callaghan, November 17, 2014.



depicted in the photographs differed from the one I had recently come to know. Sifting through the contact sheets in the archive, it gradually became clear that the collection contained a number of Griffintown images taken during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Some of these images depicted the same boarded up homes and demolition wreckage shown in the film, but I was struck by others that were of a more intimate, social nature: his subjects appeared comfortable in front of the camera and at ease with their surroundings. This was a Griffintown I had never seen before: an inhabited, animated neighbourhood, at a time when the stories I had heard claimed the site had been long since abandoned.

The neighbourhood I had been told about was “dead” from 1970 onward – its “death knell” tolled by the destruction of its community monuments and the demolitions necessitated by the construction of roadways and parking lots in anticipation of Expo 67.<sup>116</sup> It was, the stories insisted, an “abandoned” neighbourhood, a “no man’s land” at odds with the city’s postindustrial modernization.<sup>117</sup> And yet, here, in the Griffintown of Marvin’s photographs, there were figures, where no one was supposed to be (no one that mattered, anyway).

Photography’s capacity to disturb lies in part in revealing what has been there all along. What was once familiar, banal, or even cliché takes on a troubling strangeness. “The photograph’s relationship to haunting is never simple,” Gordon warns. “When photographs

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<sup>116</sup> Barlow 2009, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Barlow 2009, 7; DeWolf 2008; Gasior 2007; Gravenor 2004; Lazarus 1974. Charles Lazarus’ piece describes Griffintown (which remains conspicuously unnamed throughout) variously as a “no man’s land” between Cite du Havre and the dynamic city core,” “the deteriorating, eyesore area west of McGill and between Notre Dame and the river,” and “a landscape of obsolescence made up of old industrial plants and storefronts.”

appear in contexts of haunting, they become part of the contest between familiarity and strangeness, between hurting and healing, that the ghost is registering.”<sup>118</sup> A photograph is not the same as testimony, at least not in the usual narrative sense. Instead, it’s the *notification* that something is amiss. It makes visible and real what we might not have known was missing, leading us to question what we thought we knew about a person, an event, or a place. As “incongruous images,” Marvin’s photographs challenge the account of that Griffintown died sometime in the 1960s following its industrial decline and the exodus of the Irish community.

I suggest that Marvin’s photographs are apparitions, images becoming visible for the first time within the historical record. Wavering between the visual and the visible, such photographs “provide the evidence that a disappearance is real only when it is apparitional, only when the missing or the lost or the not there shines through, there where it might not have been expected, there in that moment of affective recognition that is distinctive to haunting.”<sup>119</sup> The term apparition is particularly useful for my discussion of Marvin’s work because it connotes something that has been obscured but is now coming to light, a return or *revenant* (a ghostly haunting by that supposed to be dead), as well as a vision of an alternate future.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Gordon 2008, 103.

<sup>119</sup> Gordon 2008, 102.

<sup>120</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *apparition* as “a sudden or dramatic appearance, esp. of a ghost or phantom; a visible ghost” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, 51). I prefer, however, the rather more poetic - if less authoritative - range of definitions for the term compiled by Wikipedia, which include: haunting; becoming visible; a sudden, remarkable, or unexpected appearance; hallucination, spectre, ghost, eidolon, or double; a futuristic or mythical vision; “an individual or object that appears to be located in two distinct places at the same instant in time.” In astronomy: “the first appearance of a star or other luminary after having been invisible or obscured.” See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/apparition> and <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/apparition>, accessed March 15, 2015 (see in particular the Wikipedia sub-entries on “Vision,” “Apparitional experience,” “Doppelganger,” and “Bilocation”).

In the previous sections of this thesis, I discussed some of the dominant narratives about Griffintown that currently circulate through official histories, popular myth, and urban redevelopment. I will now describe a selection of Marvin's Griffintown photographs and explore how they appear to unsettle or complicate the narratives I described in the previous section. As I do so, I will also begin to weave a new context for Marvin's photographs through stories that have been shared with me by former Griffintown residents familiar with David Marvin and his work.

Haunting is a social phenomenon that registers on an intimately personal level. The process of identifying images of Griffintown within David Marvin's photographic archive is in part a posthumous collaboration (grappling with David Marvin's work and his own unfulfilled desire for his images to be given a written context) but it also involves new and ongoing relationships with those he left behind. The memories and insights shared with me by those I interviewed for this project contribute significantly to the complex, radial, and often fragile context that surrounds David Marvin's work, reanimating the social life of his images and relocating them within their own lived experiences of Griffintown and Montreal.

The pages that follow present 30 views of Griffintown (and, in an exceptional case, of Griffintown residents at a community gathering outside of Montreal) reproduced from David Marvin's photographic negatives. I have chosen to present the photographs in this concentrated format because I hope to retain their collective, and potentially interconnected, evidentiary force, as well as their contradictions and gaps, in advance of my own reflections on what they make visible. The images have no explanatory captions because none were provided for them

within the archive. Instead, through a close reading of a selection of these images, I will attempt to draw out some of the correspondences, themes, and intimate details that provide insight into daily life in Griffintown at this time as well as the neighbourhood's location in the broader geography of Montreal, making visible experiences which have so far remained unaccounted for in its public histories. The images selected for closer analysis were chosen in part because they were the images that stuck with me the most; they were the images that haunted me, and the ones which often grew in significance through my ongoing conversations with former residents of the neighbourhood. These encounters will be explored in greater depth in sections 5.3 and 5.4 of this thesis, as I begin to weave together the social context that produced these images and reflect on their significance for reimagining Montréal's histories of development.

## *5.2 The photographs*



Figure 12. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2394.



Figure 13. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.3883.



Figure 14. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2530.



Figure 15. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.3373.



Figure 16. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2650.





Figure 17. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2295.



Figure 18. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2733.



Figure 19. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2740.



Figure 20. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.5333.



Figure 21. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2473.



Figure 22. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.4623.



Figure 23. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2478.



Figure 24. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2722.



Figure 25. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2216.



Figure 26. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2213.



Figure 27. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.1658.



Figure 28. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2296.



Figure 29. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2356.



Figure 30. *Untitled*, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.1728.





Figure 31. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.1736.



Figure 32. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2643.



*Figure 33. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.1716.*



*Figure 34. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.4600.*



*Figure 35. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2235.*



*Figure 36. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.4605.*



Figure 37. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2632.

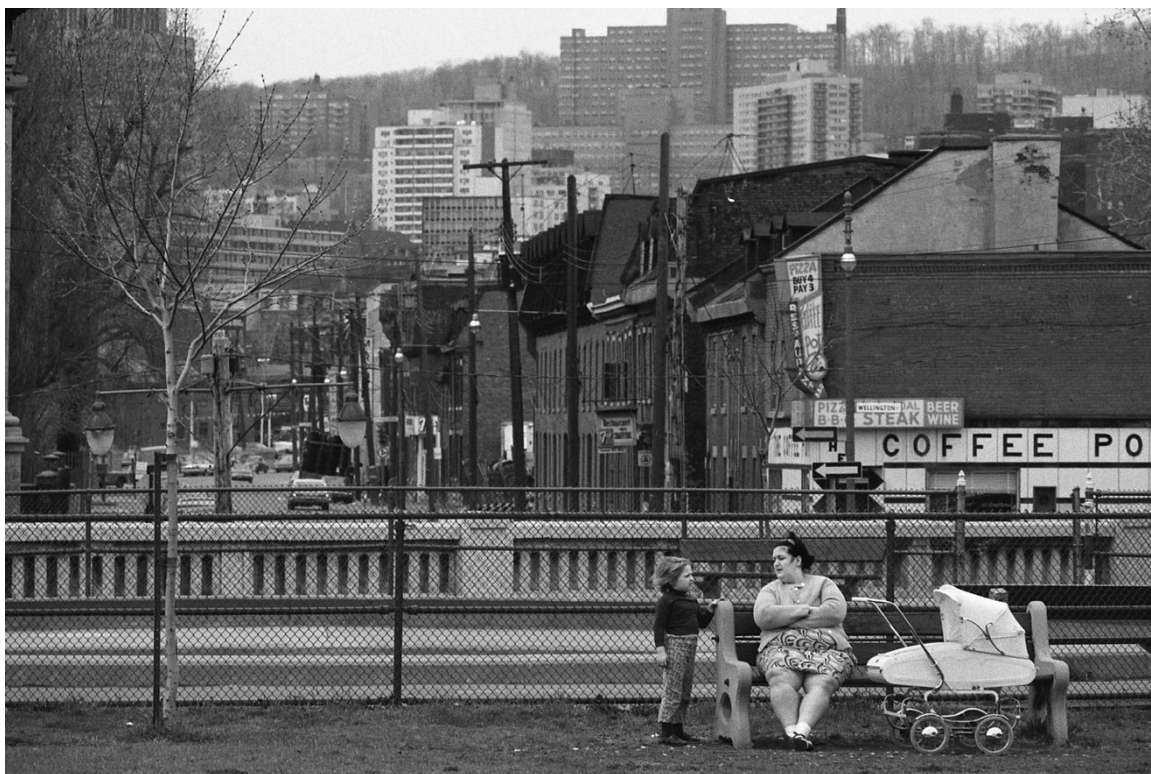


Figure 38. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.3383.



Figure 39. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.3400.



Figure 40. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.5189.



Figure 41. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.800.



Figure 42. Untitled, David W. Marvin, McCord Museum, MP-1978.186.1.2522.



### 5.3 *Blindspots*

So I resolved to start my inquiry with no more than a few photographs, the ones I was sure existed for *me*.  
Nothing to do with a corpus: only some bodies.

- Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*<sup>121</sup>

What is immediately striking about David Marvin's photographs is the point of view they convey. These are not voyeuristic images taken from the perspective of an outsider (cf. Jacob Riis), but rather, as I heard repeatedly through my interviews, the work of a fellow resident, someone who was already known to his subjects and actively involved in the community he photographed. While Marvin documented the ongoing demolition and deterioration of neighbourhood monuments and homes, he seemed to have had little interest in producing stock images of suffering associated with stereotypes of poverty and municipal neglect. Instead, his images capture what appears to be everyday life in a neighbourhood.

Even in photographs where people themselves do not appear, Marvin focuses on signs of life and habitation: clotheslines, tables set with food, graffiti, toys, and backyard gardens. His images display a remarkable level of familiarity with their subjects: most of the people who appear in his images are aware of the camera's presence, and, as the order of images on the camera rolls suggest, many of them invite him into their yards and meeting spaces where they pose for further photographs. We see elderly couples at home in their backyards or speaking in doorways; children at play in the street; a crowd of children bathing in a public pool; a man living out of a wrecked car; young students reviewing neighbourhood models with residents; a

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<sup>121</sup> Barthes 1981, 8.

woman sitting in a park with her children. Trees and weeds grow along the edges of yards and alleyways, through cracks in the asphalt and brickwork. On one strip of negatives, Marvin follows a dog for several blocks as it explores the edges of demolition sites and parking lots.

*Figure 12.* A little boy in striped trousers stands at the end of an alleyway on Ottawa Street, in the shadow of a two-storey brick house. Behind him, a figure on a road sign for street repairs echoes the leaning gesture of his small body. The alleyway is unpaved and thick, parallel tracks have been worn into the dirt. A wooden picket gate swings into the alley from the house's backyard, next to a large, leafy bush growing through the fence. The clothesline hanging from the wooden balcony on the second floor is filled with shirts, bras, and socks. One of the windows on the first floor, facing the alley, is missing a windowpane. The sightline of the photograph leads beyond the little boy, the apartment, and the alleyway and north along Eleanor Street, past a single-storey factory building, its windows opened onto the street, and a set of two-storey Victorian-era rowhouses with gabled windows. In the far background, concrete highrises line the hillside of Mount Royal.

Often, as in the photograph described above, we find ourselves looking out from within, gazing out from Griffintown toward the rest of Montreal. In one photograph (Figure 13), an older man poses for the camera on the other side of the same brick house where the young boy stands in the alleyway described above. The man leans against a graffiti-scrawled wall: “Nous sommes des citoyens du Griffintown 1- French 2 – English.”<sup>122</sup> The wall stands above an

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<sup>122</sup> There is another graffiti marking on the wall as well: “C. P L I V.” Marvin documented multiple biblical citation graffiti marks along the waterfront, many of which, according to Robert O’Callaghan, were made by Roger Valois, a Labre House regular who also appears in several of Marvin’s photographs (personal

overgrown lot filled with grass and milkweed. Behind the man, along a street lined with parked cars, thick bundles of telephone and electrical wires crisscross the sky. In the distance, the skyline is crammed with old and new construction. In both images, the older man and the small child gaze directly toward the photographer.

*Figure 37.* A small boy in baggy shorts stares at an older boy leaning on a bicycle, a big-handled cruiser with large wheels and a curved frame. The sidewalk beneath his feet is stained and patched with asphalt, and a long line of cars hugs the curbside across the street. The Dow Brewery complex and the Lowney Chocolate Factory are visible in the background. Further up the hill loom the Chateau Champlain Hotel (now the Chateau Marriott) and Place du Canada, both built in 1967.

*Figure 19.* A dog explores an overgrown lot strewn with discarded planks and litter. A small dark stain on the bottom corner of the nearby wall indicates it is the same one that appears in the “Nous somme des citoyens du Griffintown” photograph (Figure 13). Two young men, one of them on crutches, stand outside Gerry B Snack Bar, sharing a newspaper. Around the corner, a pair of small children are playing; one of them has her arms outstretched like a bird. Once again, above the two and three storey stone and brick structures, the Chateau Champlain and Place du Canada are visible in the background.

*Figure 38.* A woman sits on a bench, her arms and legs crossed, speaking to a young child standing beside her. The child, dressed in outlandishly high-waisted pants, presses its hand

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conversation with Robert O’Callaghan, November 18, 2014). If the mark in this photograph is intended to reference a biblical passage, however, the reference is not clear.

against the bench. The rowhouses behind them, on Mountain Street, were renovated in 1967 by the Norton Steel Company with support from the Society of Montreal Architects.<sup>123</sup> In the background, I can see familiar landmarks – the I General Hospital, the Mountain. At the very edge of the frame, on the far left, I just make out a sliver of the stone entranceway of St. Ann’s Church, still standing at the corner of Mountain and Wellington streets.

*Figure 23.* There’s a narrow, shingled shed of some sort against the brick wall at the back of the courtyard. The paint is wearing off the picket fencing around the edge of the yard, and some of the slats are missing from the fencing in front of the brick wall at the back. The yard is littered with broken toys, boxes, poles, and scrap wood. The front wheel of a parked bike can be seen in the far right corner, and three of the clotheslines hanging above the yard are filled with sheets, pajamas, socks, dresses, and towels – somebody clearly lives here. In the middle of the horizon, just visible between tree branches and hanging clothes, is the CIBC Tower.

The skyline of the photographs described above firmly locates Griffintown in relation to a recognizable geography of Montreal monuments and landmarks, including Mount Royal, the Chateau Champlain hotel, and the Tour de Bourse near Victoria Square. The sense of place conveyed by these images is amplified by the line of highrises visible in the distance (the Port-Royal tower of luxury apartments, constructed in 1964, being one of the most recognizable among them), which emphasize the neighbourhood’s proximity to downtown as well as the dramatic contrast in architecture and wealth between the cities above and below the hill.

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<sup>123</sup> Marvin 1975, 7.

Other images convey a palpably claustrophobic atmosphere: in Figure 20, three intersecting brick buildings close off the horizon. The tallest and most imposing of these is one is an industrial space with large glass swing windows and ventilation that formed part of the Dow Brewery complex buildings still in operation at that time. I recognize the building because it still stands today at the corner of William and Peel streets, now incorporated into the local technical college. The bottom third of the image is occupied by a low brick wall. To the right is an apartment building with balconies, partially sealed with plywood and corrugated metal siding. The lower balcony is almost entirely boarded up, leaving only two openings at one end, where a pair of clotheslines is attached to the balcony frame. On closer inspection, through the magnifying loupe, I realize someone is leaning out of a window on the balcony.

Describing the photographs in this way allows me to map them onto the city I already know, but they tell me little of what was really happening in Griffintown at this time, or how the experiences they document came to be left out of the prevailing accounts of the neighbourhood. I find it all too easy to get lost in the sentimental, poignant details: the clotheslines, the broken toys, the lone figure in the window. They're incredibly beautiful images, and often moving, but individually, they do not disturb me. What haunts me instead is the *surprising fact* of their existence and their collective evidentiary power to conjure something that otherwise I had been led to believe was never there. In order to make sense of these images and decipher what kind of haunting they conveyed, I needed to work backwards, starting from

the photographs, and speak with someone for whom these mundane details had a personal and intimate meaning.<sup>124</sup>

*Figure 16.* A small group of women and children walk south along Mountain Street, near the corner of rue Seminaire. The Five Roses factory sign is visible on the far horizon, above a dense line of rowhouses. There are oil drums stacked on the side of the road, in front of a delivery truck. The children are wearing bathing suits. The first time I viewed this photograph, it troubled me because I couldn't imagine where anyone would want to swim in Griffintown at that time. The Lachine Canal, as some of Marvin's other photographs show, was filled with junk by the late 1960s, ostensibly dumped into the water by waterfront factories.<sup>125</sup> When I showed the photograph to former Griffintown resident Robert O'Callaghan, however, he had a simple answer. "Well, they're going to the public baths, of course. There used to be one, right next to the Wellington Tunnel near the end of Mountain Street."<sup>126</sup>

A few weeks after my conversation with Robert O'Callaghan, I found an image of the public bath building while reviewing Marvin's original negatives (Figure 15).<sup>127</sup> The photograph is one of the most vibrant and populated of Marvin's images of Griffintown. In an outdoor wading pool, next to a squat stone building decorated with art deco motifs, a group of more

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<sup>124</sup> van Wyck 2010, 80.

<sup>125</sup> Battistuzzi 1970 also offers additional details of this practice.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Robert O'Callaghan, November 18, 2014.

<sup>127</sup> I hadn't seen this image earlier in my research because, as I discovered in January 2015, some forty pages' worth of negatives were missing corresponding contact sheets, which may not have been made in the first place. But I also wondered if I hadn't found the image earlier because I didn't know to look for it, and whether I would have been able to recognize it as the bath building without Robert O'Callaghan's description.

than a dozen children splash and play in the water under the watch of their adult guardians.

There are women sitting on benches behind the pool and sunbathing on the concrete. Towels and clothes are slung over the chain link fence surrounding the pool and the trees are heavy with leaves, suggesting a hot day in midsummer. A young man watches from behind the fence on the left side of the pool, sitting on a child's bicycle. The skyline of the photograph is packed with a remarkable number of iconic landmarks of downtown Montreal: the Chateau Champlain, the CIBC Tower, Place du Canada, the Marie Reine du Monde church dome, the Sun Life Building and Place Ville-Marie. Even the lookout and cross on Mount Royal are faintly visible on the hillside, if you look for them.

The pool photograph provides a surprising counterpoint to the conventional histories of Griffintown. Based on the skyline and the Renault car advertisement on Wellington Street north of the pool, the photo dates sometime between 1970 and 1972.<sup>128</sup> Gallery Square, where the pool was located, was one of two small parks remaining in Griffintown at that time where local residents could bring their children to play. The pool looks to be in good repair and the young trees near the poolside and across the street on Wellington appear to have been recently planted. If Griffintown was dying by this time, this photograph suggests that the neighbourhood's limited public spaces remained in high demand, and were curiously well cared for despite its dwindling residential population and supposed municipal neglect.

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<sup>128</sup> Renault launched the Renault 12 in North America in early 1970, with two additional Renault 12 models arriving in later 1970. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renault\\_12](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renault_12) (See "Une carrière internationale" in particular). The advertisement (translated) reads, "So comfortable, you'll want to live in it." Ironically, Griffintown's abandoned cars were often used as makeshift shelters by the area's homeless population (see also figure 34).

In January 2013, I met with Joe Baker, a retired architectural professor who founded the Community Design Workshop (CDW) program at McGill University, to discuss his recollections of the Griffintown CDW that took place from 1969-1972. I first learned about Baker's work through Michel Régnier's 1972 film *Griffintown*, in which Baker and one of his students, Ken Hampson, discuss housing conditions in the neighbourhood. The film documented some of the collaborations that took place between McGill architectural students and Griffintown residents in response to ongoing community neglect, including the renovation of a house on Barré Street to host a kindergarten and the headquarters for both the Community Design Workshop and Griffintown Citizens' Committee.

The Community Design Workshop, according to Baker, was “an experiment in teaching,” intended to offer direct support to community-led residential renewal in the late 1960s and early 70s.<sup>129</sup> Inspired by Baker's firsthand experiences of resisting unwanted development in his own neighbourhood, the Community Design Workshop was founded on the premise that in order for citizens to successfully defend their neighbourhoods, they must have access to professional architectural and urban planning services that would allow them to translate their needs into formal plans that could be offered as realistic alternatives to city planners. Baker, then a young professor at McGill University, introduced a community outreach seminar to the university's architectural program that brought students off campus and in direct contact with the citizens of neighbourhoods such as Pointe-St-Charles, lower Westmount (St Antoine), and Milton-Parc. The students conducted architectural surveys of

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<sup>129</sup> Baker 1975, 33.



existing housing stock and public buildings and communities that were unable to afford these services were given access to the advice and labour of a team of young professionals in architecture and urban planning. Under Baker's supervision, the students produced detailed reports and recommendations that prioritized the needs and voices of neighbourhood residents. In the process, students gained practical professional experience in working with real-life challenges and constraints.

By the time the Community Design Workshop arrived in Griffintown, however, Baker worried that it was already too late. The city had rezoned the area "light industrial" in 1964, making it challenging to find funding to renovate the housing stock that remained, and landlords preferred to allow buildings to crumble rather than invest in necessary repairs. The ongoing demolitions, he told me, gave the neighbourhood a desolate feeling. The growing number of rubble-strewn lots reminded him of the war-torn blocks of his childhood in post-WWII Manchester:

I lived in an area much like Griffintown. Until the Second World War, [Manchester] was quite homogenous and built up with its churches and its synagogues and its assembly rooms, and then all of that was destroyed during the war. When I saw Griffintown for the first time, and what was left of it, it seemed to me very much like what I saw after we'd been bombed.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with Joe Baker, January 24, 2013. In fact, Griffintown had been bombed, in 1944: mechanical failure caused a bomber plane to crash into six residential homes at the corner of Ottawa and Shannon streets, killing 15 people, including 10 Griffintown residents and all five members of the bomber crew. See *Montreal Gazette*, April 26, 1944.

And yet in the midst of this destruction and decay, Baker explained, Griffintown remained an inhabited neighbourhood, and its residents' desires to remain in the area were supported by motivated community workers and an active citizens' committee.

According to Baker, the Community Design Workshop (CDW) came to Griffintown at the invitation of Joanabbey Sack, a young community worker in the neighbourhood at the time. Sack had heard about the recent success of the CDW in the Lower Westmount, where local residents had compelled the provincial government to rescind its original plan to demolish housing to make way for the construction of Autoroute 720.<sup>131</sup> The citizens involved in that neighbourhood campaign had been so successful in their efforts that the highway was rerouted even after concrete foundations for the original route had already been built, which meant that the provincial government took on the additional expense of demolishing and relocating the initial construction.

Towards the end of our interview, Baker showed me an issue of *Unity*, a community newspaper he had kept from his time in Griffintown.<sup>132</sup> *Unity* was published by a team of volunteers at Benedict Labre House and functioned as a Griffintown community newspaper, providing news and commentaries on local events as well as theological discussions and other

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<sup>131</sup> Conversation with Joe Baker, January 24, 2013.

<sup>132</sup> Since my initial meeting with Baker, I have so far been able to locate a total of three articles by David Marvin, two of which were originally published in *Unity*. In each of these articles, Marvin emphasizes the plight of low-income communities in Griffintown and other downtown neighbourhoods. In particular, he speaks out against the lack of social housing and support for these groups, and what he sees as the senseless destruction of community buildings, including homes, schools, and churches, to make way for industrial yards and parking lots.

religious content.<sup>133</sup> The newspaper was modeled directly on the *Catholic Worker*, a publication edited by the American pacifist and social activist Dorothy Day, which focused on Catholic social justice and calls for direct action to combat poverty and homelessness.

Unfortunately, the existing institutional archives of the *Unity* newspaper are incomplete: Labre House no longer maintains its own archive of past issues and while a partial archive was donated by Labre House to the collections of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationale du Québec (BAnQ) in Montréal, neither institution currently has issues of the newspaper dating earlier than 1979. The issues of *Unity* that I refer to in this thesis date between 1969 and 1970. They are personal copies shared with me by Joanabbey Sack, Gerry Pascal, Joe Baker, and Patricia Nolan, an independent historian who has conducted extensive research on Labre House's history as a Catholic lay mission. These issues demonstrate the active political roles Labre House and Patricia House played in the neighbourhood during this period, including the role of the houses' community workers in establishing the Griffintown People's Association in 1970.<sup>1</sup>

In 1970, the paper documented some of the Community Design Workshop's collaborations with neighbourhood residents, including a teach-in weekend hosted by the CDW in rural Quebec during the summer of 1970. The September 1970 issue shared with me by Baker featured several photographs by David Marvin, including several of the community

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<sup>133</sup> Intriguingly, Marvin is briefly mentioned in histories of Benedict Labre House as one of the earliest contributors (and perhaps even a founding contributor) to the newspaper. See "Our Roots – Benedict Labre House" [http://www.benedictlabre.org/newsite/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=96&lang=en](http://www.benedictlabre.org/newsite/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17&Itemid=96&lang=en) Unfortunately, there are no further references to David Marvin's involvement with the paper in Labre House's own records and the current staff do not know the original source of this information.

retreat, as well as an article Marvin had written on the recent destruction of a neighbourhood school (Figure 43).



Figure 43. The front page of *Unity's* September 1970 issue.

Joanabbey Sack's diary entries about Griffintown provide additional insight into the shifting approach to community work being implemented at this time by Sack and others involved with Benedict Labre House, the CDW, and the Griffintown citizens' committee:

In 1969, the original Patricia House<sup>134</sup> was on Peel Street and was organized around giving food, and later clothing, to people in the area. But the concentration on day-to-day needs left little time to examine the roots of the problems; the need to concentrate on just surviving was preventing opportunities for growth and the simple comfort of hope. As the House evolved, I also evolved; Patricia House moved to Ottawa Street, just around the corner from Labre House, and out of the several rooms grew cooking exchanges, tutoring sessions, workshops and eventually a community-run clothing room.<sup>135</sup>

Basic services such as communal childcare offered neighbourhood parents additional time and opportunities for work, while a food bank, a soup kitchen, and a supply of donated clothing helped alleviate immediate needs. An apartment on Barré Street renovated by the CDW provided much-needed space for these frontline services, as well as a functional, drop-in headquarters for the Griffintown citizens' committee.<sup>136</sup>

Several of Marvin's photographs document the community work taking place at this time: in Figure 17, a small crowd has gathered on the corner of Eleanor and Ottawa, in front of Gerry B Snack Bar, a storefront that appears frequently in Marvin's photographs. Some of the members of the group have their arms crossed and lean their heads towards each other as though they are involved in an animated discussion. Across the street, a woman carries an overstuffed paper grocery bag with a loaf of bread balanced on top, while a small child walks behind

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<sup>134</sup> Patricia House was a sister organization to Benedict Labre House that provided support to women and families in the Griffintown area.

<sup>135</sup> Compiled from personal diary excerpts and similar reflections provided by Joanabbey Sack, originally published in Projean 2012, 36.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

her, partially hidden from view. In the foreground, a young man and woman look out on the scene with their backs to the camera, gesturing toward the street and taking notes. In Figure 24, Robert O’Callaghan, Rick Battistuzi, and Gerry Pascal stand around a backyard table covered with a map of Montreal.<sup>137</sup> Joanabbey Sack tends to something at a washstand behind the table, while a young child watches her from the back stairway of the apartment next door. Behind her, a small fence separates the yard from the stoop of the ground floor apartment. An unknown man stands at the left of the frame, near the entrance to the yard, next to a large oil barrel. In Figure 25, Sack and another woman work at the same backyard table, this time filled with lunch-making materials: sandwich bags, mugs, a cookie bag, and a blender.

These images, and the newspaper articles where they first appeared, provide glimpses of daily life in Griffintown during a period of renewed hope and neighbourhood mobilization, but they also raise further questions. If Griffintown really did “die” in the early 1970s, Marvin’s images suggest that the circumstances of the neighbourhood’s demise were more complicated than the prevailing histories would have us believe. What was at stake for the residents of the neighbourhood at this time? And what came of these attempts at community organizing and support?

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<sup>137</sup> There are also notepads, paper, mugs, camera lens cases, and a notebook on the table. The camera lens and light meter likely belong to Marvin, and it is tempting to wonder what other materials on the table may have belonged to him – the black notebook, for instance, bound by a single elastic.

#### 5.4 *Virtual uninhabitants*

For more than a hundred and fifty years Griffintown had been a place where the poor could live – or at least, survive. Now those people were being made to realize that they had no value as people. It seemed as if an empty lot littered with junk and abandoned cars could take the place of families who had lived there all their lives.

- David Marvin, “A brief chronicle of Griffintown”<sup>138</sup>

The front page of *Unity*'s spring 1970 issue (Figure 44) featured the dramatic headline “Death of a Community.”<sup>139</sup> At first glance, the article appears to confirm the prevailing historical narrative of the neighbourhood's inevitably fatal decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its author, Labre House community worker Rick Battistuzi, describes Griffintown as “just an industrial slum” marred by outdated infrastructure (“the epitome of ugliness”), trash-strewn lots, wrecked cars, and a redundant, sewage-filled canal.<sup>140</sup> Factories were shutting down, houses were being demolished, and the area was becoming increasingly desolate and depopulated. Two of Marvin's photographs accompany the headline: a rear view of wooden tenements, and the silhouette of an industrial roofline.

Yet in spite of these grim circumstances, Battistuzi continues, Griffintown remained a home to nearly 1000 residents who resisted moving out of the neighbourhood and the apartments where they had lived for so many years. While Griffintown's residents endured

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<sup>138</sup> Marvin 1975.

<sup>139</sup> *Unity*, May/June 1970 issue. A third photograph appears in the bottom of the third column on the front page. This issue was shared independently with me by both Joanabbey Sack and Rick Battistuzi, both of whom provided their own commentary on the piece. In March 2015, I met with Joanabbey, Rick, and Robert, along with Gerry Pascal, another community worker in Griffintown during David Marvin's involvement with Labre House and the Griffintown citizens' committee.

<sup>140</sup> Battistuzi, 1.

increasingly difficult living conditions, those responsible for the neighbourhood's deterioration willfully ignored its existence while continuing to use the area as a dumping ground:

This once-thriving community of Irish descendants is now the back porch to cosmopolitan Montreal and the landlords and city are not cleaning up. They're trying simply to forget about it.<sup>141</sup>

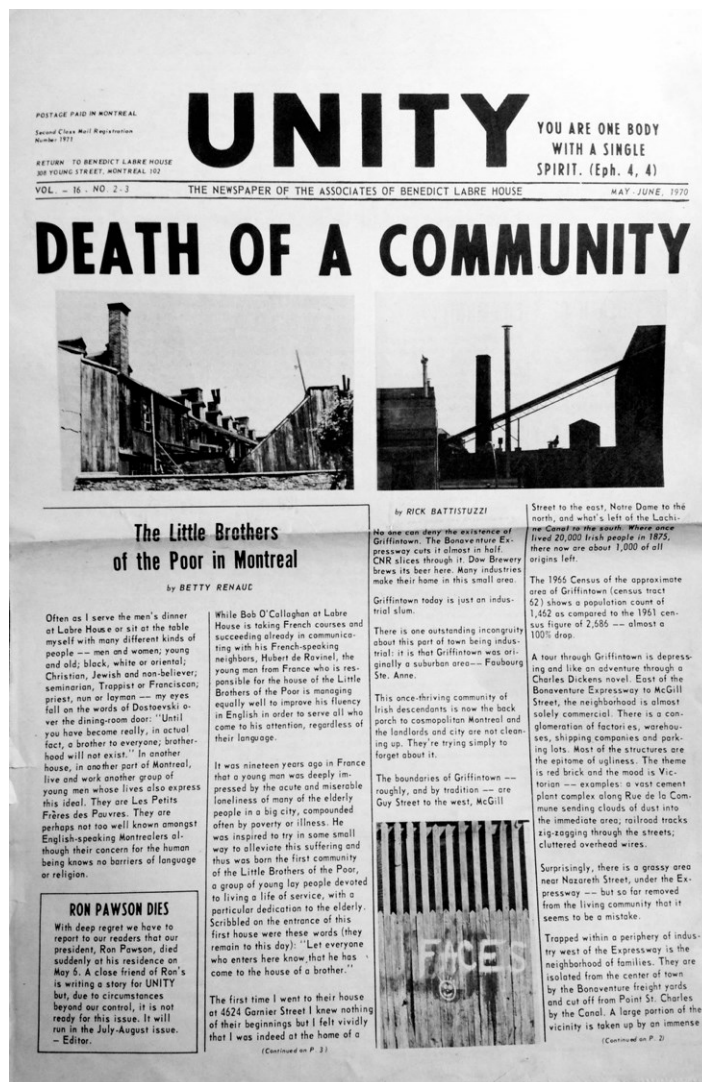


Figure 44. The cover of *Unity's* May/June 1970 issue.

<sup>141</sup> Battistuzi, 3. Several of Marvin's photographs appear to illustrate the industrial junk encroaching on Griffintown at this time: in Figure 20, for instance, shows an enormous dirt pile near the Peel Basin, surrounded by a field of debris: coils of rebar, concrete weights, cable spools, boulders, broken pallets, and a smashed up car.



Published alongside Battistuzi's article in the same issue of *Unity* was "Renewal in Griffintown," by Joanabbey Sack (O'Callaghan), a colleague and friend of Battistuzi's who was the community worker in charge of Patricia House, the sister organization to Labre House that provided food and other essentials to women and young families. In her own article, Sack details current living conditions for families as well as the active efforts of residents to improve their situation. While Sack, like Battistuzi, acknowledges the difficult, even dangerous consequences of Griffintown's ongoing neglect, she views the recent renewal efforts as a sign that the neighbourhood could still recover:

Griffintown is validly referred to as a depressed area. After buildings are torn down the lots are left vacant where the only play facilities are wrecked cars – with rusted metal often cutting the children who imagine they're out for a ride. In a Canadian book on poverty, Charles Hughes describes aptly the lives of many "poor" – "It is not that future rewards are not expected, they are simply not envisioned." That can change in Griffintown for we are beginning to envision a new surrounding for its residents. The people who now live here in slum conditions and inadequate housing are working toward a renewal project for this area.<sup>142</sup>

The front page of *Unity*'s May/June 1970 issue was not an obituary, but rather an alarm bell. The community "death" described by Battistuzi referred to the serious threat posed by municipal neglect and industrial decline in the area, and was intended as a call to action to

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<sup>142</sup> Sack (O'Callaghan) 1970, 4. Joanabbey's *Unity* articles appear under two surnames, Sack (her birth name) and O'Callaghan (her married name as of 1970). Since she uses Sack exclusively now, all articles by Joanabbey referenced in this thesis will be listed in the bibliography under her preferred surname ("Sack" rather than "O'Callaghan"), to avoid confusion and to ensure that her authorship of multiple articles is fully recognized.

municipal leaders and Labre House supporters alike. The neighbourhood's residents, meanwhile, wanted to remain in the area and participated in community actions because they believed that its destruction could still be prevented. They had begun organizing themselves to provide their own front-line services in order to carve out a liveable future.

The destruction of St. Ann's Church in early June 1970 therefore came as a bitter disappointment for Griffintown's residents. Weeks earlier, the neighbourhood citizens' committee had petitioned both the city and the Sulpician Order (who owned St Ann's) to delay the demolition and consider the residents' plans to convert the building into a community centre and social housing for seniors.<sup>143</sup> At the time, the committee remained hopeful: both the city and a church official had assured the residents that they would consider their plans.<sup>144</sup> When the bulldozers arrived without warning on June 4<sup>th</sup>, the city claimed they had been sent in error, but the demolition continued nonetheless.<sup>145</sup> More than 40 years later, Baker was visibly frustrated as he recalled the story:

It's interesting now when you read reports on that situation, if there are any reports. People say, 'The building was in bad condition and had to be destroyed,' which was not true. But that's how reports get changed... The city at that time, you had to pry information out of them, it was very difficult to get hold of. In that period, wrecking was in the air, it was going on everywhere... It was the thing to do, to demolish everything, that's what they wanted to do. And in the case of Griffintown, the designation of the area was for industrial use, not for housing, and so you couldn't

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<sup>143</sup> Marvin 1975, Régnier 1972.

<sup>144</sup> Marvin 1970.

<sup>145</sup> Marvin 1970, 4.

actually get subsidies or any idea of improvements, because they didn't want to improve it. They wanted it to be pulled down.<sup>146</sup>

A 1962 municipal evaluation of Victoriatown (more popularly known as Goose Village), a small residential quarter neighbouring Griffintown, provides a particularly vivid illustration of the cognitive dissonance at work in the city's decisions to demolish residential homes:

... we found no indications of delinquency, illness, or other issues in the area that are popularly associated with rundown areas [*zones délabrées*]. Moreover, many of the residents are recent immigrants [*nouveaux Canadiens*] who work passionately to improve their homes. A significant proportion of the residents own their own homes in what is a relatively low-income area... the current living conditions and environment make it clear that "Victoriatown" [Goose Village] is entirely unfit for habitation, and therefore the whole population should be relocated and the site completely razed and never again used for residential purposes. "Victoriatown" is an area whose state and surroundings necessitate, unequivocally, redevelopment.<sup>147</sup>

The municipal inspectors acknowledged that living conditions in Goose Village were safe, and that the area's residents took pride in maintaining their dwellings (many had even managed, in

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Joe Baker, January 24, 2013.

<sup>147</sup> Service d'urbanisme de la Ville de Montreal, quoted in Barlow 2009, 223. The translation is my own. According to *Montreal Gazette* reporter Marian Scott, contemporary newspaper accounts of the Goose Village evictions made false claims about the neighbourhood's condition that, while directly and explicitly contrary to the municipal report findings, shaped the prevailing public perception of the site and contributed to its downfall. *The Montreal Star's* account, in fact, is so close in wording to the original report yet so opposite in meaning that it is hard to believe it could be anything other than either incompetent translation or willful deception: "Close to the CNR tracks, this is an area where there is much evidence of juvenile delinquency, lawlessness, sickness and other problems so often associated in the public mind with slum areas" (Scott, "V is for Vanished," *Montreal Gazette*, July 18, 2007).

spite of their low incomes, to purchase their own homes).<sup>148</sup> The “living conditions” that ostensibly rendered Goose Village uninhabitable, however, were its conspicuously un-modern architecture, which municipal leaders deemed an “eyesore” in conflict with their aims to modernize the city’s landscape, and its prominent waterfront location, favoured by municipal officials as the future site of the Bonaventure Expressway.<sup>149</sup>

The urban transformations that swept through Montreal during the 1960s were driven in part by a desire to establish Montreal’s reputation as a thoroughly modern “World City of the first order” in advance of Expo 67.<sup>150</sup> The ambitious building programme that followed enacted both symbolic and literal forms of erasure and displacement for several of Montreal’s working class districts, including Griffintown, Goose Village, and the Faubourg à M’lasse, whose conspicuous poverty led to their condemnation as “eyesores” in need of removal.<sup>151</sup> Many

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<sup>148</sup> These homes were expropriated in advance of the evictions. The former owners were offered no more than the tax valuation of their homes, which were among the lowest in the city, and which did not include any renovations or improvements made to the properties. Even these meagre payments were unreasonably delayed, however, and in the lead up to the demolitions, residents living in expropriated homes were forced to pay rent to the city for homes they had once owned and for which they had yet to be compensated. “City officials spoke vaguely of relocating residents into public housing, but nothing came of it. *The Montreal Star* cheerfully predicted demolition would more than double land values, enabling the city to resell some of the land at a profit” (Scott 2007). As late as 1983, some twenty years after the evictions, former residents of the neighbourhood petitioned the city for permission to rebuild on the site, which remained unused since 1975 following the demolition of a stadium briefly established on the land: “ ‘Some of these people are just barely surviving. There is a need for people to get into a decent dwelling.’ ... A survey by the group shows that most of the former residents are tenants and low wage earners. Nearly two-thirds of them report annual incomes of \$15,000 or less” (Scott, “Goose Villagers fight to come home again,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 8, 1983).

<sup>149</sup> Scott 2007; Barlow 2009, 224. Barlow explains: “The discourse surrounding the term ‘slum’ construes it as a problem, something that needs to be solved. *Les rénovations urbaines* were sought as a means to solve the problems of the slum. This mindset, when it drives public policy, is almost always deleterious for the inhabitants” (Barlow 2009, 224).

<sup>150</sup> Galantay 1967; Barlow 2009, 223.

<sup>151</sup> Grenier 1967; Marvin, quoted in Bell 1975. A recent Centre d’Histoire de Montreal exhibition, *Les quartiers disparus*, on display in Montreal from 2011-2013, provided an excellent, in-depth exploration of

residents were given as little as one month's notice to vacate their homes, and in some cases were forced to accept smaller apartments for significantly higher rent, thereby intensifying their already economically vulnerable circumstances.<sup>152</sup>

The ideology of the *rénovations urbaines* central to many of these transformations evolved out of 19<sup>th</sup>-century slum discourses that viewed poverty as an environmental problem.

Griffintown was considered a slum and, as Matthew Barlow explains, “slums were areas to be diagnosed and cured of their ills (as a means of curing the ills of society as a whole).”<sup>153</sup> But while some lower income neighbourhoods such as Little Burgundy and Pointe-St-Charles received funds for social housing and renovation, Griffintown's demands remained largely ignored, in spite of the initial successes achieved by the Community Design Workshop stationed there.<sup>154</sup>

Rob Nixon argues that such nationalist narratives of progress rely on “spaces of amnesia predicated on imaginative evacuations,” in which “communities, under the banner of development, are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from a place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory.”<sup>155</sup>

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these urban transformations and neighbourhood demolitions, with a particular focus on Goose Village, the Faubourg à M'lasse, and the Red Light District. As part of the exhibition, the Centre also produced soundwalks (*baladodiffusions*) for each of these neighbourhoods, which are available to download on the museum's website:

[http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?\\_pageid=8757,129587576&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=8757,129587576&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)

<sup>152</sup> Barlow 2009, 220; Charlesbois and Linteau 2014; Scott 1983.

<sup>153</sup> Barlow 2009.

<sup>154</sup> Barlow 2009, 225, and Baker 1975.

<sup>155</sup> Nixon 2011, 153.

These expulsions produce “ghosted” communities whose existence is categorically denied because they are inconvenient or disruptive to the aims of these development narratives.

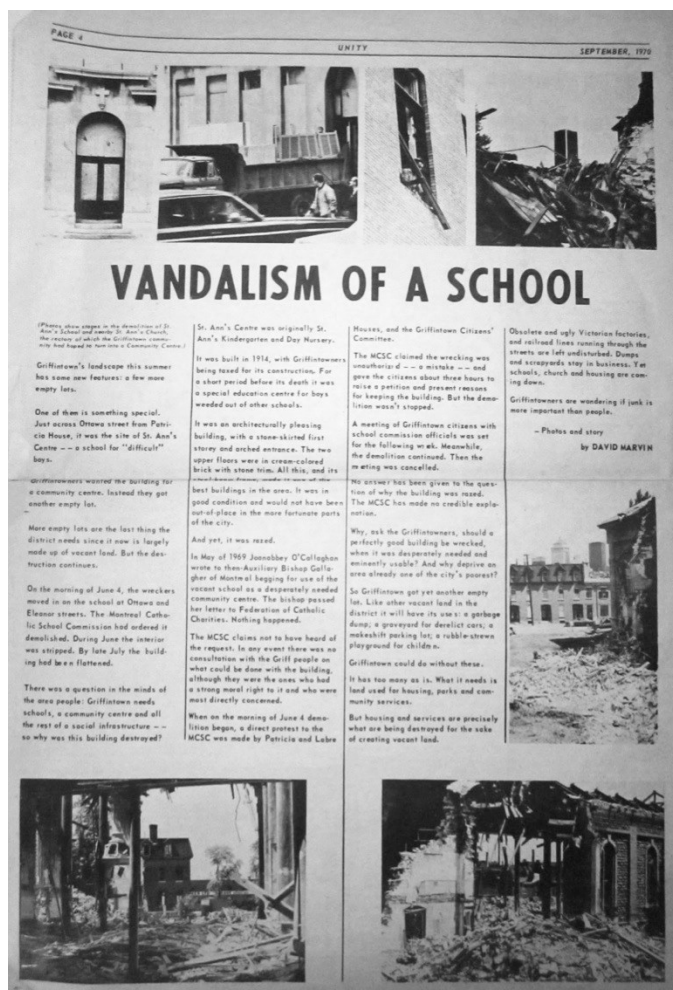


Figure 45. Article and photos by David Marvin in *Unity's* September 1970 issue.

North America's postwar deindustrialization and the ongoing globalization of industrial labour have given rise to new forms of ghosting for working class communities. It is no accident that Griffintown's historical erasure coincided with the decline of Montreal's waterfront industries, or that its reinvention as an Irish *lieu de mémoire* has been accompanied by the selective “museumification” of Canadian working class life and industrial production.

The transformation of former manufacturing spaces into heritage districts, Steven High and David Lewis argue, is directly linked to the reinforcement of progress narratives that deem the closure and demolition of factory spaces as necessary for economic and social renewal. In this way, deindustrialization is recrafted as an inevitable and organic process, carefully manicured to omit any mention of the human costs it entails, as well as the organized resistance frequently mounted by workers and their communities.<sup>156</sup>

David Marvin knew firsthand what it meant to be ghosted. At the age of 23, unemployed and destitute, he found himself living on the street with no money and no prospects. Young and deaf in 1950s Montreal, he was regularly denied work because of his deafness, no matter how menial the labour. His published reflections on this period of his life provide a harrowing record of how difficult it was for him to survive:

The social order must be rotten, I thought, when human life depends on having money or the ability to make it. I hated the social order all the more because it was an impersonal force that I couldn't go up and kick. It had shut me out simply because I wasn't a money-making factor in the economic system. Therefore, I wouldn't get a job and the means to live. All the people who denied me a job denied me the right to live. They were all my executioners.<sup>157</sup>

To become “ghosted” is a pre-requisite of haunting. It works to conceal both the harm produced by structural violence and other expressions of domination, as well as the efforts of those affected by such violence to speak out against their erasure. Rendered “virtual uninhabitants” by

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<sup>156</sup> High and Lewis 2007.

<sup>157</sup> Marvin 1975, D1.

the imaginative erasures wrought by Montreal's modernization and deindustrialization, Griffintown's residents were effectively relegated to the margins of Montreal's histories and elided from its imagined futures.<sup>158</sup>

#### 5.4 *Photographic futures*

In his reflections on photography, Barthes emphasizes the viewer's desire to discern something beyond the image, something that seems to live on. In certain contexts, I would add, this desire becomes a responsibility.

- Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Images*<sup>159</sup>

While Griffintown's Irishness has been revived and reinvented as a cornerstone of Canadian progress, the experiences of the mixed ethnic community who continued to reside in the neighbourhood long after the majority of its Irish residents left in the mid-1960s have remained little more than a footnote in Griffintown's history, used to illustrate the neighbourhood's inevitable, postindustrial failure. Matthew Barlow has argued compellingly that Griffintown's reinvention as a *lieu de mémoire* for Irish-Canadian identity and history has resulted in a limited, exclusionary view of the neighbourhood's past:

In this manufacturing of a mythologized Griffintown, dissenting views, which are oftentimes more critically reflective of the neighbourhood's history, are either completely expunged from the record, or else dealt with in a humorous manner, as if to disarm these

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<sup>158</sup> Janet Gordon, quoted in Nixon 2011, 153. Janet Gordon uses the "virtual uninhabitants" to describe her own experience of her home being described as "virtually uninhabited" in order to justify the establishment of a nuclear test site upwind from where she lived. Gordon recounted her story to Rebecca Solnit for her book, *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West*, which Nixon draws upon in his own discussion of "ghosted" and "unimagined" communities.

<sup>159</sup> Baer 2005, 144.



dissenting views. This is especially true, as I will argue here, when it comes to the Other, various ethno-linguistic or religious groups in Griffintown.<sup>160</sup>

Yet Barlow, too, forecloses the possibility of alternative accounts of the site when he concludes the following: “With Griffintown depopulated and little more than an industrial wasteland today, there is no one there to counter this careful reconstruction of the neighbourhood, nor is there anyone who can effectively challenge the Irish claim to Griffintown as a neighbourhood.”<sup>161</sup>

In this penultimate section of my thesis, I will turn briefly to a series of images within the Marvin archive that explicitly document the future of Griffintown as imagined by its residents and members of the Community Design Workshop, in order to consider how they obligate us to reimagine Griffintown’s fate and offer a countermemory to the dominant narratives currently in circulation.

*Figure 27.* The lighting in the photograph is poor, but I can still identify the site modelled in this architectural maquette on the basis of its tiny house and sharply angled streets: I recognize Wellington and Mountain, just north of the canal (the public bath building described earlier in this thesis is also visible, on the far right of the image). The maquette is remarkably detailed: great care has been taken to cut out individual windows, gables, and entryways on most of the buildings. Simple, stackable wooden blocks represent possibilities for future construction, while plain cardboard shapes stand in for existing industrial buildings. St Ann’s

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<sup>160</sup> Barlow 2005, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Barlow 2005, 16.

church is notably absent (replaced by stacks of wooden blocks) but a model of its presbytery still stands on the northwest corner of the lot, making it likely that the scene photographed (or at least the scene which the maquette is meant to represent) dates to the summer or fall of 1970.

*Figure 40.* A group stands around the maquette, gesturing toward its miniature streets and houses. Wooden blocks are scattered across its surface, and various members of the group move piles of wooden blocks into the empty spaces between model buildings. From this angle, I can see that the maquette is much larger than I had initially imagined: made of plywood, it spans at least four metres long, encompassing the area from Peel Street to somewhere near Basin Street, west of the former site of St Ann's Church. I'm surprised, however, by its relatively narrow span from north to south: little more than two blocks, from the Lachine Canal to just north of Ottawa Street. I recognize the man with the beard leaning over the far side of the table as Joe Baker, who seems to be concentrating on stacking blocks on the former site of St Ann's, aided by another figure whose hand is visible but whose face remains beyond the frame.

*Figure 41.* Two figures stand over the maquette, which in this scene is more polished and detailed than it appears in other photographs. New, large courtyards have been created by adding a series of three-storey apartment buildings to the triangular block formed by Mountain, Ottawa, and Murray Streets, while another series of apartments have been added on the site of St. Ann's at the bottom of the frame. (An earlier version of this design appeared in the form of wooden blocks in Figure 27.) Small model trees have also been added to the courtyards and alleyways behind homes. (The photograph looks more posed than many of Marvin's other

images: the scene is well-lit and both figures are neatly dressed.) The man in the hat pointing across the maquette is Léon Brault, the chairman of the Griffintown citizens' committee photographed by Marvin for the September 1970 issue of *Unity* (Figure 43, bottom left). Beside him is Sandra Marshall, then a young architecture student working for the Community Design Workshop.<sup>162</sup>

Joanabbey Sack and Robert O'Callaghan identified Figures 27 and 40, as well as several additional images on the same film strip, as scenes from a Griffintown community gathering that took place at Camp Oolhiwan, a rural acreage located several hours north of Montreal, during the summer of 1970.<sup>163</sup> When I spoke with Joe Baker about this event, he explained that the Community Design Workshop had arranged a rural retreat with Griffintown residents to determine the community's needs and discuss possible solutions:

The idea was to explain to the residents that were left what was happening and if anything could be done about the housing and so on. And it was an interesting weekend. I had a model that students had made and took it down there and we spoke about housing and the possibilities of getting the city to do something about the conditions. It was nice. The kids had a great time and they played and they were quite a bunch. It was just the one day that they were there. That led to my setting up this Community Design Workshop in the neighbourhood... [The studio was] on Barré Street [...] and that's

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<sup>162</sup> Conversation with Sandra Marshall, April 30, 2013. She could not confirm the location of this image, but it may have been taken inside an apartment on Barré Street that functioned as the CDW headquarters, where students frequently worked on architectural plans and community projects. Photographs of this space sent to me by Marshall also include a room which resembles the one which appears in Figure 41. Both this room and the maquette also appear in Michel Régnier's film, *Griffintown*.

<sup>163</sup> Conversation with Joanabbey Sack and Robert O'Callaghan, February 24, 2015.

where we set up shop. [...] There were quite a number of students involved. In total, there were about 50 students...<sup>164</sup>

During the initial meetings, residents expressed their desire for renewed infrastructure and public services. By renovating existing homes and retaining community buildings, they argued, Griffintown could eventually become a thriving residential district.

In April 2015, Patricia Nolan, a local historian of Labre House, shared with me some of her accumulated archive of Griffintown documents, including extensive documentation of the Griffintown citizens' committee and the Community Design Workshop. Among these papers was an early draft of David Marvin's own history of the neighbourhood ("A brief chronicle of Griffintown") that included additional historical details not shared in the published version, as well as a four-page history of the citizens' committee, which mentions David Marvin in its very first sentence (Figure 46, below).<sup>165</sup> In my earlier research, I had wondered whether Marvin's involvement in community activism may have been limited by his difficulties in communicating; yet here he was singled out for accompanying the citizens' committee to a meeting that took place directly with Quebec's Minister of Municipal Affairs. David Marvin's son, Duncan, also confirmed to me that his father had applied directly for grants related to his work in

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<sup>164</sup> Conversation with Joe Baker, January 24, 2013.

<sup>165</sup> I use "the published version" here to refer to the version of the chronicle that was published by the CMHC in its housing journal *Habitat*, as well as the *Montreal Star*, in 1975. I have so far been unable to confirm whether it was published in other venues, but according to Sandra Marshall, Marvin was actively looking for a collaborator to assist him with the writing of a book about Griffintown (conversation with Sandra Marshall, April 30, 2013).

Griffintown, including a substantial research grant from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.<sup>166</sup>

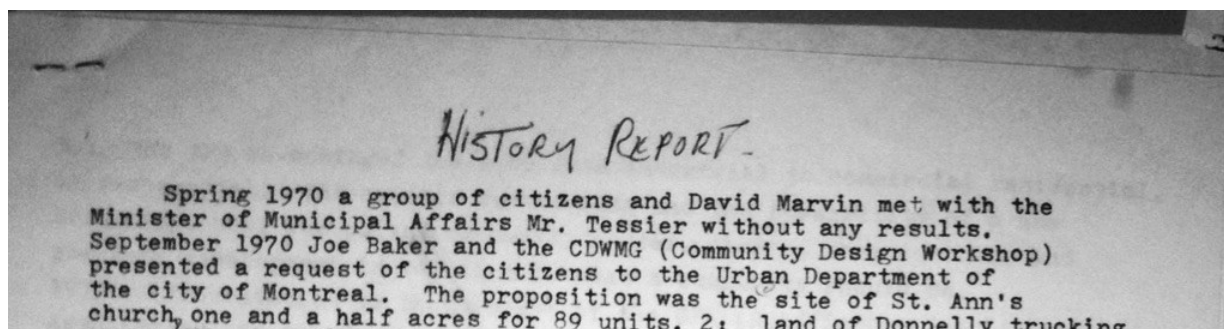


Figure 46. A history of "the Griffintown Progress Association," 1974.

More importantly, however, the document reveals additional details of the citizens' committee's aims and actions, including its proposal for 89 units of social housing on the former site of St. Ann's Church. The document also revealed that the citizens' committee of Griffintown received grants for community initiatives as late as 1972, and continued to operate as a group until at least 1974, which suggests that neighbourhood residents continued to identify as a community and advocate for their homes until at least this time.

Marvin's photographs are haunting in part because they document the possibility of events that never came to pass, providing poignant evidence of the valiant but ultimately futile efforts of area residents to revitalize their neighbourhood in the face of overwhelming municipal

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<sup>166</sup> Duncan believes that his father may have received a \$20,000 grant from the CMHC in early 1975, but the cheque remained uncashed following his death. I have contacted the CMHC for more information, but while there was a grant program in place for community research at the time, the organization did not retain full records of its finances during 1970s and could not confirm whether or not Marvin had been one of its award recipients in 1975 or even whether \$20,000 would have been a plausible award amount for an individual applicant to receive during that era. The Griffintown citizens' committee, however, did receive an organizational grant of \$20,000 from the federal government in 1972 ("Residents unite to save Griffintown," *Montreal Gazette*, July 13, 1972, C8).

neglect and economic decay. Such a reading, however, implies a narrative cohesion not inherent to the images themselves, or indeed, to Marvin's own experience, for that matter, since he took these photographs while Griffintown's fate, and his own, were still unfolding – a fact underscored by the citizens' efforts documented in Pat Nolan's archive. For instance, in retrospect we may know that the social housing projects proposed by the Griffintown citizens' committee and the CDW did not come to pass, but to seek proof of this outcome in the photographs projects a reality onto the past that did not yet exist there, inadvertently denying the possibility that things might have been (and might still be) otherwise.

Similarly, Ulrich Baer cautions that by viewing photographs as evidence of an inevitable and foregone outcome, we ignore their unique capacity to invoke both a past event as well as its indeterminate outcome:

Photographs... do not only capture the living as already dead, they do not simply freeze the past, but keep the present open to different outcomes beyond the depicted moment... Each photograph exposes us to the *very possibility of the future* rather than simply leading us to outcomes that are known from other sources.<sup>167</sup>

The ghost arises not when all hope is lost, but at a moment of renewed possibility. Gordon explains that at such a moment, “the trouble that results creates conditions that demand re-narrativization.”<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Baer 2005, 242. See also Baer 2011: “...the photograph contains these possibilities as pure potential. And this content outweighs the documentary dimension that marks this picture as evidence of a moment in the past. The photograph invokes the future and conjures possibilities, rather than refer back to a moment that is easily integrated into the narrative we know as history.”

<sup>168</sup> Gordon 2011, 3.

Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.<sup>169</sup>

Barthes uses the term *punctum* to describe a detail that affectively leads the viewer to imagine the lifeworld (the “blind field”) that extends beyond the photograph’s frame. This detail is often deeply personal and subjective, drawing upon the viewer’s own memories and desires, but it is not entirely an individual projection: “it is what I add to the photograph and what is nevertheless already there.”<sup>170</sup> The blind field and the moment of affective recognition that draws us toward it are also central to Avery Gordon’s own understanding of haunting:

The blind field and its fundamental imbrication in the visible field is what we are aiming to comprehend. The blind field is what the ghost’s arrival signals. The blind field is never named as such in the photograph... it is precisely what is pressing in from the other side of the fullness of the image displayed within the frame; the punctum only ever evokes it and the necessity of finding it.<sup>171</sup>

For Gordon, however, the notification conveyed by the ghost signals us not only to the dead and absent, but to a very real, “seething” presence that persists in the blind field, disavowed by the social conditions and conflicts whose existence depends on its continued concealment.<sup>172</sup> To

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<sup>169</sup> Gordon 2008, 22.

<sup>170</sup> Barthes 1981, 55.

<sup>171</sup> Gordon 2008, 107.

<sup>172</sup> Gordon 2011, 197.

reaffirm that the ghost is “already dead” or simply “that-has-been” (Barthes’ own term for photography’s ontological haunting) is to ignore its message and re-enact the symbolic violence that rendered it seemingly invisible in the first place.

Haunting as method asks that we turn our attention to what has persisted in the blind field and reckon with the desires of those we find there. David Marvin’s photographs confront us with the haunting presence of those left out of Montreal’s histories of modernization and post-industrial renewal, signaling a critical juncture in the formation of memory and place. Importantly, they also offer a vision of how things might yet be otherwise and demand that we work toward a liveable future. The “something-to-be-done” demanded by ghosts involves identifying and working toward the dismantlement of the repressive conditions that have produced the ghosts in the first place, but it also involves telling new stories about where we live, and how.<sup>173</sup> In writing about David Marvin’s photographs, I have attempted to connect and reanimate some of the memories, stories, and archival fragments I have encountered in my research, in order to understand how the people and places his photographs depict came to be elided from Montreal’s histories, and how these forces continue to shape the future of the city today.

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<sup>173</sup> Gordon 2008, xvi.



## VI. CONCLUSION

It is not that the pieces started to fall into place; there were just pieces.  
- Peter C. van Wyck, “An Archive of Threat”<sup>174</sup>

### 6.1 *Some lingering fragments*

This thesis has been an experiment in haunting as methodology. Early on in her book about haunting, *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon warns us that “knowing ghosts often shows up not as professional success, but as failure: the one whose writing/not writing only came together as she came together with the object, with the reality of fictions and the unrealities of the facts; the slightly mad one who kept saying, ‘There’s something in the room with us.’”<sup>175</sup> Haunting as a mode of recognition and research often involves making connections between fragmentary evidence – incomplete biographies, rumours, missing newspapers, contradictory accounts, and suggestive clues – the “flashing half-signs ordinarily overlooked until that one day when they become animated,” as Gordon puts it, “by the *immense forces of atmosphere concealed in them.*”<sup>176</sup>

Photographs are uniquely suited to investigations of haunting because they can present us with figures whose existence has otherwise been long overlooked or outright denied, enabling the moment of affective recognition necessary for producing a “something to be done.” They notify us that something is amiss, bringing into

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<sup>174</sup> van Wyck 2013, 61.

<sup>175</sup> Gordon 2008, 22.

<sup>176</sup> Gordon 2008, 204.

question the state of affairs that until now we had taken for granted. And sometimes, as Gordon's own case studies of ghosts reflect, what is missing from a photograph becomes the most powerful notification that a haunting is at work.<sup>177</sup>

Using the "surprising fact" of David Marvin's photographs as my starting point, I have sought out other traces that would allow me to reanimate the social life of his images, bringing together archival documents, historiography, and oral histories to identify and describe the people and places they depict, as well as the forces that have resulted in their displacement from both the histories and landscape of Montreal.

Conjuring the haunting aspects of social life in this way also involves "calling up and calling out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation."<sup>178</sup> In the case of the David Marvin archive, I have attempted to identify and describe the forms of social and economic violence that contribute to the ongoing displacement and attempted destruction of marginalized communities, as well as the competing stories about Griffintown that have continued to conceal these communities from view.

## *6.2 Bringing up the bodies (a plot hole)*

I opened this thesis with a story about the Black Rock because it was a visit to this stone that first led me to the David Marvin archive. It was a photograph of the Black Rock, however,

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>178</sup> Gordon 2008, 24.

which unsettled my understanding of the monument and the relationship between story, history, and image. In 2012, while searching for images of the Ancient Order of Hibernians' annual memorial march to the Black Rock, I came across a photograph (Figure 1) of what I thought was a march that took place in 1942, on the anniversary of the stone's original dedication. The more I have looked at this image, however, the more troubled my initial interpretation has become.

The photograph comes with a caption inked directly onto its surface: *PTE ST-CHARLES ... CEREMONY 1942 NEAR THE BLACK ROCK*. The clouds look low and rainy – some of the spectators crowded around the stone carry umbrellas, and most are bundled in long, heavy coats. The skyline is thick with low-slung wires and telephone poles. I recognize the railway embankment to the left, but to the right there's an unfamiliar cluster of residential buildings, and what appears to be a large white wall or billboard. In the distant horizon, there are freight trucks parked along the road. Someone has helpfully scribbled in an arrow above the Black Rock: *look here*. The arrow clearly marks the stone as the focus of this image, but it's hard to distinguish it from the smudgy grey horizon – my eyes are drawn instead to the large, black pit dominating the foreground. A crowd has gathered alarmingly close to the edge, some of them standing with their backs to the hole, mere footsteps from falling. The sides of the pit are lined with what look like sandbags, or stones. To the right, a thin line of spectators, mostly small children, are held back by a long, thick rope.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> The longer I stare at this scene, the more it resembles a large ship – the Black Rock becomes the prow, the wrought iron fences become railings, the pit leads down into the hold below. Montreal's own Sutton Hoo.

If the caption of this photograph is accurate, the scene photographed takes place in 1942, nearly a century after the 1859 memorial described on the stone. According to the story I'd often heard about the Black Rock, it was meant to preserve a mass grave in the aftermath of its unexpected discovery.<sup>180</sup> But according to the research of historian Colin McMahon, a monument had been established at the Victoria Bridge well before 1859, and its presence was a daily reminder to bridge workers that they worked on a site that was intended to remain buried. Many of the workers were even housed in the same buildings where the typhus victims had died:

As many as five hundred English and Irish workers even took up residence next to the mass graves in the fever sheds which Peto, Brassey and Betts, the British firm responsible for building the bridge, had converted into housing. If these formerly febrile environs were not unsettling enough, the presence of 'a small mound and a cross' outside their doors would have served as a further reminder that they lived and worked at a "sacred spot."<sup>181</sup>

The workers, already well aware of the site's history, McMahon argues, grew increasingly uneasy working on a burial site.<sup>182</sup> To appease the workers, the construction firm eventually agreed to oversee the dedication of a more permanent monument once bridge construction was

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<sup>180</sup> This version of the Black Rock story is frequently retold in public by representatives from Irish community organizations, most recently by Fergus Keyes of the Montreal Irish Monument Park Foundation on Global News on March 19, 2015: <http://globalnews.ca/video/1886995/montreal-irish-monument-park>

<sup>181</sup> McMahon 2007, 51.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

completed at the site.<sup>183</sup> It was not the discovery of human remains (the “bones” so often described in the origin stories of the Black Rock), therefore, which had led to the monument, but rather the workers’ desire for visible and lasting recognition of a tragedy whose consequences continued to shape their daily lives.

The workers who demanded the 1859 monument fully believed in the existence of a mass grave somewhere near the Black Rock site, but there is no evidence to suggest they ever uncovered any burials themselves.<sup>184</sup> In fact, as McMahon’s work demonstrates, the monument was intended to prevent such a desecration. Proof of a gravesite, however, became urgent in 1898, when the Grand Trunk Railway petitioned to buy the land around the monument for the construction of new train tracks, arguing that there had never been a mass burial near the Victoria Bridge in the first place.<sup>185</sup> Irish Catholic organizations were incensed by the proposal to remove what they saw to be a “a holy and righteous object.”<sup>186</sup> The Anglican Church, however, while it remained reluctant to sell an established community memorial, shared the Railway’s skepticism:

There seems to be a mistaken impression in the minds of many that the six thousand unfortunate immigrants were buried in the plot about the monument. This is not the

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. Furthermore, while the majority of the typhus victims were reportedly Irish Catholics, Catholic clergy were not invited to participate in the monument’s dedication - the Anglican Church presided over the memorial ceremony instead, and were given ownership of the land by Thomas Brassey, one of the partners behind the construction firm. As a visiting Irish priest later observed, there is no mention of “Irish” anywhere on the monument itself.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> McMahon 2007, 51.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*: Not all Irish Catholics, however, were in agreement – some felt that the burials should be moved to the Catholic cemetery on Mount Royal, while others believed that the monument should be relocated closer to the Irish community in Griffintown.

case, and it is very doubtful whether any of the victims of the epidemic were buried in that particular spot. As a matter of fact they were buried all over the Point [Pointe-St-Charles]. The monument was raised by the workmen engaged in the construction of the Victoria Bridge, out of the goodness of their hearts, to record a fact, and not to mark a sepulcher.<sup>187</sup>

The Anglican Church ordered small test pits to be dug around the monument for evidence of human remains - the excavator, however, recovered only a few small dog bones.<sup>188</sup> Debate over the monument's legitimacy continued until 1913, when the Railway agreed to pay \$6000 for use of the land surrounding the monument, on the condition that the monument itself remain protected within a designated area.<sup>189</sup> By this time, the Black Rock had already been moved twice, including a stint of nearly ten years at St. Patrick's Square on the edge of Griffintown.<sup>190</sup>

When workers uncovered bodies while constructing the Wellington Bridge Tunnel in 1942, Irish Catholic organizations insisted that this, at last, was proof that the area surrounding the Black Rock was a burial ground – and perhaps it was also the event which introduced an “accidental discovery” into the Black Rock's mythology:

Over the course of a month, workers inadvertently disinterred “coffins of rotting pine wood, blackened by time,” holding the remains of twelve individuals who had been buried in 1847 in “a long trench-like grave at the foot of Bridge Street”.... The discovery was also a vindication for those who had long argued that the Ship Fever monument stood on hallowed ground.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> “Preserve the monument,” *Montreal Daily Star*, 30 November 1898, 10.

<sup>188</sup> McMahon 2007, 51.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

The coffins were so important to certifying Irish Catholic claims to the Black Rock's meaning that they were reburied under the monument after the fact, as proof that it was a legitimate burial marker.<sup>192</sup>

What comes first, the story or the photograph? As a tombstone that precedes the arrival of bodies, the Black Rock provides both a metaphor and a monument to the competing stories of place surrounding Griffintown. The 1942 photograph of the Black Rock introduces a hole into the site of these stories, leading us into their gaps and contradictions and allowing us to witness the difficulty of matching physical terrain with human memory (there were bodies here, we just don't know where).

In writing this thesis, I have looked to David Marvin's photographs in search of traces of inhabitation and belonging that linger in the wake of urban change, particularly those changes brought about by municipal neglect and exclusion, displacement, eviction, and gentrification. In doing so, my thesis contributes to a larger, emerging body of work concerned with the legacies of modernism, de-industrialization, and working class life in Montreal (for instance, Barlow 2009, Fennario 2005, Hammond 2008, High and Lewis 2007). While David Marvin's photographs alone cannot "tell" the story of Griffintown, they nevertheless complicate the prevailing narrative of the neighbourhood's decline by documenting not only its ongoing habitation, but also the willful desires and resistance of its residents.

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<sup>192</sup> It begs a number of questions, however, such as: how do they know for certain that these are victims from the same typhus outbreak? How big, exactly, is this mass grave? Where are all the other bodies? Under the Costco?

To accept the prevailing narrative that Griffintown quietly died at the end of the 1960s is to deny the neighbourhood's continuous inhabitation, however precarious, well into the 1970s, as well as the ongoing resistance to erasure and eviction mounted by the area's residents. What happened to Griffintown was not inevitable, nor was it an isolated incident. The ghosting of Montreal's neighbourhoods was part of a concerted programme of displacement and redevelopment that affected the city's waterfront working class communities, depriving some of the city's poorest residents of their homes in the name of large-scale modernization and renewal.

### *6.3 Future research directions*

C'est toujours la même chanson. Les maisons qui n'ont pas eu le temps de vieillir, on les démolit avant d'apprendre à les aimer, avant d'en faire une histoire, de peur que quelqu'un ne s'avise d'en garder souvenir. Rien n'est plus inquiétant que la mémoire. Rien n'est plus troublant qu'un lieu qui signifie quelque chose. Rien n'est plus dangereux qu'un quartier.

- Pierre Perrault, "Imageries sur ma ville," 1965<sup>193</sup>

The photographs I have examined in this thesis are only a small selection of the six thousand images found in the David Marvin photographic archive. Griffintown, while clearly a place of great personal and ethical importance to Marvin, was but one of several sites he documented in and around Montreal, including the neighbourhoods of Cote-des-Neiges, Lachine, Ville-Marie, and Le Plateau. I intend to continue my investigation of this image collection over the coming years, while expanding the scope of my project to include other

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<sup>193</sup> Perrault 2009, 197.



photographic collections, private and institutional, that document the urban transformations necessitated by the *rénovations urbains* from the perspective of local residents.<sup>194</sup> The popularity of the Centre d'Histoire de Montreal's recent exhibition, *Les quartiers disparus*, demonstrates a clear demand and interest in the urban transformations and neighbourhood demolitions of this era, and I am curious to locate additional documentary archives that might shed light on the community responses to development at the time.<sup>195</sup> The issues of *Unity* which I have compiled so far in my research are also worthy of closer attention, particularly given their potential as a rich resource of the community-led activism and social services emerging in Montreal at the time.<sup>196</sup>

David Marvin's images of Griffintown are potentially traumatic photographs. Not because the scenes they depict are inherently shocking or violent, but because they trouble the accepted structure of memory and history through which Montreal's narratives of place and identity have been drawn thus far. Certain photographs, Ulrich Baer has argued, are traumatic

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<sup>194</sup> Some of this expanded research is already underway: portions of my initial explorations of Marvin's street photography, for instance, have been incorporated into an outdoor photography exhibit taking place in Montreal during the summer of 2015. *David W. Marvin: Street Chronicles, 1965-1975* will be the McCord Museum's first-ever solo exhibition of Marvin's work. I am curious to learn how Marvin's photographs will be received by the general public and whether or not they may provoke renewed conversations about the urban transformations that took place in Montreal during this period.

<sup>195</sup> *Les quartiers disparus* featured surveyor photographs primarily from the Ville de Montreal archives, which documented various neighbourhood homes and business prior to demolition. These photographs often included the residents of these homes, who were unaware of the purpose of the photographs and were provided with minimal notice of eviction when the demolitions were formally announced. These images were contrasted to great haunting effect by the incorporation of an impressive array of oral history interviews with former residents, as well as archival television footage, newspaper articles, and excerpts from poet Pierre Perrault's *J'habite une ville* series, originally broadcast on Radio-Canada in 1963.

<sup>196</sup> Additional examples of this community service model include NDG's Head & Hands and the Pointe St-Charles Community Medical Clinic, both of which continue to provide frontline social and medical services to this day.

because they depict a reality unaccounted for in known histories, attaining their meaning “only in retrospect.”<sup>197</sup> As images of experiences elided in the official histories of Montreal, the David Marvin photographic archive appears to be a unique and significant manifestation of the residential displacements necessitated by Expo 67 and the photograph’s traumatic potential for unsettling the past. My future research will examine the traumatic potential of archival images in greater depth, and take a closer look at how the Marvin archive in particular comes to haunt, retroactively, the futuristic visions of Expo 67. To date, there has been relatively little discussion of the ways in which photographs speak to the traumas of community displacement. In examining the Marvin archive in relation to the official narrative of Expo 67, I hope that my future research may reveal how the delayed evidentiary force of certain archival photographs can challenge and reshape public memory, further complicating the prevailing narratives of development in North American cities such as Montreal which experienced large-scale and often contentious urban transformations in the postwar period.

The Marvin archive registers forms of haunting which I was not able to address within the scope of this thesis. While most of the archive features street scenes of Griffintown and other urban neighbourhoods, for instance, the collection also contains family portraits, including several photographs taken within Marvin’s family home. These ostensibly domestic scenes provide additional insights into the social life and constraints surrounding the production and viewing of Marvin’s photography that would benefit from future research, including the

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<sup>197</sup> Baer 2005, 181.

historical and gendered ways that documentary photographs have been used to construct and reinforce public notions of private life.

Recent proposals for large-scale redevelopment in traditionally working class, low-income neighbourhoods such as Parc-Extension and St-Henri demonstrate the continued relevance and urgency of challenging contemporary narratives of urban life, as low-income residents continue to be pushed out of urban centres through gentrification and other forms of municipal redevelopment.<sup>198</sup> What is at stake is not simply how we remember the past, or the acknowledgment of overlooked historical experiences, but rather the outcome of an ongoing process of exclusion, displacement, and erasure that continues to shape our cities in the present.

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<sup>198</sup> See [spacing.ca/montreal/2011/02/24/universite-de-montreal-expansion-raises-concerns-in-parc-extension/](http://spacing.ca/montreal/2011/02/24/universite-de-montreal-expansion-raises-concerns-in-parc-extension/) and [http://www.mcgill.ca/urbanplanning/files/urbanplanning/residents\\_experiences\\_of\\_displacement.pdf](http://www.mcgill.ca/urbanplanning/files/urbanplanning/residents_experiences_of_displacement.pdf) for further discussion of controversial development in these areas.

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