

Last Dance on the Main

An animated documentary on the demolition of a row of historic buildings on Montreal's St Laurent boulevard, also known as 'The Main', by politicians and building developers, and the resistance put up by the burlesque artists and local community.



Last Dance on the Main: Research of traces lost.



“Historic buildings saved by burlesque performers?”, I thought, after reading about it on a Heritage Montreal post, and after seeing a youtube video featuring local cultural historian Louis Rastelli and activist/actor Donovan King lamenting the loss of the Main's architectural heritage.

To my mind, it was the perfect idea for an animated documentary on architecture, urbanism, people's empowerment, Montreal and the invincible spirit of celebration!

Visiting the Lower Main

The Lower Main is a colloquial name for the southern part of St Lawrence (St Laurent) boulevard. The site in question is just south of the corner of St Catherine street. I soon visited the crossroad where developers had already gone ahead with demolishing a series of 19th century heritage buildings with the blessings of the municipal and provincial authorities.



Visiting the Lower Main

An entire row of 19th century greystone buildings were gone. There was promise that they would be reassembled and part of a mid rise glass tower for Hydro Quebec and that the area would be revamped and “upgraded”.



Visiting the Lower Main

Architectural detail from one of the dismantled buildings on the west side of the Lower Main.



Visiting the Lower Main

The buildings that remain on either end of the empty site are the Theatre National, a national heritage site that could not be demolished, and Cafe Cleopatre, currently a striptease club but also a burlesque theatre venue on the second floor, housed there since it was built. The latter's owner and artists resisted expropriation.



Visiting the Lower Main

A few days before the municipal elections, Tuesday, October 1, 2013, candidates Richard Bergeron, Denis Coderre, Marcel Côté and Mélanie Joly present their platform on Montreal's culture at a public event at Club Soda. Questions were repeatedly raised regarding the safeguarding of the heritage buildings across the street but answers remained, typically, vague.



Visiting the Lower Main

The burlesque scene.



Applying Ideas

The Dancers Scene



Preliminary sketch - Animatic

Final Film



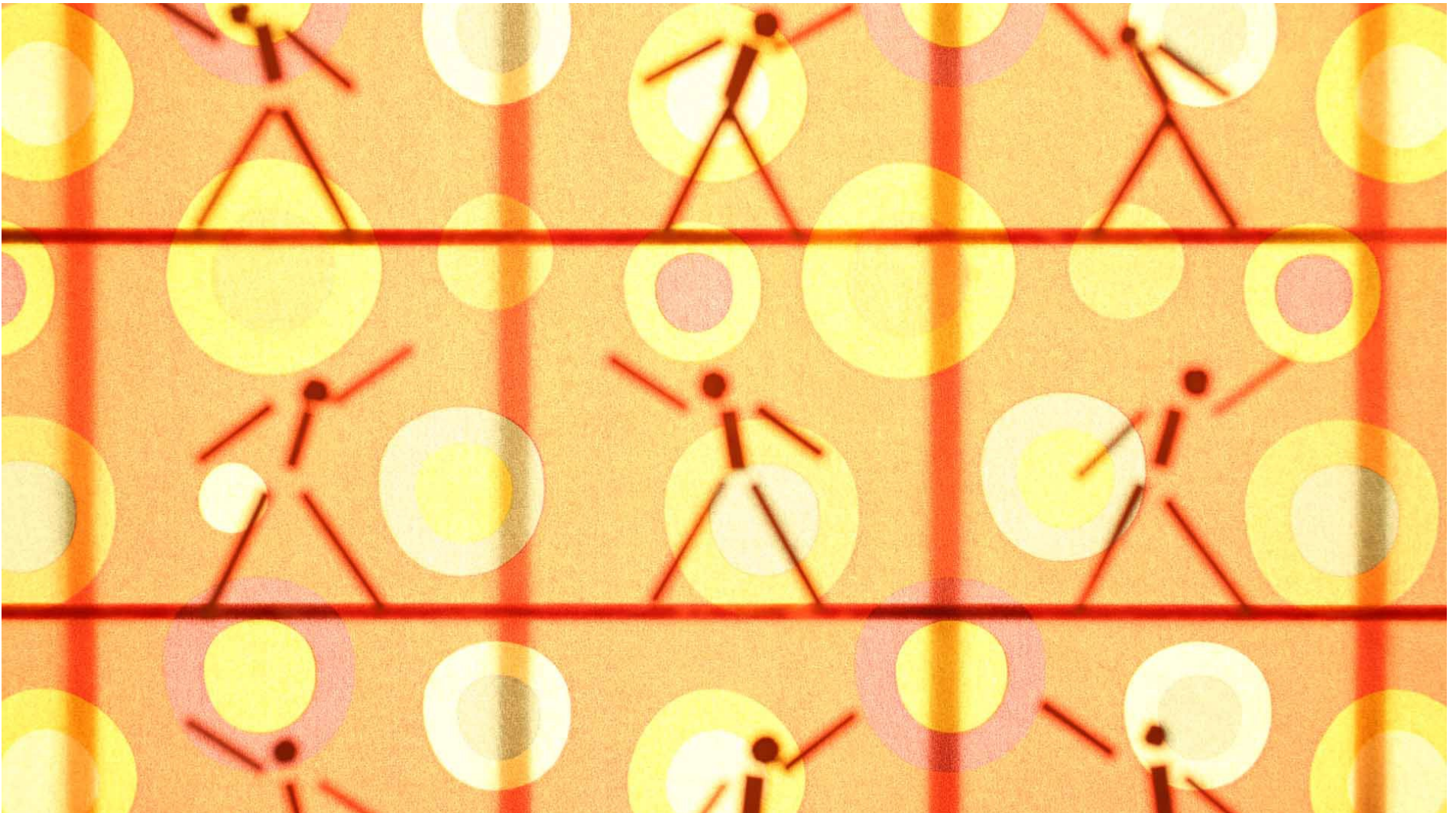
Visiting the Lower Main

Big buildings – big entertainment – quiet people



Applying Ideas

“Cartier des spectacles” scene



Finding people

Conservation Architect, Luce Lafontaine was one of the names suggested to me by Heritage Montreal. After weeks of correspondence, we meet at the crossroad, the sunny morning of 5 November 2013 and chat. I'm looking for a quiet space, she suggests the nearby Place de la Paix. I accept, worried that there might be noise coming from the street. Her interview is magnificent, she raises all the points with little effort from my part and the only noise that might cause problems in editing comes from the wind. There is one line, however, that comes clearly across and I already know it will be central in my film : "Ce n'est pas nécessairement une belle rue, mais c'est remplis de Montréalité!"

Later that evening I'm walking up St Urbain street in Little Italy to meet Louis Rastelli who was one of the two men on that youtube video. He runs the Montreal Archives and although he is an architect he prefers the title of "cultural historian", which the Montreal Gazette once used for him. The place is full of books on Montreal and the city's night life, CDs but also, curiously, of old cigarette vending machines that are destined to be reused and sell various Montreal memorabilia in clubs across the city. The interview is 23 minutes long, and of course the description and analysis of how St Laurent boulevard came about, what it was, is and what will happen is more than thorough. As he euphemistically said at the end, "you probably have more than two minutes".

Books he recommended:

- *St Laurent: LA Main de Montreal* by Pierre Ancil
- *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and '50s*

by William Weintraub

- *The Street Called the Main* by Aline Gubbay
- *Le red light du Montreal* by Daniel Proulx
- *Swinging in Paradise: The history of Jazz in Montreal*

by John Gilmore

From <http://aristofanisblog.wordpress.com>



Finding people

Again, ordering hot dogs at the “Montreal Pool Room” to legitimize – to the suspicious eyes of the cashier – my presence there. Thankfully, she does accept my plea for lowering the music, even if she doesn’t crack a smile. With me is actor, teacher and Concordia graduate, Donovan King, the other voice of that youtube video, the one voice I had not replaced so far in my soundtrack. We discover common interests, backgrounds and ideas and the discussion flows very comfortably. The recording should yield some good material for the film, albeit different from the equally good youtube footage.

The next night, after eight hours of classes, I am dressing up again to head down town. This time I am meeting with the owner of Cafe Cleopatra, Johnny Zoumboulakis. I had called him the week before after a few days of inner debate and reluctance. “To whom is this intended?” he asked me in Greek.

Now, midnight of 18 November, having walked through a crowd of strippers and onlookers, I am sitting in a little back room of Cafe Cleo, next to the man who said *no* to the *Société de développement Angus*, while I am trying nervously to connect the 722 sound device cables. “Are you going to make a cartoon out of me?” he asks and I laugh. He is flipping his keys as a Greek would flip his worry beads, their sound not as prominent as the one coming from the dance floor, outside. “We are missing a door”, he says and I assure him that this ambient sound will work to the film’s advantage. As he speaks, slowly, with a sense of gravitas looking at a certain vacuum, there isn’t much additional information I am getting about the Main and the events regarding Cafe Cleo’s resistance, but there is definitely a shift in style from the previous interviews. The style I was missing. That, along with a very good punchline:

“The way I met the Main and the way the Main accepted me... it was something very exceptional, because the Main is the only place where francophones, anglophones and allophones meet , entertain and nobody says *my* Main”.

From <http://aristofanisblog.wordpress.com>

Following the press

Revitaliser la « Main » | Le téléjournal 18 h | Radio-Canada.ca

2014-10-24, 5:50 AM

ICI RADIO-CANADA  .ca

Revitaliser la « Main »

Reportage du lundi 2 décembre 2013

News of proposals for building up the area.

Un immeuble de 160 millions au coin St-Laurent et Ste-Catherine | André Dubuc | Immobilier

2014-10-24, 5:43 AM

Un immeuble de 160 millions au coin St-Laurent et Ste-Catherine

Publié le 02 décembre 2013 à 12h08 | Mis à jour le 02 décembre 2013 à 12h08



Photo fournie par la SDA

On trouvera une tour résidentielle de 150 logements du côté de la rue Sainte-Catherine. Sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent, il est prévu d'aménager au rez-de-chaussée un marché d'alimentation à aire ouverte formé de plusieurs commerçants indépendants.



André Dubuc

La Presse

Le quadrilatère dévasté au coin de la Main et de la rue Sainte-Catherine sera bientôt chose du passé. La Société de développement Angus (SDA) a annoncé lundi la construction à compter de 2014 du Carré Saint-Laurent, un immeuble à usage mixte de 160 millions.

> [Blogue de l'immobilier: Projet de 160 millions dans le Red Light](http://blogues.lapresse.ca/lapresseaffaires/immobilier/2013/12/02/projet-de-160-millions-dans-le-red-light/)
(<http://blogues.lapresse.ca/lapresseaffaires/immobilier/2013/12/02/projet-de-160-millions-dans-le-red-light/>)

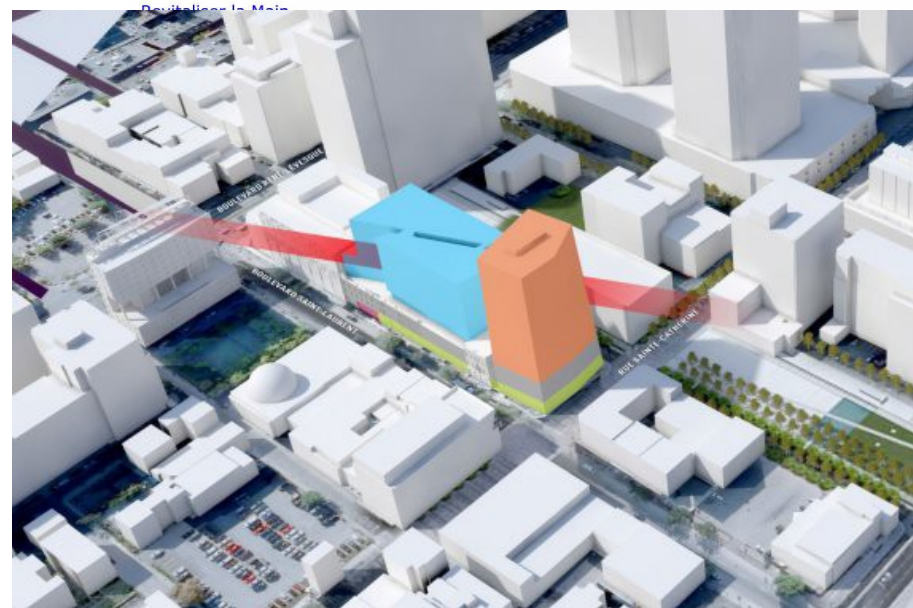
Le projet proposé contourne le célèbre bar d'effeuilleuses le Café Cléopâtre, dont le propriétaire John Zouboulakis, refuse d'être exproprié.

Sur la rue Sainte-Catherine, on trouvera une tour résidentielle de 150 logements. Sur le boulevard Saint-Laurent, il est prévu d'aménager au rez-de-chaussée un marché d'alimentation à aire ouverte formé de plusieurs commerçants indépendants comme on en trouve à l'intérieur du marché Atwater. Le premier étage sera consacré à des organismes culturels du domaine de la création. Les étages supérieurs d'une superficie de 14 000 mètres carrés logeront des 700 fonctionnaires du gouvernement du Québec, dont une bonne part loge actuellement au Centre de commerce mondial, dans le Vieux-Montréal. Le bail est d'une durée de 25 ans.



Revitaliser la « Main »

C'est un projet qui se faisait attendre et qui va redonner un peu de lustre au boulevard Saint-Laurent. À l'aide d'un investissement de 160 millions de dollars, le « carré St-Laurent », situé entre René-Lévesque et Sainte-Catherine, regroupera des condos, des commerces et des espaces culturels, tout ça autour du Café Cléopâtre. Les détails avec Anne-Louise Despatie.

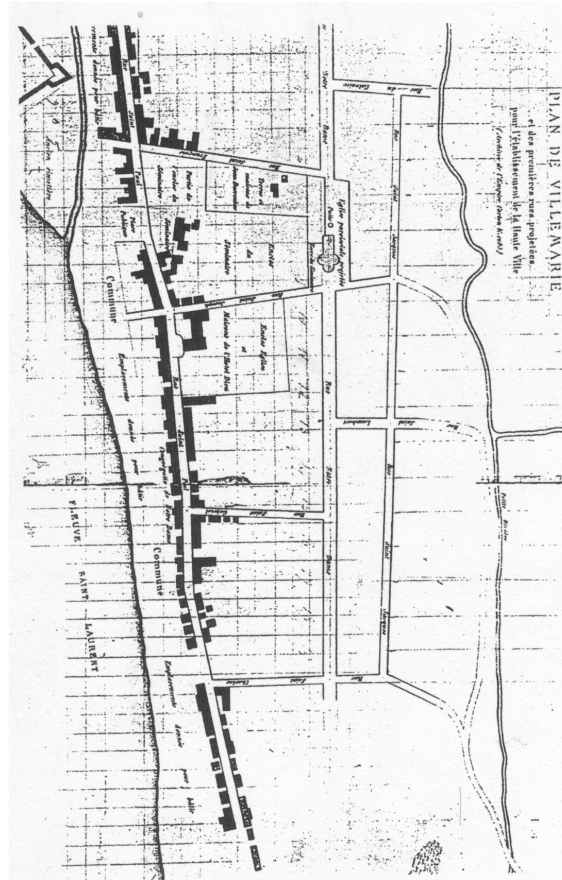


Understanding the past

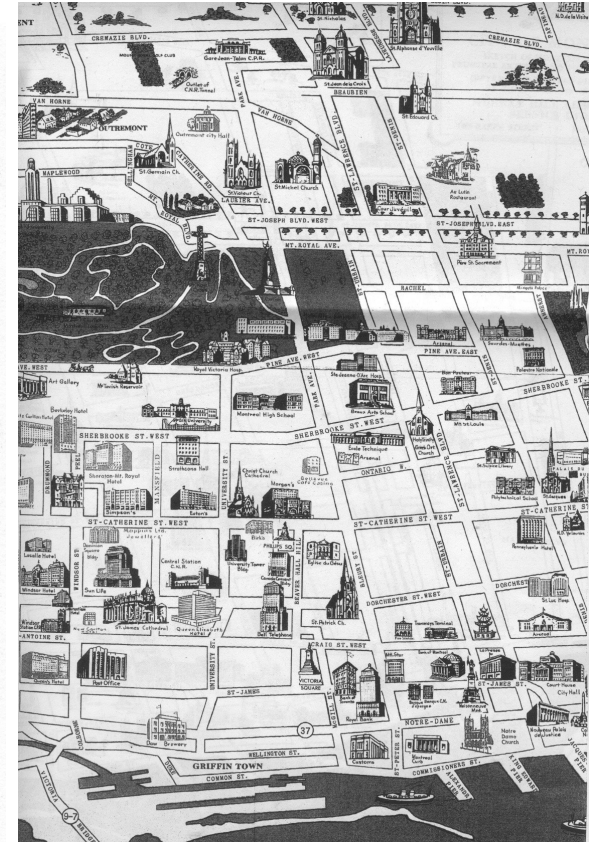
Maps from the CCA



Fig. III. Section of Map (1830) showing the new suburb of St. Laurent/St. Lawrence.

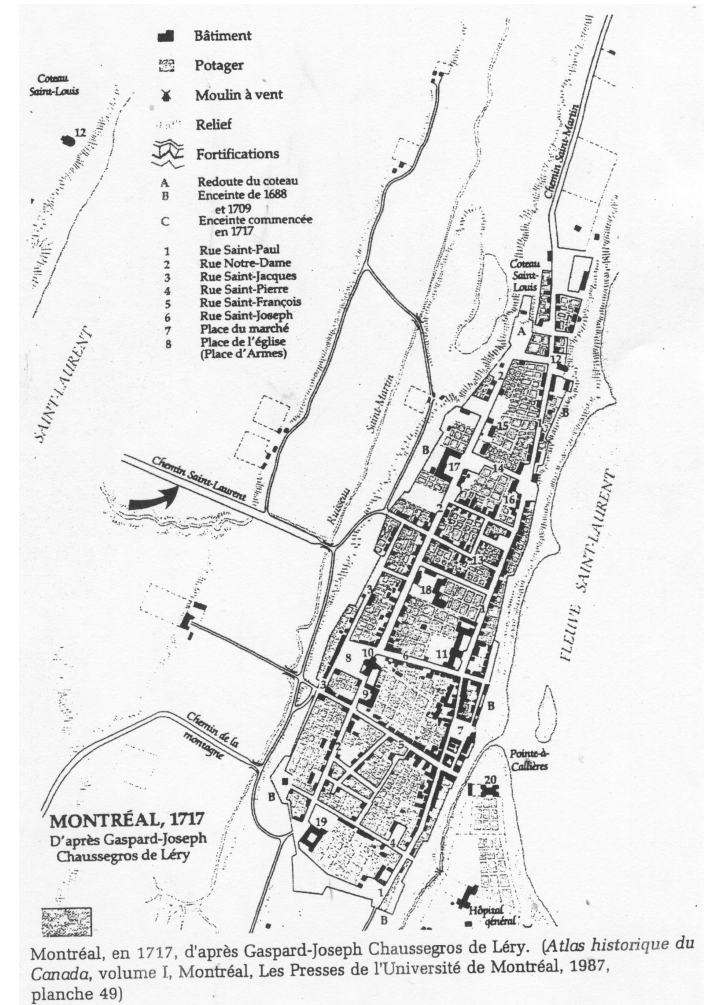
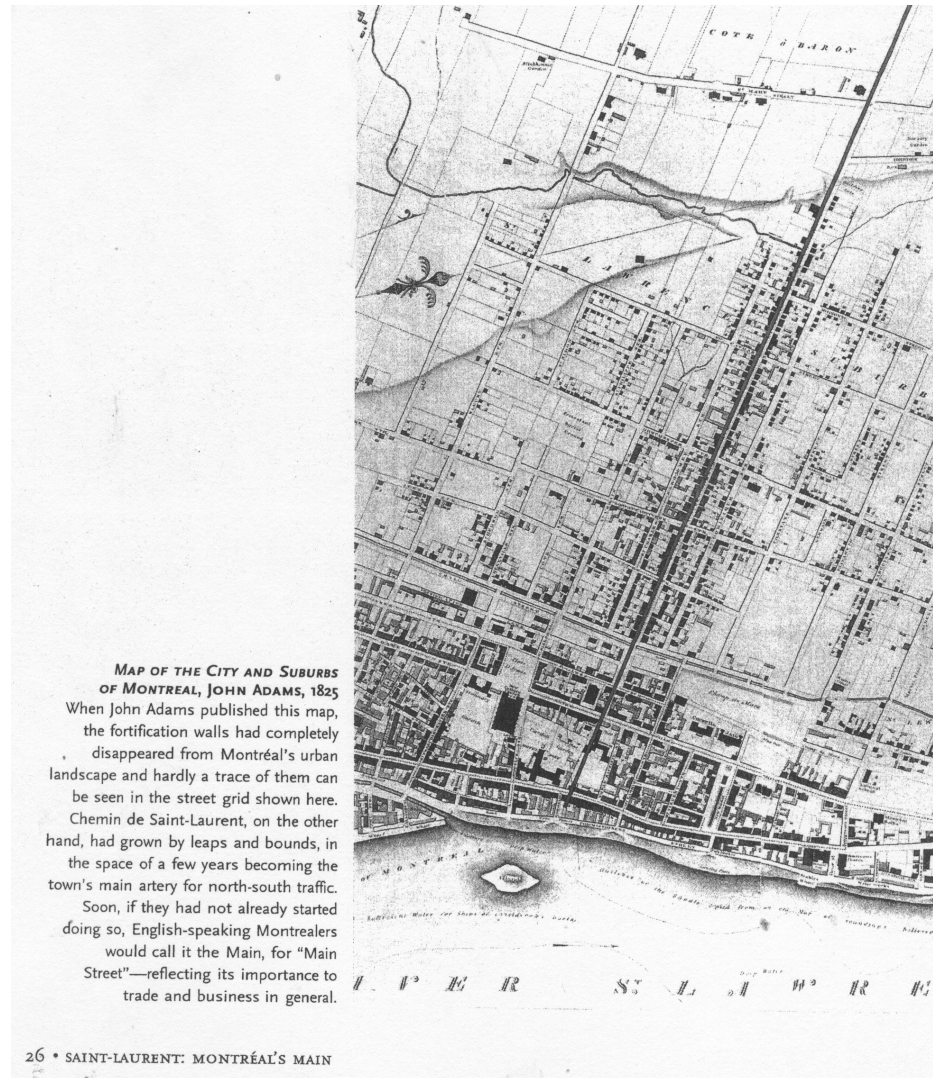


Map of old Montreal showing rue St. Lambert leading out of the city. Based on the Street plan of 1672 by Dollé de Casson.



Understanding the past

Maps from the CCA



Applying Ideas

Opening Scene



Montreal and the Main's
evolution (plans)

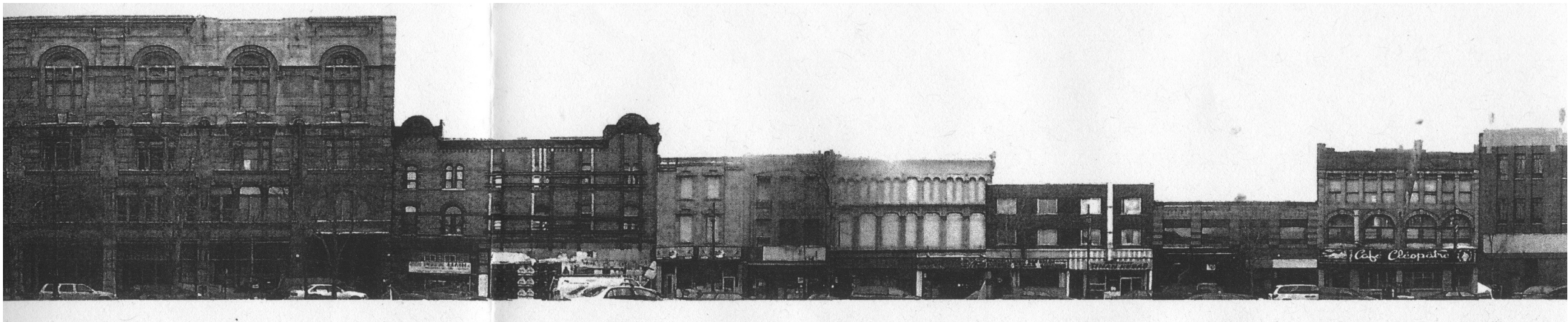


Understanding the past

Street Elevation of the Lower Main before demolition (looking West)

Source:

Fulton, G.W., & Vermette, L. (1996). L'arrondissement historique du boulevard Saint-Laurent (La "Main"), Montréal (Québec). Gatineau, Québec: Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office = Bureau d'examen des édifices fédéraux à valeur patrimoniale].



Plan of Red Light district



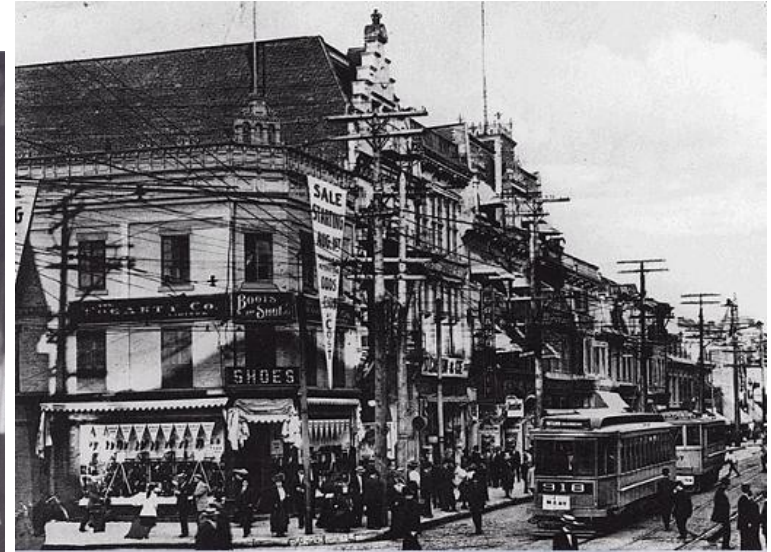
Applying Ideas

Scene based on west elevation of St Laurent Boulevard



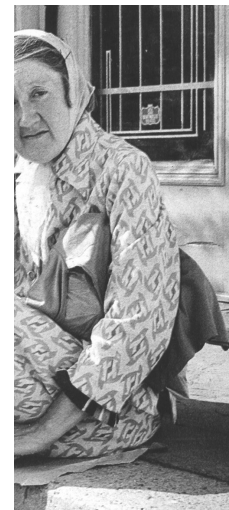
Understanding the past

Testimonies of past traces



Understanding the past

Photographs from publications



Applying Ideas

A collage of traces (used in several scenes)



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