

Sustainability in the City and Beyond

Concordia University

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The Frontier & The Wasteland: Hydrocarbon Landscapes & Settler-Colonial Imaginaries in SudOuest Montreal

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This talk examines the northwestern side of the Lachine Canal as a landscape of settler-colonial infrastructure. The booms and busts of two distinct landscape patches - the Turcot Yards and the neighboring district of Saint-Henri - are examined as sites of fluctuating colonial interest as determined by transport technology and fossil fuel uses of the times (via steamships, railways, & automobiles). The construction and maintenance of infrastructures related to these technologies has embedded morality surrounding settler-colonial conceptions of race, class, & gender within both spaces to varying degrees. With future & ongoing “revitalization” plans currently underway in both spaces, this presentation will explore how fossil fuel infrastructures have fueled European settler ideology in these spaces even into the present.

The talk begins by briefly describing the larger role Montreal had in the settlement of North America beyond the Great Lakes. Waterways on the Island itself are then explored as sites of racialization relating to “good” and “bad” land-use in the 17th & 18th Century. The 19th Century sees the area boom with the advent of the Lachine Canal and the adjacent railways-creating highly-gendered and classed spaces of industrial activity. In the 20th Century, the Quiet Revolution brings the resurgence of Quebecois pride, as the building of the Turcot Interchange puts a spotlight on Saint-Henri’s past and solidifies the structural components of all three socially-constructed differences. And in the present, the plans for a parkway (Dalle Park) and brownfield revitalizations in Saint-Henri are connected to settler conceptions of heritage and restoration still predicated on fossil fuel use and white supremacy. Strategies for mitigating these pernicious biases- and a focus on the resistance to these agendas- are areas stressed for future research by more qualified scholars.



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