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**FORGING URBAN CULTURE: MODERNITY AND CORPOREAL EXPERIENCES IN
MONTREAL AND BRUSSELS, 1880-1914**

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Thèse de doctorat effectuée en cotutelle

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Thèse présentée à la Faculté des études supérieures de l'Université de Montréal en vue
de l'obtention du grade de Philosophiæ Doctor (Ph.D.)
en histoire

et à

la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles en vue de
l'obtention du grade de Docteur en histoire, art et archéologie

avril 2008

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Université de Montréal
Faculté des études supérieures

et

Université Libre de Bruxelles
Faculté de philosophie et lettres

Cette thèse intitulée

FORGING URBAN CULTURE: MODERNITY AND CORPOREAL EXPERIENCES IN MONTREAL
AND BRUSSELS, 1880-1914

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20 JUIN 2008

RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

Se penchant sur les cas de Montréal et de Bruxelles en comparaison, cette thèse examine la façon dont, à travers la perception sensorielle et les pratiques corporelles des citoyens, la signification sociale et culturelle de l'espace urbain se construit. L'analyse se base principalement sur des sources discursives témoignant de la vie urbaine et du rapport à l'espace d'une multitude d'acteurs durant la période 1880-1914, traversée par d'intenses transformations liées à la modernité et à l'industrialisation. Les discours émanant des élus et des fonctionnaires municipaux, des industriels, des réformateurs urbains, des inspecteurs d'usines et de logements, des ouvriers, des médecins, des hygiénistes, des écrivains, des artistes et de simples citoyens ont été consultés.

S'agissant d'une époque où la ville est de plus en plus conceptualisée dans sa totalité, la thèse aborde, dans un premier temps, les discours, à la fois critiques et élogieux, concernant la ville industrielle dans son ensemble, en montrant comment ceux-ci sont construits par rapport à l'expérience et aux perceptions de la matérialité urbaine. Puis, dans les chapitres subséquents, les lieux de production industrielle, le logement et les rues sont examinés successivement. Dans chacun de ces types d'espace, les discours faisant état de l'intensification des transformations à l'environnement se déclinent, de façon prononcée, en référence au corps et aux sens. Ils témoignent de la place prépondérante des expériences personnelles et subjectives dans la construction du rapport à l'espace urbain, et ce à une époque marquée par la montée de la pensée scientifique et rationnelle. L'analyse de ces milieux permet aussi de mettre en relief la façon dont se construit la signification culturelle du corps, ainsi que la place de celui-ci dans l'évolution des tensions sociales caractéristiques de l'époque.

À travers une approche comparative, l'étude de ces deux villes permet d'examiner l'évolution de processus similaires dans deux contextes analogues, mais distincts. Ainsi est-il possible de déceler certaines spécificités de Bruxelles et de Montréal, de même que des traits communs aux deux villes. Cependant, l'apport principal de cette perspective croisée est de montrer, à la lumière de deux exemples locaux, la manière dont les citoyens intériorisent de vastes processus globaux de transformation par le biais de leur corps, des espaces qu'ils fréquentent quotidiennement, et de leur contexte socioculturel immédiat.

MOTS CLÉS

histoire des villes, histoire comparative, espace urbain, corps, subjectivité, industrialisation, urbanisation, environnement, rapports sociaux

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Through a comparative examination of Montreal and Brussels, this thesis considers the way city dwellers shaped the social and cultural significance of urban space in terms of sensorial experiences and bodily practices. The analysis is based primarily on qualitative sources relating to urban life and to the relationship with the city environment during the period 1880-1914, a time when cities underwent intense transformations associated with modernity and industrialisation. The discourses and representations examined in this study were produced by a wide range of urban actors, including elected officials and municipal bureaucrats, industrialists, urban reformers, factory and housing inspectors, workers, doctors, hygienists, writers, artists and ordinary citizens.

This was a period in which the city was increasingly conceptualised as a total, organic object. Consequently, the thesis first examines representations, both critical and celebratory, of these cities in their entirety, showing how the discourse about urban space was constructed through experiences with, and perceptions of, its materiality. The subsequent chapters examine, in turn, spaces of industrial production, homes and the streets. In each of these spaces, representations of these changing environments were produced in marked reference to the body and the senses. In a time marked by the rise of scientific and rational thought, the sources consulted demonstrate the centrality of personal and subjective experiences in the construction of understandings of the city. Analysing these specific milieus also affords the opportunity to consider the cultural significance of the body, as well as its place in the social tensions that characterised the period.

The comparative approach through which these cities are analysed illuminates the development of similar processes in analogous, yet discrete, contexts. In this way, certain specificities of Brussels and Montreal, as well the commonalities they shared, are brought to light. The principal objective of this bipartite perspective, however, is to demonstrate, in reference to two local examples, how urban dwellers interiorised vast processes of global transformation by means of their bodies, the spaces through which they moved on a daily basis, as well as their immediate socio-cultural context.

KEY WORDS

history of cities, comparative history, urban space, body, subjectivity, industrialisation, urbanisation, environment, social relations

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ABBREVIATIONS

AM. Archives de Montréal

- CHS. Fonds de la Commission d'hygiène et de santé
- CIE. Fonds de la Commission des incendies et de l'éclairage
- CS. Fonds du Comité de santé

AALO. Association pour l'amélioration des logements ouvriers

AEB. Archives de l'état à Bruxelles (Anderlecht)

AVB. Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles

BAnQ. Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

BCB. Bulletin communal de Bruxelles

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project flowed out from my own encounters with the unique atmosphere of industrial neighbourhoods built up in Montreal at the turn of the twentieth century. When I approached Professor Michèle Dagenais of the Université de Montréal with the idea of extending the research I had undertaken for the preparation of guided walking tours into a thesis on the intersection of industrialisation and urban culture, she was immediately enthusiastic. As I expressed my interest in pursuing a comparative study, it was she who introduced me to Professor Serge Jaumain of the Université Libre de Bruxelles,* and he, too, expressed the same enthusiasm from the outset. Pursuing research in two places has its lot of challenges, but I could not have hoped for more encouraging co-supervisors to guide me through the process. I would like to express my profound gratitude to both for their individual, and concerted, support, their unfailing encouragement, their superior intellectual advice, their selfless re-readings of my work, their help with innumerable application dossiers, and, of course, the many pleasant exchanges over the years.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous financial support I have received from the following institutions: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Fonds Québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC), the Department of History and the Direction des relations internationales of the Université de Montréal, the Centre d'études canadiennes (CEC) and the Bureau des Relations Internationales et de la Coopération (BRIC) of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, the Montreal History Group (MHG), Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), the Commissariat général aux Relations internationales de la Communauté française de Belgique (CGRI), and the Association internationales des études québécoise (AIEQ). The CEC and BAnQ also provided invaluable office space that greatly facilitated research and writing in both cities.

Aside from my direct supervisors, numerous teachers, in both of my home institutions and whom I have had the pleasure of meeting at various conferences, have offered advice and suggestions, recommended sources and readings, and discussed with me various aspects of my project. For their direct help in shaping this thesis, I would like to thank, in particular, Professors Ollivier Hubert, Michael Huberman, Brian Young, Simon Gunn, Jean Puissant, and Chloé Deligne. During my studies, I was warmly received into the Montreal History Group, a collegial and rigorous team of researchers. I would like to thank all of the members of the MHG for many illuminating discussions, for their role in integrating students into academic life, and for forming a rich intellectual community, of which it is a pleasure to be a part.

Preparing a dissertation is said to be a solitary task, but I have hardly noticed, so well surrounded have I been by family and friends. For their presence and dedication, I wish

* Quite fittingly our first meeting occurred in the context of an event held at the Écomusée du fier monde, a museum on Montreal's industrial history, located in the heart of one of the city's major early-twentieth-century manufacturing districts, and in a building whose design and architecture magnificently captures the grandeur of the age.

to thank my parents, Françoise and Stephen Kenny, as well as my extended family spread across Canada. Family in Belgium have made the two years spent there truly delightful as well. Several fellow students in both Montreal and Brussels have not only been part of my work life, but good friends as well. On both counts, I would especially like to extend my gratitude to Harold Bérubé, Amélie Bourbeau, Jean-François Constant, Denis Diagre and Cécile Vanderpelen. Countless memorable moments have made the graduate student experience a most enjoyable venture. To Elizabeth Kirkland, for all the rooftop cava, to Sean Mills, for the hops-inspired and Brel-accompanied conversations at all hours of the night, to David Meren for all the Utopik and utopian coffee breaks, and to all three, who have shared with me the ups and downs of grad school, and especially the many unrivalled dinner parties in the company of Stephanie Bolton, Megan Webster, Anna Shea, and Greg Griffin, thank you for your friendship.

Throughout every stage of this process, down to the meticulous proof reading of this thesis, I have had the unwavering support of Stephanie Bolton. We were fellow travellers in life and in love well before I undertook this particular journey, and she has shared with me all of the happy times, accompanying me through the more trying ones as well. Along the way, we were joined first by Béatrice, then by Olivier, who have brightened our lives in unimaginable ways. Though my work on this project has frequently kept me away from the three of them for longer hours than I would have liked, it is to them that I owe the feeling of gratification that goes with completing it.

INTRODUCTION

I. THE FIRST GLOBALISATION

A century has passed since a vigorous wave of modernity swept through the western world, leaving in its wake profound cultural, social, economic and political transformations that marked virtually every aspect of people's lives. As a result of rapidly expanding industrial production and of the sustained development of extended communication and transportation networks that allowed for the unprecedented movement of people and exchange of goods, industrialised countries experienced what historians call the "first globalisation."¹ One of the areas in which the effects of this modernity were most strongly felt was in the growth and changing character of cities. A veritable urban explosion occurred as manufacturing establishments concentrated in growing cities, in close proximity to transportation routes, financial institutions, markets and sources of manual labour. As industrialisation took hold of North American and European economies and the population of cities swelled, an unprecedented mix of factories and warehouses, homes and parks, skyscrapers and public buildings changed the landscape. For those who lived through it, this period of transformation resulted in an environment, an atmosphere, like they had never before experienced.² As industries situated in urban contexts grew and multiplied, older city centres began to reach a point of saturation and the apparatus of industrial production spilled over into outlying districts, resulting in a push of urbanisation that would forever reconfigure the makeup of many agglomerations.³ The large cities of the western world became even larger,

¹ Suzanne Berger, *Notre première mondialisation : leçons d'un échec oublié* (Paris: Seuil, 2003). On the Belgian case specifically, see Michael Huberman, "Ticket to Trade: Belgian Labour and Globalisation before 1914," *Economic History Review* 61, no. 2 (2008).

² "La ville n'a plus rien de commun avec ce qu'on pouvait voir et vivre un siècle plus tôt," writes urban historian Viviane Claude in reference to the changing perceptions of the urban environment underway at the end of the 19th century. Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville : les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2006), 6.

³ On the connections between industrialisation, urbanisation and sub-urbanisation, see Robert Lewis, ed., *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004). and Robert Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). One of the most comprehensive studies on how these issues played out in Europe is Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). The authors argue that while urbanisation and industrialisation were long standing realities across Europe, it was only as of the 1880s that the two became so intimately linked. "Industry," they posit, "made its major direct contributions to the growth of cities rather late." (194)

striving to capitalise on this energy in order to consolidate their role and influence as urban metropolises. But the wave also struck many smaller cities which came to their own as new sites of power and influence over the course of the nineteenth century.

Those in the social and economic position to act upon these possibilities did their utmost to seize the momentum. Despite the economic fluctuations of the preceding decades, the expansion and activity of cities at the turn of the twentieth century speaks to the extent to which urban elites were brimming with confidence. The growth of cities in this period, notes historian Thomas Hall, were “typical manifestations of developments in society as a whole at the time, imbued as they were with a huge optimism, a spirit of enterprise and an eagerness to launch a variety of projects, combined with a positivist faith in man’s capacity to cope with great problems by seeking rational solutions.”⁴ Energised by the seemingly boundless possibilities for economic growth and development, they worked to move their cities into what promised to be a new period of sustained production and wealth. This enthusiasm crossed social divides, and those traditionally excluded from the circles of power also strove to assert their aspirations for a better future. As Eric Hobsbawm has speculated, “if public opinion pollsters in the developed world before 1914 had counted up hope against foreboding, optimists against pessimists, hope and optimism would pretty certainly have prevailed.”⁵

The modern city provided the natural stage for the crystallisation of these ambitions, and for the waging of the conflicts that shaped them. Its public and private spaces, its places of work and leisure, its streets and squares, even its private homes became the sites upon which hopes were built, tensions articulated, and social identities constructed and reinforced. In both form and function, western cities of the period seemed to breathe a new vitality, animated by the cultural, social and economic tensions through which resonated the febrile atmosphere of the *fin de siècle*. The forces of industrialisation and urbanisation forged a new urban culture during this period, and as

⁴ Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 269. Historian Jean-Luc Pinol also emphasises this shift, after 1880, to optimistic and positive visions of the city among urban middle classes, henceforth more confident that capitalist development would contribute to an amelioration of their situation. Jean-Luc Pinol, *Le monde des villes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1991), 45, 60.

⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Abacus, 1994), 11.

the shape of modern cities evolved, so too did their soul, embodied in the individual and collective identities of their inhabitants.

II. MONTREAL AND BRUSSELS

The purpose of this dissertation will be to consider the rapport of those who experienced this first globalisation to the specific local context of the city environments in which it took place. Given the increasing social, cultural and economic importance of cities during the period, they can be seen as reflections and manifestations of the broader ideas about the changing world of those who lived, worked and played in them. As I will argue, this interaction between the mental and the physical, between ideas and the material spaces in which they were produced, was played out on varying but interconnected scales, ranging from the intimate and bodily level of the individual, to the broader, public landscape of the urban community. This thesis will thus seek to contribute to a historiographical current in which the idea of urban space is mobilised as a central and dynamic element of social and cultural relations. More than a receptacle in which events occur, the spaces that comprised these complex industrial cities were directly involved in the expression of urban dwellers' sense of themselves and of each other. I will argue that the significance of urban space extended beyond its simple materiality as it penetrated the ideas and discourses of those who occupied it, conferring upon it a 'mental' or intellectual dimension. To explore this connection, I will concentrate specifically on the bodies of urban residents, on their corporeal experiences of the city. People's physical interaction with the urban environment bore distinctive cultural and social significance, offering a revealing angle from which to interpret written and visual representations that gave meaning to urban space at the turn of the twentieth century.

Two cities that lend themselves quite usefully to such an examination, and which together form the comparative object of this investigation, are Montreal and Brussels. These centres underwent continuous growth and change during this period of flux, making it necessary to clarify the spatial and temporal limits of this study. I will refer to each city in terms of their broader urban landscape, one that includes the neighbouring

suburbs which combined with the central districts to form an urban continuum. Where relevant, reference will be made to specific municipalities. But people's experience of the industrial city did not necessarily adhere to the lines that were drawn on maps. Individuals constantly crossed these administrative boundaries, while smoke and noise from factories made them more permeable than some might have hoped. After all, this sense of motion, transfer and repositioning was among the primary characteristics of the modern urban experience examined in this thesis.

The same flexibility will characterise the periodisation, which I situate, quite loosely, at the turn of the twentieth century. And a very wide turn it was, stretching roughly from 1880 to 1914. A frequently used bracket in contemporary history, these years correspond to a period of particularly rapid development in both Montreal and Brussels. Indeed, the industrialised world had been significantly handicapped by a global economic recession that spanned much of the 1870s. By the 1880s, economic recovery resulted in renewed industrial and urban growth.⁶ Despite various fluctuations, this phase of expansion continued until the outbreak of World War I, an event that once again left scars on these cities' economies, but even more significantly on their inhabitants' psyche, particularly in Brussels, occupied by German forces as of August 1914.⁷ While specific dates can be associated with the creation of specific spaces that marked this industrial and urban development, the significance they held for their inhabitants developed through much more fluid social and cultural processes. As with the territorial limitations, these dates serve as landmarks that situate the link between urban environments and identities within a period of particular social and cultural febricity, rather than as flat delineators of precise events.

⁶ This is especially true in Montreal where, as Brian Slack notes, the 1880s marked the beginning of large-scale industrialisation as large factories began to supplant smaller industries. Brian Slack et al., "Mapping the Changes: The Spatial Development of Industrial Montreal, 1861-1929," *Urban History Review* 22, no. 2 (1994). See also Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2nd ed. (Montréal: Boréal, 2000), 16. In Belgium, the 1880s witnessed a prolongation of the hardships of the previous decade and while industrial developments during the period were substantial, massive growth resumed only in the 1890s. See René Leboutte, Jean Puissant, and Denis Scuto, *Un siècle d'histoire industrielle, 1873-1973 : Belgique, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas : industrialisation et sociétés* (Paris: SEDES, 1998), 128.

⁷ On the particular atmosphere that reigned in August 1914, see Valérie Piette, "Les femmes et la ville en temps de guerre. Bruxelles en 1914-1918" in Serge Jaumain and Paul-André Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville. Bruxelles et Montréal au XIXe et XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2006), 139, as well as Serge Jaumain, Valérie Piette, and Gonzague Pluvinage, *Bruxelles 14-18. Au jour le jour, une ville en guerre* (Bruxelles: Musées de la Ville de Bruxelles, 2005), 5-12.

III. SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

In keeping with this approach, the sources I have consulted are also diverse. What they have in common is their qualitative nature, their rendering of city dwellers' intimate thoughts and concerns about the material and cultural consequences of modernity and industrialisation, and their frequent references to sensorial experiences and bodily practices in the urban environment. An important challenge of comparative history lies in identifying similar sources for each case observed. Because of the distinct national and historical contexts in which they were produced, the sources on Montreal and Brussels do not always lend themselves to systematic empirical comparison. Nevertheless, both cities faced similar pressures of industrialisation and urbanisation, and both were immersed in the flows of information and exchange that underpinned the way cities were conceived and managed across the western world in this period, leading to the production of analogous types of documents through which these developments can be traced.

I have thus examined a number of more formal, institutional records, primarily those of the municipal administrations in Montreal and Brussels. While these differed in terms of the specific needs and priorities of each city, and the way data and information were collected, calculated and presented in each milieu, these documents offer a wide-ranging view of the way urban development was conceptualised, debated and responded to at the administrative level. These include the records and reports of the city councils of both Montreal and Brussels, as well as the archives of their bureaucratic structures, primarily those whose responsibility included public health, hygiene, building regulation and other areas of maintenance such as public works, lighting and boiler inspections. For Brussels, we are fortunate to have, in the *Bulletin communal*, the full published minutes of every city council meeting, allowing us to trace the development of specific issues over time, and to listen in on the extensive debates that preoccupied this elected body. In Montreal, records of actual meetings are far more superficial, but each department produced detailed annual reports, overflowing with data and analysis on each of these themes.

These published and archival documents were consulted systematically for the entire period 1880-1914, and from them I have gleaned the points of view of individuals on the front lines of urban development, whose actions had a direct bearing on the shape of the landscape, and whose conceptions of the city evolved during this period in light of urban planning and public health ideas increasingly grounded in scientific methods and applied by a growing number of professional specialists. But in addition to offering an official point of view on the city, the analysis of these sources also shows how subjective appreciations of the environment were never far beneath their self-qualified objective facade. Indeed, the letters from citizens, the incident reports, the research notes contained in these files, as well as the comments and appraisals of a more personal nature made by municipal functionaries as they participated in meetings or prepared their reports, displays the lens of human subjectivity through which page upon page of figures, tables and charts were understood. If statistical data was billed as a tool of efficient and rational city governance, I have concentrated more explicitly on bringing out the social and cultural context that motivated these representations of the city, emphasising the way interior considerations underlay municipal authorities' vision of the urban environments to which they dedicated their careers.

Because my principal intent is precisely to bring out the subjective dimension of the transformations accompanying this wave of modernity, the bulk of the sources consulted for this study are documents, written and visual, in which the authors expressed personal attitudes about the city, related individual ways of interacting with urban space, contemplated the material layout of their environment, and attributed cultural and ideological meanings to city life. In some cases, analogous sources can be readily identified in both cities. In the late 1880s, for instance, both Belgium and Canada held national investigations into labour relations, and I have focussed specifically on the hearings held in Brussels and Montreal respectively. As of the 1890s, moreover, government-mandated doctors and hygienists in Belgium and Quebec reported on their inspections of conditions in manufacturing establishments on a regular basis, supplying reports on their observation in Brussels and Montreal in particular. While the methodologies of these inquiries differed in each context, both of these sets of documents offer informative windows on the people's relationship to the industrial

environment in the two cities. Particularly helpful for understanding the way Belgians perceived the landscapes of industry are the *commodo-incommodo* records discussed in Chapter 4, no equivalent of which exists for Montreal.

Other published sources providing information on the themes of industrialisation, urbanisation, housing and boulevard culture examined in this study, including housing investigations, scientific studies on health, hygiene and the human body, sociological studies on urban neighbourhoods, architectural, engineering and city planning reviews and treatises, reports by philanthropic organisations, popular hygiene manuals and journalistic investigations, were identified through a systematic search in library catalogues, primarily those of Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BAnQ), and the Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique. These are place-specific, informing us about the urban realities of the settings in which they were researched and published. But because the themes addressed often converged, they are nonetheless a reflection of how similar issues were discussed in different contexts, and I have analysed them from this perspective.

Finally, this thesis draws heavily on sources that may be considered less typical to urban history, but that were consulted as evidence of urban dwellers' intimate musings about their environment. Among these are popular magazines and the illustrations and advertisements published therein, travel guides and literature, almanacs, booster materials, personal memoirs, historical and commemorative works, and other reflections on the nature of urban space, including novels, poems, illustrations and photographs. While some of these documents inform us directly about people's view of the city or the body, others address these topics only indirectly. Taken together, I have interpreted these in terms of the many levels of meaning urban dwellers attributed to their corporeal experiences of the city, bringing out the elements of subjectivity they contained, and paying attention to the pervasiveness of these issues at the time, as they were expressed even in what can be considered unlikely forums.

In drawing upon this eclectic collection, my goal is to offer a wide range of perspectives through which people interiorised the effects of modernity, and represented their personal connection to the urban spaces they moved through and occupied. To be sure, I make no claims to exhaustiveness. Bodily experiences and urban realities were

so central to daily existence that a number of additional sources might well have been consulted, but were excluded because they fell outside of the scope and feasibility of this project. Newspapers, for instance, would have offered additional perspectives on how urban issues were discussed in the public sphere. While I rely on press articles to complement my discussion of specific themes, the quantity of regular dailies appearing in both Montreal and Brussels made a comprehensive scrutiny impossible. Additional technical or scientific information on the city and body might have been obtained from a deeper reading of contemporary research into manufacturing techniques, factory management, housing construction, or medical practices, without necessarily adding to my analysis of the way these themes were perceived and experienced in wider urban society. Finally, debates held at national levels of government, or within parties and unions, would have oriented the discussion on a political plane rather than toward the shared realities of daily urban existence this thesis seeks to uncover.

In sum, I have sought to present viewpoints emanating from a diversity of groups that animated urban culture, including municipal authorities, elected officials, bureaucrats, professionals of urban matters such as architects, engineers, hygienists and doctors, urban reformers, businessmen, journalists, intellectuals, clergymen and scientists, as well as producers of cultural goods including writers and artists. These sources, to be sure, were produced, and read, by individuals who were often formally educated and who had access to the means to produce and publish such documents, which provide primarily middle or upper-class points of view. For the sake of clarity, I refer to these individuals as forming part of an 'urban elite,' a term that encompasses a wide of array of urbanites who, while not always sharing the same empirically definable socio-demographic traits, nonetheless expressed their point of view on the city from this position of relatively high social standing and prestige. In attempting to demonstrate the prevalence of urban space in the forging of urban culture and identities, I have also sought, where possible, to include more marginal voices as well, notably those of workers, and of women of all social classes, available in labour investigations, letters to municipal administrations, literary sources, and in various publications targeted to these groups.

By approaching these records and documents less for the empirical information they contain, and rather as testimonials of their authors' encounters with modernity, I seek to explain how residents of Montreal and Brussels constructed a relationship to their environment in terms of their day-to-day experiences with the pulse of urban life in a frenetic time. I rely on a diversity of sources that were produced in discrete local settings, but that spoke to trends of a transnational nature. Rather than present parallel narratives of the two cities, I draw on the common problems and realities emerging from these sources to place thematic considerations at the heart of the analysis, intertwining the broader notions of modernity, urban space and the body around the specific experiences of the residents of these two dynamic cities.

IV. LAYOUT

The first three chapters of this thesis address the relationship to the changing urban environment in a global sense. Chapter 1 brushes a general portrait of the cultural, social and economic scenery in Montreal and Brussels at the turn of the twentieth century before addressing the nature of comparative history and my objectives in applying this method to the case of these two cities. The second chapter lays out the theoretical grounding of this analysis, focusing specifically on the themes of modernity, space and the body that inform my reading of the sources. In Chapter 3, I examine discourses that conceptualised the modern industrial city as a whole, focusing first on how panoramic views were used to give meaning to the city in its totality, and secondly on the way the realities of the industrial periphery of these cities conflicted with the image of order and prosperity put forth by urban elites.

From this all-encompassing perspective, I move to a discussion of specific spaces that were most frequently evoked in representations of modern cities. During this period, labour unions and other workers' representatives emphasised the need to balance the length of the work day with other fundamental activities, advocating that a typical day should be separated into three eight-hour segments. According to this view, one third of the day was to be devoted to work, another third to sleep, leaving the rest of the day for

an assortment of other activities, including learning, leisure, and time spent with family.⁸ Nineteenth-century understandings of the rules of bodily and mental hygiene were evoked to support the benefits of this system, and it was argued that all of society would prosper from the increased productivity that well-rested workers would bring to the job. Though for most it remained an ideal, this breakdown of life in a modern environment sought to bring rhythm and structure to time and space in hectic industrial settings. In distinguishing between three parts of the day, comprised of activities occurring in specific spaces and that made specific uses of the body, this discourse emphasised intrinsic connection between space and bodily practices in the minds of contemporaries.

The last three chapters thus consider each beat of this rhythm in turn, discussing the spaces evoked in terms of the bodily experiences and practices that shaped the meaning of factories, homes and streets in the modern city. Chapter 4 focuses on the motors that propelled these modern transformations, namely the industries and the bodies at work to make them function. How did factory environments and the realities of industrial work shape urban life, and how was this understanding predicated upon bodily and sensorial experiences? The fifth chapter transposes these questions to the working-class home, and discusses how living conditions, and in particular the debates over hygiene and morality that underpinned them, brought issues of privacy and intimacy to the fore of public debate. Finally, in Chapter 6, I examine the streets of Montreal and Brussels, and consider debates over their form and planning, as well as the mix of uses residents made of them, discussing circulation, public amusements, accidents, lights, lavatories, funerals, in order to assess how these open and public spaces that were occupied in various ways by all residents of the city also spoke to people's subjective and interior joys and sorrows, concerns and aspirations.

⁸ *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 5 vols., vol. 1 Québec : 1ère partie (Ottawa: A. Senécal, 1889), 99. Jules Destrée, "Le Droit au loisir. Le Repos hebdomadaire," *Abonnement Germinal* 1, no. 14 (1905), 1. Initially pleading for a reduction of the work day to nine hours, the eight-hour movement became a characteristic feature of labour demands in both North America and Europe during this period. Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1989), 15-16, Gregory S. Kealy, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 225-227, Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 210-211, Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Jacques Rouillard, *Le syndicalisme québécois : deux siècles d'histoire* (Montréal: Boréal, 2004), 22, 77-78.

This thesis, then, tells a single story of two places, or rather of the multiple spaces of which they were comprised, bringing to light the connection between urban dwellers' sense of self and the dynamic material environment they occupied. It is the story of how people moved through, thought about, appropriated and fought over these cities, and, in the process, placed them at the centre of their own worries and ambitions. Focussing on events and debates that had urban space as their primary setting, I discuss how people's senses and bodily practices were directly engaged in determining how the modern city was to be navigated and negotiated, and I argue that there was a fundamental correlation between physical experiences of material space, and the interiorised discourses that marked Montreal and Brussels as sites of modernity.

CHAPTER 1

COMPARABLE CITIES? MONTREAL AND BRUSSELS AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In a recent collaborative study bringing together historians of Brussels and Montreal, Claire Billen suggests that the relevance of comparing these cities “ne saute pas aux yeux.”¹ Before delving into such an endeavour, it is indeed necessary to delineate the terms on which these two cities will be examined, and the purpose of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for this comparison. At first glance, Montreal and Brussels certainly appear to have quite little in common, especially with regards to the culture of urban life. Why bring such apparently disparate entities into the single lens of a comparative inquiry? In comparing the experience of modernity in Montreal and Brussels, this thesis seeks to contribute to an ongoing historiographical dialogue between scholars of the two cities, one that has materialised through exchanges, conferences and the recent publication of the collection of articles cited above. While these activities have generally taken the form of a conversation, with specialists of each city elaborating on common themes in reference to their research on one specific case, the present study seeks to push further along this line of inquiry by engaging in a direct comparative analysis elaborated through primary research in both Montreal and Brussels.

This first section of this chapter will present a general overview of Montreal and Brussels during the period 1880-1914, outlining some of their main similarities and differences in terms of cultural, social, economic and geographic characteristics in order to contextualise the analysis of urban space that will follow.² As we will see, the two cities differed considerably in terms of their respective historical evolution, the realities of their geographical situations, and their distinct political climates, social composition and cultural lives. However, it is in terms of their similar and simultaneous experiences with unprecedented levels of industrialisation and urbanisation during this period that

¹ Claire Billen, “Bruxelles au miroir de Montréal,” in Serge Jaumain and Paul-André Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville. Bruxelles et Montréal au XIXe et XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2006), 43.

² For an overview of the major trends in the history of these two cities spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and written with references to one another, see Paul-André Linteau, “L’évolution de Montréal depuis le XIXe siècle. Continuités et ruptures,” and Claire Billen, “Bruxelles au miroir de Montréal,” in *Ibid.*

Montreal and Brussels will be compared. Although the form of these processes differed according to local context, my analysis will concentrate on the broader ways in which urban dwellers interiorised these global processes in terms of their immediate environment.

The second section of the chapter will expose the comparative methodology employed to these ends. I argue, along the same lines as Billen, that the relevance of historical comparison ultimately lies less in a point by point examination of specific elements in each context, than in the way posing similar questions in different settings can enrich our understanding of historical processes; in this case, the nature of corporeal interactions with space. Drawing on recent methodological literature on historical comparison, I note that, while a classical comparative approach can enhance our understanding of each case by viewing it in the light of the other, the heuristic value of studying more than one society at a time ultimately lies in the cross-national perspectives it uncovers. Bringing comparison beyond causal explanations of national specificities, a cross- or transnational framework generates original questions about the values, attitudes, identities and social relations through which individuals engaged in processes whose scope far exceeded the particular contexts in which they took form.

I. MONTREAL AND BRUSSELS, CIRCA 1900

a) *Differences...*

On the surface, the historical trajectories of Brussels and Montreal to the end of the nineteenth century bear few similarities. Though both cities originated as sleepy riverbank settlements, Brussels traces its roots to agriculturalists of the tenth century who were already integrated in a network of northern European pathways. Conversely, when Montreal was founded in the seventeenth century by a band of religious missionaries on a site long abandoned by native populations, the tiny colony was considered the outermost frontier of a vast colonial empire. When the forces of industrialisation took root, nearly 900 years after its founding, Brussels was in the process of becoming an established capital, possessing political and economic institutions, vibrant social structures and community networks as well as a flourishing cultural and artistic production, all of which had been honed under the varying

influences of successive and alternating, Spanish, Austrian, French and Dutch rule. In 1830, the city had been the scene of armed uprising as Belgium declared its independence from outside governance, and by the end of the century, Brussels was comfortably affirming its status as the capital of the young and thriving nation.³ Major urban renewal projects were undertaken at mid-century in the aim of replacing its medieval central core with luxurious boulevards and sophisticated promenades.⁴ In 1880 Brussels hosted Belgium's lavish jubilee celebrations designed, in large part, to display both the nation's vitality and the capital city's ascendancy.⁵

As historian Jane Block argues, the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century were, for Belgium in general, and Brussels in particular, a period of "unbridled dynamism, experimentation and change,"⁶ fed by the currents of artistic and literary creativity flowing across Europe from Montmartre and other culturally rebellious localities. Physically transformed by the planning and building initiatives funded by King Leopold II's colonial enterprise,⁷ Brussels embodied this spirit of renewal, and was home to a vibrant community of avant-garde artists, such as those who gravitated around the meetings, exhibitions and publications of the celebrated group *Les XX* – later the *Libre esthétique* – a collective of painters who actively challenged academic norms of content and style. Photography and advertising posters, for their part, offered new media through which artists challenged conventions of visual representations, inserted themselves into the consumerist tendencies of modern industrial society, and offered fresh perspectives on urban space and life. In the world of architecture, these were the years when a young Victor Horta broke from the dominant neo-classical tradition to

³ On Brussels' various incarnations as capital under different regimes, see Jean Stengers, *Bruxelles : croissance d'une capitale* (Anvers: Fonds Mercator, 1979). On the challenges Brussels has historically faced in affirming its status as a capital city, see Claire Billen, "Bruxelles-Capitale?" in Anne Morelli, ed., *Les grands mythes de l'histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie* (Bruxelles: 1995), 219-232.

⁴ For a comprehensive study of these projects, refer to Thierry Demey, *Bruxelles, chronique d'une capitale en chantier*, 2 vols., vol. 1 Du voûtement de la Senne à la jonction Nord-Midi (Bruxelles: P. Legrain, 1990).

⁵ Historian Jean-François Constant analyses the role of this exhibition in the construction of ideas about the nation and in comparison with agricultural and industrial exhibitions held in Montreal during the period. See Jean-François Constant, "Entre mémoire et avenir. La nation aux expositions nationales de Bruxelles et Montréal (1880 et 1884) in Jaumain and Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville*, 351-371. On Brussels' attempts to project its vitality on the international scene, see Peter Scholliers, "An Essay on the History of the Internationalisation and Representation of Brussels, 1800-2000," in *19 keer Brussel - 19 fois Bruxelles - 19 times Brussels*, ed. Els Witte and Ann Mares (Brussels: VUB Press, 2001).

⁶ Jane Block, *Belgium, the Golden Decades, 1880-1914* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 1.

⁷ Piet Lombaerde, *Léopold II : Roi-bâtitseur* (Pandora, Snoeck-Ducaju & zoon, 1995).

surprise observers with buildings designed according to the malleability of materials like glass and steel, with sinuous curves appealing to modern sensitivities to the natural world, and daring uses of light and colour providing a pleasing contrast with the monotone greys of the industrial landscape. Brussels was also the hub of a dynamic literary scene, and the contributions of authors like Camille Lemonnier, Georges Eekhoud, Emile Verhaeren, Marius Renard, and Louis Dumont-Wilden, all of whom will be considered in these pages, echoed this spirit of renewal, bringing the subtleties of changing urban environment to the heart of readers' sensibilities.

Historians have pointed out that these cultural accomplishments were intimately bound up in Brussels' role as the country's economic and political centre. As Philippe Roberts-Jones notes, Belgium's economy flourished after 1880, its industries operated full-steam, its bourgeoisie prospered, fortunes were amassed, and those involved in the African colonial adventure were gaining in economic influence.⁸ While the country's political life opposed liberal and catholic political factions,⁹ the capital was also home to a thriving socialist movement, contesting the political and economic structures in place and channeling opposition from those who were left out, despite having supplied the labour for this industrial boom. The spirit of contestation and revolt that led to the creation of the *Parti ouvrier belge* in 1885, as well as to the expansion of the franchise and the beginnings of legislated social reforms in the late 1880s and 1890s, was also a source of inspiration to this bubbling cultural activity.¹⁰ The increased presence of industrial workers in the city, the visibility of their difficult living conditions and the message of protest they carried in strikes and even occasional riots provoked the imagination of authors and writers of different horizons, and challenged a deeply-rooted conservatism.¹¹ Writes Roberts-Jones, Brussels emerged, between 1880 and 1914, in its

⁸ Philippe Roberts-Jones et al., *Bruxelles, fin de siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 261. For a recent critical analysis of the colonial enterprise in the Congo, and its impact on Belgium's politics and economy, see Guy Vanthemsche, *La Belgique et le Congo. Empreintes d'une colonie, 1885-1980*, vol. 358 (Bruxelles: Éditions complexe, 2007).

⁹ Xavier Mabille, *Histoire politique de la Belgique : facteurs et acteurs de changement*, 4th ed. (Bruxelles: Crisp, 2000), Els Witte and Jan Craeybeckx, *La Belgique politique de 1830 à nos jours : les tensions d'une démocratie bourgeoise* (Bruxelles: Labor, 1987).

¹⁰ On the Parti ouvrier belge, see Marcel Liebman, *Les socialistes belges 1885-1914 : la révolte et l'organisation* (Bruxelles: Vie ouvrière, 1979). On the question of suffrage, see issue 31 of *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie*, "En avant pour le suffrage universel," (2004).

¹¹ Jean Puissant, "Bruxelles et les événements de mars 1886," in Marinette Bruwier, ed., *1886, la Wallonie née de la grève ?* (Liège: Archives du futur, 1990).

fully plural dimension, heir to centuries of tradition, but hostile to the weight of a bygone past. “Attaché à ce passé dans lequel la Belgique, tout au long du XIXe siècle entend puiser sa légitimité, Bruxelles tourne aussi son visage vers le futur.”¹²

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Montrealers too sought to establish their city’s position at the vanguard of the young Canadian nation, though the terms on which this was done differed substantially from the process undergone in Brussels. Having lost its briefly-held title as capital city of the Province of Canada after a fiery riot in 1849, Montreal, while consolidating its role as an economic centre, did not possess the aura of prestige that accompanied Brussels’ status as Belgium’s political capital. The rich cultural life that accompanied Brussels’ standing was not as developed in Montreal, which lacked the centuries of history through which Brussels had established itself as the centre of a wide range of intellectual, educational, scientific and artistic pursuits. As historian Paul-André Linteau notes, “sur le plan des arts et des lettres, Montréal est donc une ville assez provinciale et ne constitue pas encore un milieu propice à l’éclosion d’une production originale.”¹³

This is not to suggest that Montrealers lacked an imaginative spirit. On the contrary, their urban project was grounded precisely in a creative process, one of building up a European-style metropolis on the rugged North American landscape. As Linteau himself points out, Montreal elites gathered in its theatres and concert halls to watch and listen to both local and foreign artists. They consumed the increasing number of books and newspapers coming off local printing presses and they gathered around cultural institutions such as churches, colleges, art galleries, private clubs and libraries to discuss international literary, artistic and scientific developments. In their assessment of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Montreal, Marcel Fournier and Véronique Rodrigue argue that the city was progressively becoming an artistic and intellectual centre, and that the arrival of waves of immigrants allowed for the development of a distinct urban culture, affording it a cosmopolitan character. Increasingly sophisticated methods of

¹² Roberts-Jones et al., *Bruxelles, fin de siècle*, 260. On these developments, see also Marie-Thérèse Bitsch, *Histoire de la Belgique* (Paris: Hatier, 1992), 149 onward.

¹³ Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2nd ed. (Montréal: Boréal, 2000), 116. On the relative paucity of literary representations of Montreal in this period, see also Micheline Cambron, “Une ville sans trésor” in Madeleine Frédéric, ed., *Montréal, mégapole littéraire* (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Centre d’études canadiennes, 1991), 7-35.

communication such as rapid means of transportation, print media, the telephone, gramophone and cinema thrived in Montreal, bringing it into the modern orbit of mass culture and consumerism.¹⁴

In the final analysis, though, these and other scholars agree with art historian Esther Trépanier's contention that the advent of cultural modernity, the development of an artistic and intellectual generation that affirmed itself in opposition to established academic practices and forms of expression such as the movements that emerged in Europe as of the mid-nineteenth century, would not fully materialise in Montreal until the interwar period.¹⁵ So, while the type of modernity that surfaced in Brussels at the turn of the twentieth century combined a range of cultural and economic forces and was deeply rooted in cultural and ideological tensions bearing the heavy weight of traditions, the underlying push fuelling Montreal's metropolitan project relied somewhat more heavily on the city's booming economy. Although economic and cultural factors had varying degrees of influence over the dynamics of modernity in these two cities, it is important to emphasise that it was precisely this combination of factors that allowed for a modern ethos to structure urban life in both places.

Differences between Brussels and Montreal also rested upon material factors such as their respective geographical realities. In this sense, Montreal's ability to develop as an active hub for manufacturing, shipping and financial interests can be attributed to the presence of a vast hinterland that furnished the raw materials of industry and commerce. The much larger scale of construction in Montreal during this period, from towering skyscrapers to wide avenues, from gigantic factories, to palatial homes and expansive public parks, can also be explained by the vast amount of available space surrounding the original town centre. Brussels, on the other hand, found itself in the middle of a considerably more restricted territorial schema. Circumscribed by a ring of independent municipalities, and also located on a smaller but much more densely

¹⁴ See Marcel Fournier and Véronique Rodriguez, "Une époque fertile en miracles," in Isabelle Goumay and France Vanlaethem, eds., *Montréal métropole, 1880-1930* (Montréal: Boréal, 1998), 39-46. On Montreal's cultural life during this period, see also Micheline Cambron, ed., *La vie culturelle à Montréal vers 1900* (Montréal: Fides, 2005).

¹⁵ Esther Trépanier, *Peinture et modernité au Québec, 1919-1939* (Montréal: Éditions Nota bene, 1998), 9.

populated territory, Brussels was, as we will see, far more constrained than Montreal in its attempts to project its modernity onto so grandiose a scale.¹⁶

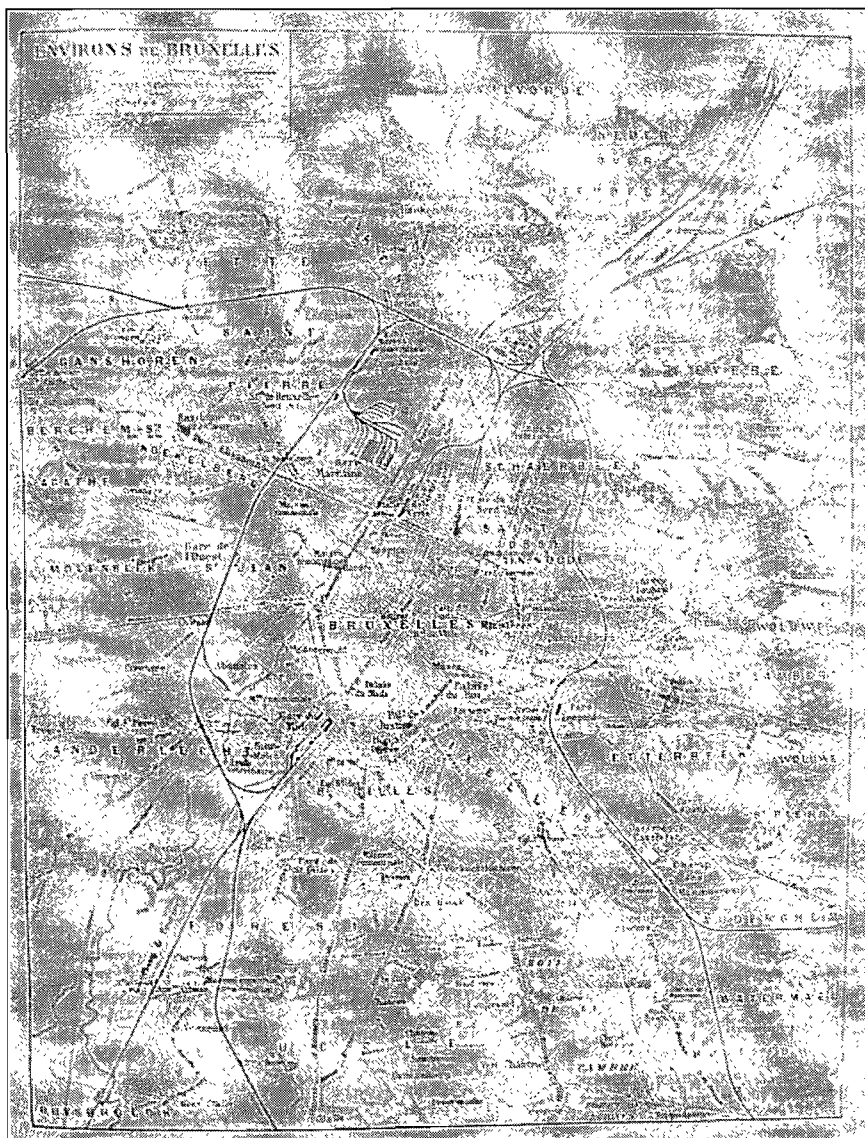


Figure 1 “Environs de Bruxelles,” showing central city and surrounding communes, the canal, the Senne and the principal railway lines in 1910.¹⁷

In some ways, the two cities’ bilingual heritage might come to mind as perhaps the only significant point of convergence. But even this is, at best, a false similarity.

¹⁶ For more on these geographical differences, see Chloé Deligne, Michèle Dagenais and Claire Poitras, “Gérer l’eau en milieu urbain. Regards croisés sur Bruxelles et Montréal, 1870-1980,” in Jaumain and Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville*, 171.

¹⁷ Louis Dumont-Wilden, *La Belgique illustrée* (Paris: Larousse, 1911).

While the history of Montreal's Francophone population during this period is frequently viewed in terms of social and economic struggle in the face of a wealthier Anglophone minority,¹⁸ the financial, political and cultural life of Brussels during this period was resolutely Francophone. As historian Eliane Gubin demonstrates, Brussels progressively lost its historical Flemish character over the course of the nineteenth century as the French-speaking industrial bourgeoisie increased its political power and social influence, such that the previously Flemish-speaking working class became increasingly bilingual, or even exclusively Francophone.¹⁹ And while Montreal historians have shown how linguistic tensions frequently polarized public opinion and political action, these frictions still remained of secondary importance in Brussels, where civil society was organised along Catholic, Socialist, and to a lesser extent, Liberal ideological "pillars."²⁰ Though a nascent Flemish movement emerged during these years, portraying the linguistic issue as a class-based form of social domination, Gubin notes that in its outward expression – street names, storefronts, signs, theatres, administrative services, city council, schools – Brussels displayed a decidedly francophone face. As such, it would have stood in contrast to the Anglophone, or at least bilingual, face of Montreal readily apparent in the iconographic representations of the turn-of-the-century city.

b) ... *and similarities*

An initial glance, then, would seem to reveal only a host of differences and inequivalencies in terms of these two cities' principal social, economic and political characteristics. To be sure, this in itself should by no means hamper a comparative

¹⁸ Citing Canadian census figures, Paul-André Linteau notes that the proportion of the population of British ethnicity decreased from 41% to 26% between 1881 and 1911, while during the same period the proportion of Francophones increased from 56% to 64%. Central and Eastern Europeans, Italians, Germans, and to a lesser extent Asians, rounded out the portrait. Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 162. While Montreal's economic elite was primarily Anglophone, Fernande Roy demonstrates that this did not preclude the emergence of a Francophone bourgeoisie during this period. See Fernande Roy, *Progrès, harmonie, liberté : le libéralisme des milieux d'affaires francophones de Montréal au tournant du siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 1988).

¹⁹ Eliane Gubin, "L'emploi des langues au XIXe siècle. Les débuts du mouvement flamand" in Stengers, *Bruxelles : croissance d'une capitale*, 238-239. Until the 1880s, notes Gubin, the proportion of French and Flemish speakers remained stable, with figures ranging from 20 to 25% Francophone, 36% to 39% Flemish, and 30 to 38% bilingual. As of the 1890s, however, the increasingly French character of Brussels can be attributed not to a proportional rise of Francophones, but to a surge in the "bilingual" category.

²⁰ Serge Jaumain, *Industrialisation et sociétés, 1830-1970 : la Belgique, CAPES-agrégation* (Paris: Ellipses-Marketing, 1998), 46.

project. Comparing objects only if they are similar is of little interest, as it reveals nothing uncommon or remarkable, argues anthropologist Marcel Détiéne, who maintains we must instead “comparer l’incomparable.”²¹ Nevertheless, these glaring differences also overshadow an important set of similarities. Most obvious is that, at the turn of the twentieth century, a large amount and a wide diversity of industrial activity was concentrated in these cities. Whether one lived in the Belgian capital or the Canadian metropolis, there was a good chance that one’s means of livelihood was in some way connected to this economic reality. From the elites who owned and managed industrial establishments to the foremen who ran them, to the masses of waged labourers employed in them, industrial production occupied city dwellers of all social backgrounds. Whether they worked from their own homes, in narrow basement workshops or in massive new installations, whether they were adults or children, men or women, recent arrivals to their city or descendants of many generations, a significant proportion of Montrealers and Bruxellois made their living and contributed to their family economies through industrial employment. From the importing of raw materials to the factories, to their transformation as manufactured products, to the display and sale of goods in commercial establishments, through to their shipment and distribution on international markets, the economies of these cities were structured around the multiple facets of industrial production. Even among the poor, whose economic strategies stretched beyond these formal structures, the choices available, such as piece work or boarding lodgers, were predicated upon the broader industrial economy.²²

In both of these cities, industrial manufacturing was characterized by the extent of its diversity. In Montreal, by far Canada’s largest industrial city in terms of production and employment during the period, the shift from small-scale manual production to massive, mechanized factories employing scores, even hundreds, of workers was largely complete by the 1870s. During this time, Montreal industries manufactured primarily consumer goods such as food, clothing and shoes, while machinery and other mechanical equipment formed another branch of specialization. As the city’s manufacturing force continued to expand through the turn of the century,

²¹ Marcel Détiéne, *Comparer l’incomparable* (Paris: Seuil, 2000).

²² Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrialising Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

production increased, and among the main industries were textiles, tobacco products, electrical equipment, steelworks and rolling mills. While in 1890 the value of manufactured goods, 77 million dollars, had more than doubled from twenty years earlier, it would continue its rise over the next two decades to reach 195 million dollars by 1910. Over the same period, the number of people employed in these industries also increased dramatically, going from 20,000 in the early 1870s, to 42,000 in 1890 and 80,000 in 1910.²³

For its part, the Brussels agglomeration also positioned itself as the main centre of industrial employment within its national sphere; Belgium being, for most of the nineteenth century, the most industrialised country after Great Britain.²⁴ The intensification of industrialisation in Brussels began in earnest at mid century, as factories sprouted both within the old city and in the ring of nine municipalities immediately adjacent. By the beginning of the twentieth century, over 100,000 people worked to manufacture foodstuffs, chemicals, paper and wood products, textiles, leather, metals, and a host of other goods. Compared with Montreal, however, Brussels' role as industrial capital was less visually spectacular, given the smaller scales of production. While enormous, multi-story steelworks and factories lined the Montreal landscape, their Belgian counterparts were more typically located around Walloon cities such as Liège or Charleroi. Indeed, as historian Michel De Beule has calculated, 23% of employees worked for small companies employing 5 or fewer people, while another 44% worked in midsize concerns of up to 50 people.²⁵ Concentrated into a multitude of

²³ Empirical data concerning industrialisation is taken from Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*.

²⁴ "Autour de son port, de son canal et de ses gares, la region de Bruxelles s'affirme, dans la seconde moitié du dix-neuvième siècle, comme la première zone industrielle du pays." Claire Billen, Jean-Marie Duvosquel, and Charley Case, *Bruxelles* (Anvers: Fonds Mercator, 2000), 109. On Belgium's "precocious" industrialisation, see René Leboutte, Jean Puissant, and Denis Scuto, *Un siècle d'histoire industrielle, 1873-1973 : Belgique, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas : industrialisation et sociétés* (Paris: SEDES, 1998), Jaumain, *Industrialisation et sociétés*.

²⁵ Michel De Beule, *Bruxelles, une ville industrielle méconnue* (Bruxelles: La Fonderie, 1994), 16. On the question of scale, De Beule explains that if "l'industrie de la capitale est souvent méconnue, cela tient sans doute à ce que l'industrie lourde y est peu développée : point ici de paysages sidérurgiques comme à Liège ou de vastes complexes pétrochimiques comme dans la zone industrialo-portuaire anversoises. Bien que la structure industrielle de Bruxelles-capitale se soit fortement modifiée dans le temps, elle est toujours restée caractérisée par la diversification et la dominance des industries de main d'œuvre, souvent qualifiée. Jusqu'à la seconde guerre mondiale pour le moins, l'innovation technologique définit l'industrie bruxelloise." Michel De Beule, *Itinéraire du paysage industriel bruxellois : 30 km de Forest à Evere*

ilots, clusters of industrial buildings hidden from view behind a standard street-front facade, the smaller industries of Brussels, though less visible than in Montreal, were nevertheless the economy's primary motor, and the sites of the urban tensions this thesis will examine.

Such empirical data underscores the relative importance of the industrial economy to these cities. More central to this study are the many ways this presence of industry shaped urban life in these two centres. Indeed, despite differences of scale and specialization, the most significant dimension of this massive expansion of industry is the effect it had on the landscape of both Montreal and Brussels. Having established itself as the headquarters of a burgeoning international fur trade in the eighteenth century, Montreal took active measures to position itself at the helm of Canada's industrial economy, consolidating its predominance not just in the manufacturing sector, but in transport and financial activities as well. Large manufactures and warehouses were initially built within the older downtown district, where they soon found themselves competing for limited space with civil society's public and private institutions such as municipal buildings, the courts, financial institutions and various company headquarters. As these establishments laid their territorial claim to the city centre in the form of prestigious and striking public buildings, the ever-larger factories and workshops moved to the outskirts, forming the imposing ramparts of a bustling town. Historical geographer Robert Lewis notes the extent to which the entire city's geography was reshaped according to the pressures of industrialisation. Turn-of-the-century intensification of manufacturing, coupled with the spatial requirements for the ever-larger machinery and new production methods that accompanied this trend, resulted in the emergence of entirely new suburbs on the city's immediate outskirts. But, Lewis adds, smaller firms whose production was based on less sophisticated methods and "investment capabilities" were also attracted by the financial incentives which these bordering municipalities offered to entrepreneurs and industrialists, contributing to the central city's loosening grip on manufacturing, and confirming that any history of

Montreal and industrialisation must be understood in terms of this “elaborate metropolitan geography” that was being created.²⁶

Lapping against the walls of this fortress of industry were the waters of the city’s moat, the mighty St. Lawrence River. Indeed, the St. Lawrence had always been central, not just to the industrial spatialization of Montreal, but to its earliest development. When Maisonneuve’s intrepid band of Counter-Reformation missionaries first settled on the southern tip of the largest island in a vast archipelago, the river offered both a practical means of communication and a source of drinking water. Only as the city’s *raison d’être* shifted from the religious to the economic, though, was the full extent of this strategic positioning felt. Montreal’s hydrographical situation, at the confluence of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers, had made it the linchpin of the colonial fur trade enterprise and ensured the transition to manufacturing predominance. In terms of industrial geography, production was initially centred along the city’s waterfront. As industrialisation forced the city to expand, smaller workshops, textile producers for instance, moved north along the central St. Lawrence Boulevard, and out of Montreal proper, into towns like Saint-Jean-Baptiste and Saint-Louis-du-Mile-End. Larger installations requiring hydraulic power and direct access to shipping installations, however, stayed close to the river. To the east, industries changed the make-up of older working-class districts within the city limits, such as Sainte-Marie and Saint-Jacques. Further along the river, this movement contributed to the construction of vibrant new towns geared exclusively to manufacturing, the city of Maisonneuve being the best example.²⁷ To the west, the choppy waters of the Lachine rapids, which had prevented the original European settlers from landing any further upstream, had been bypassed since the 1820s with the construction of an inland canal, an infrastructure frequently enlarged over the course of the nineteenth century to make way for the ever-growing transatlantic vessels that sailed through Montreal. Communities bordering the canal, Sainte-Cunégonde, Saint-Gabriel, Saint-Henri, for example, saw themselves becoming

²⁶ Robert Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 135.

²⁷ On the development of Maisonneuve as one of Montreal’s most important industrial suburbs, see Paul-André Linteau, *Maisonneuve, ou Comment des promoteurs fabriquent une ville : 1883-1918* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1981).

the heartland of Montreal's industrial boom.²⁸ Most of the outlying municipalities would be formally annexed to the central city by the end of the First World War, but together they shaped the landscape of industrialisation in Montreal. The spatial layout of the city's industry, to the north, east and west, thus took the overall shape of two perpendicular axes, the meeting point of which was the heart of a thriving metropolis.

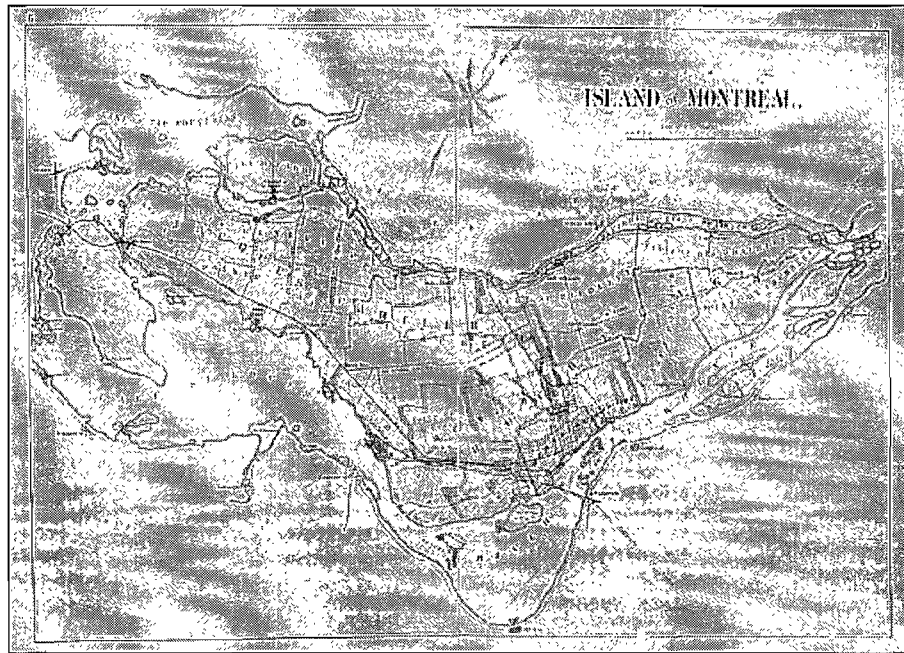


Figure 2 "Island of Montreal," by H.W. Hopkins.²⁹

At this point of intersection stood state-of-the-art harbour installations, featuring towering grain elevators, massive docks and jetties, and as of the early 1880s, the first complete electric lighting system in any port around the world. These infrastructures were built over the course of the nineteenth century, under the aegis of a dynamic group of commissioners, eager both to accommodate the shipping needs of their city's industries and to supersede other north-eastern seaports rivalling for commercial

²⁸ On the history of the Lachine Canal, see Yvon Desloges and Alain Gelly, *Le canal de Lachine : du tumulte des flots à l'essor industriel et urbain, 1860-1950* (Sillery, Québec: Septentrion, 2002). For an analysis of the development of the urban fabric along its course, see Desmond Bliet and Pierre Gauthier, "Understanding the Built Form of Industrialisation along the Lachine Canal of Montreal," *Urban History Review* 35, no. 1 (2006).

²⁹ H. W. Hopkins, "Atlas of the city and island of Montreal, including the counties of Jacques Cartier and Hochelaga : from actual surveys, based upon the cadastral plans deposited in the office of the Department of Crown Lands," (S.I.: Provincial Surveying and Pub. Co., 1879).

superiority. Only the ice locks of the winter months could dampen their aspirations for growth in shipping activity. This quest to move goods and people ever faster and farther also marked the urban landscape with a complex and innovative network of transcontinental railway systems, that would shape not just Montreal's, but all of Canada's commercial, demographic, and even political history. As geographer David Hanna argues, these transportation networks were the key to translating the city's manufacturing capacity into its broader role as the country's economic and social metropolis.³⁰



Figure 3 Central Montreal. Detail of Hopkins map showing central districts and Lachine Canal.

In Brussels too, the urban environment was forever transformed by the spread of industrial interests. In the tradition of medieval cities, the various trade corporations had long been based in the town's inner core, notably around the central Grand'Place. However, as manufacturing shifted to a mass production scale, there occurred an outward movement quite similar to Montreal's. Though many smaller industries

³⁰ David Hanna, "The importance of transportation infrastructure" in Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, eds., *Montreal Metropolis, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Stoddart in association with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1998), 45-56.

remained within the narrow city centre, the urban renovation projects undertaken throughout the century left progressively less space, and the presence of factories clashed with the objectives of embellishment. As a result, workshops and factories found themselves pushed into a ring of independent municipalities, or *communes*, surrounding the central city. This process had been greatly facilitated by the demolition of the fortification walls that had surrounded the city during the second quarter of the century,³¹ and the subsequent abolition of the excise tax in 1860.³²

³¹ On the successive projects concerning Brussels' fortification walls, see Astrid Lelarge, *Bruxelles. L'émergence de la ville contemporaine : la démolition du rempart et des fortifications aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Bruxelles: CIVA, 2001).

³² Victor-Gaston Martiny, "Le développement urbain," in Arlette Smolar-Meynard and Jean Stengers, eds., *La région de Bruxelles : des villages d'autrefois à la ville d'aujourd'hui* (Bruxelles: Crédit communal, 1989), 164.

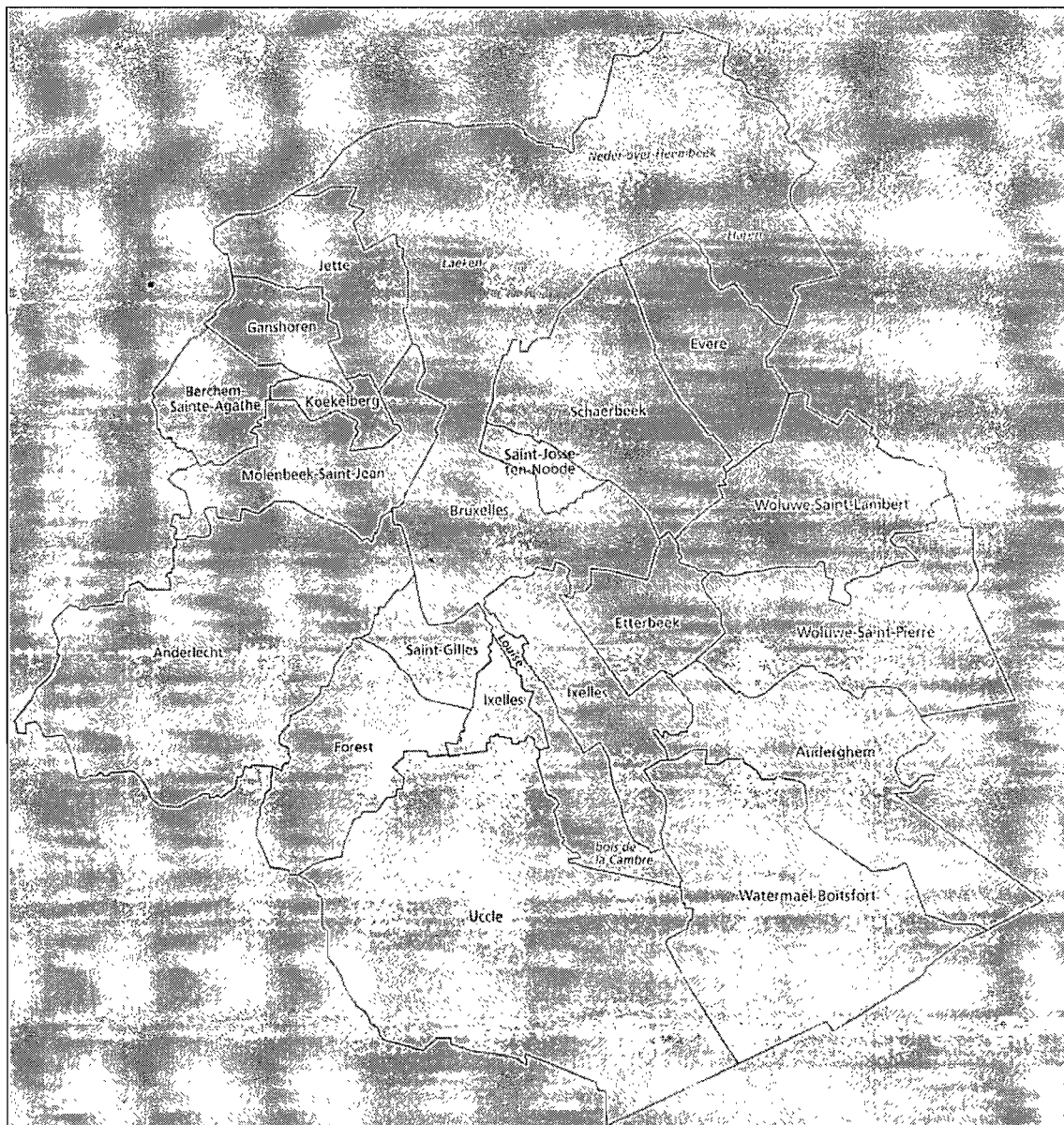


Figure 4 “La Région et les dix-neuf communes.” Map showing the municipalities comprising the Brussels region, and referred to in this thesis.³³

³³ Billen, Duvosquel and Case, *Bruxelles*, 166.

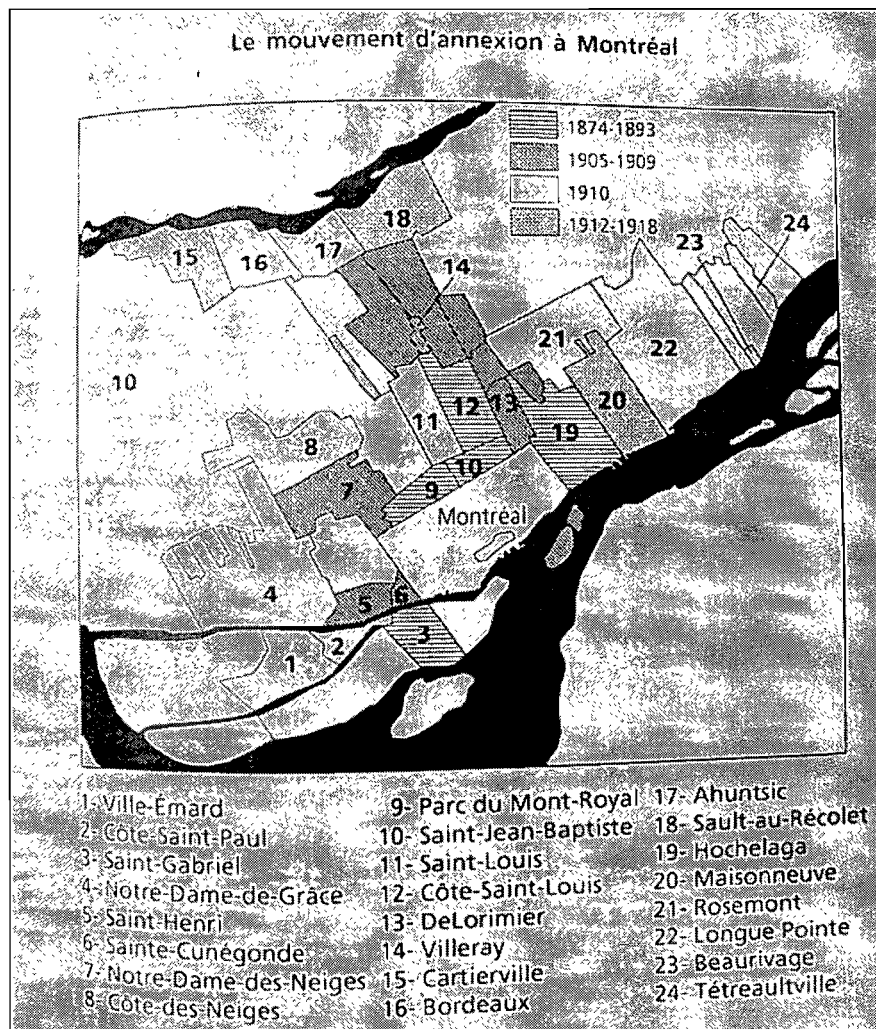


Figure 5 “Le mouvement d’annexion à Montréal.” Map showing the outlying suburbs of Montreal that are referred to in this thesis, and the years in which they were annexed to the central city.³⁴

Though Brussels shares with Montreal the particularity of being a riverside town, its main watercourse, the Senne, is much smaller, and its portion flowing through the city, used as an open sewer, was entirely vaulted in the mid-nineteenth century, when it was considered a nuisance and a public health risk.³⁵ The main industrial transportation network crossing the capital was comprised of a railway system, dating to the 1830s, and two canals that flowed on a north-south axis, and joined up immediately to the west of

³⁴ Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 207.

³⁵ Chloé Deligne, *Bruxelles sortie des eaux : les relations entre la ville et ses cours d'eau du moyen âge à nos jours* (Bruxelles: Musée de la ville de Bruxelles, 2005).

the city centre. Inaugurated in 1561, the Willebroek Canal was a well-established route connecting Brussels to Antwerp, Belgium's largest seaport. Of more recent construction, and directly related to the country's industrialisation, was the Charleroi Canal, opened in 1832 and which allowed the city and its industries to be directly connected to the coal-producing areas in the south of Belgium.³⁶

Given their commercial importance, it was along these canals that Brussels' industries were based, such that the western portion of the city, and the neighbouring commune of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean constituted one of the most densely industrialised areas of the country. A heavy industrial presence also took root in a number of peripheral communes such as Anderlecht, Saint-Gilles and Forest, such that the analogy to Montreal's perpendicular axes is a more or less crescent shaped band of territory, encircling the western portion of central Brussels, stretching from the communes of Haeren and Neder-over-Hembeek to the north, and along the Senne's basin all the way to Forest and the western part of Uccle in the south.³⁷ As in Montreal, however, these politically autonomous districts can be taken as forming a continuous whole on the wider landscape of industrialisation.

The effects of industrialisation on the physical geography of these two cities were accompanied by equally important changes in their social geography. The increasing population figures for these cities at the turn of the twentieth century attest to the rapidity of their growth. In Montreal and its immediate suburbs, for instance, the population in 1881 numbered just over 170,000 people. Thirty years later, the figure had jumped to nearly 530,000, as new Montrealers continued to arrive from the Quebec countryside, as well as from across Europe, and in some cases, Asia.³⁸ Though not as marked, Brussels also experienced impressive growth, the agglomeration's population rising from 437,000 in 1880 to 757,000 in 1910.³⁹ As the density of downtown cores increased with the rise of industrial, commercial, and financial activity, and as more and more space had to be made for wide avenues, imposing monuments and towering public

³⁶ For an overview of the development of these canals, see issue 1 of *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie*, "Bruxelles : un canal, des usines et des hommes," 1986.

³⁷ De Beule, *Itinéraire du paysage industriel bruxellois*, 7.

³⁸ Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 40, 160.

³⁹ These figures are based on the 1880 and 1910 national censuses, cited in Frank Daelmans, "La démographie au XIXe et XXe siècle," in Smolar-Meynart and Stengers, eds., *La région de Bruxelles*, 212-213.

buildings – all meant to reflect modernity's hold over Brussels and Montreal⁴⁰ – living quarters were being pushed away from the centre, and into the immediate periphery. In addition to workshops and warehouses, then, the above-mentioned districts also attracted droves of men, women and children who fuelled these establishments with their labour. This high-density mix of people and activity, this close and incessant movement of individuals through physically and socially constructed urban space, are what resulted in the highly charged atmosphere of modernity which forms the framework of this study.

For their part, the wealthier citizens of these cities sought to make their homes as far away from the disagreeable environment of industrial neighbourhoods as they could, and at an increasing distance from downtown neighbourhoods, often considered overcrowded and insalubrious despite the embellishment works under way. In Brussels, those who could afford to left the centre of the city for the newly built *quartier Léopold* or the wooded and breezy heights of communes like Ixelles. Prestigious thoroughfares like the Avenue Louise were built, lined with rows of trees and grandiose private homes, leading out to the scenic and refreshing Bois de la Cambre. [Figure 6] In Montreal, it was around the bucolic slopes of Mount Royal that the city's wealthiest residents elected to build their castle-like houses. Certain municipalities even imposed strict building regulations in order to ensure that their territory would be populated only by those who possessed the means to comply.⁴¹

⁴⁰ This reflects a widespread trend in the development of cities during this period. By the beginning of the twentieth century, notes Helen Meller, "well established cultural norms" dictated that city centres should contain "grand municipal offices, signifying the importance of local government in achieving a high level of civilized life, and cultural institutions to support such a life: a central library and university, a concert hall, art gallery, and civic museum." Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans, and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 28.

⁴¹ See Walter Van Nus, "A Community of Communities: Suburbs in the Development of 'Greater Montreal,'" in Gournay and Vanlaethem, eds., *Montreal Metropolis*, 59-67. On the dynamics underlying the formation of Montreal's wealthiest residential district in the nineteenth century, see Roderick Macleod, "Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal's Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895" (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1997).

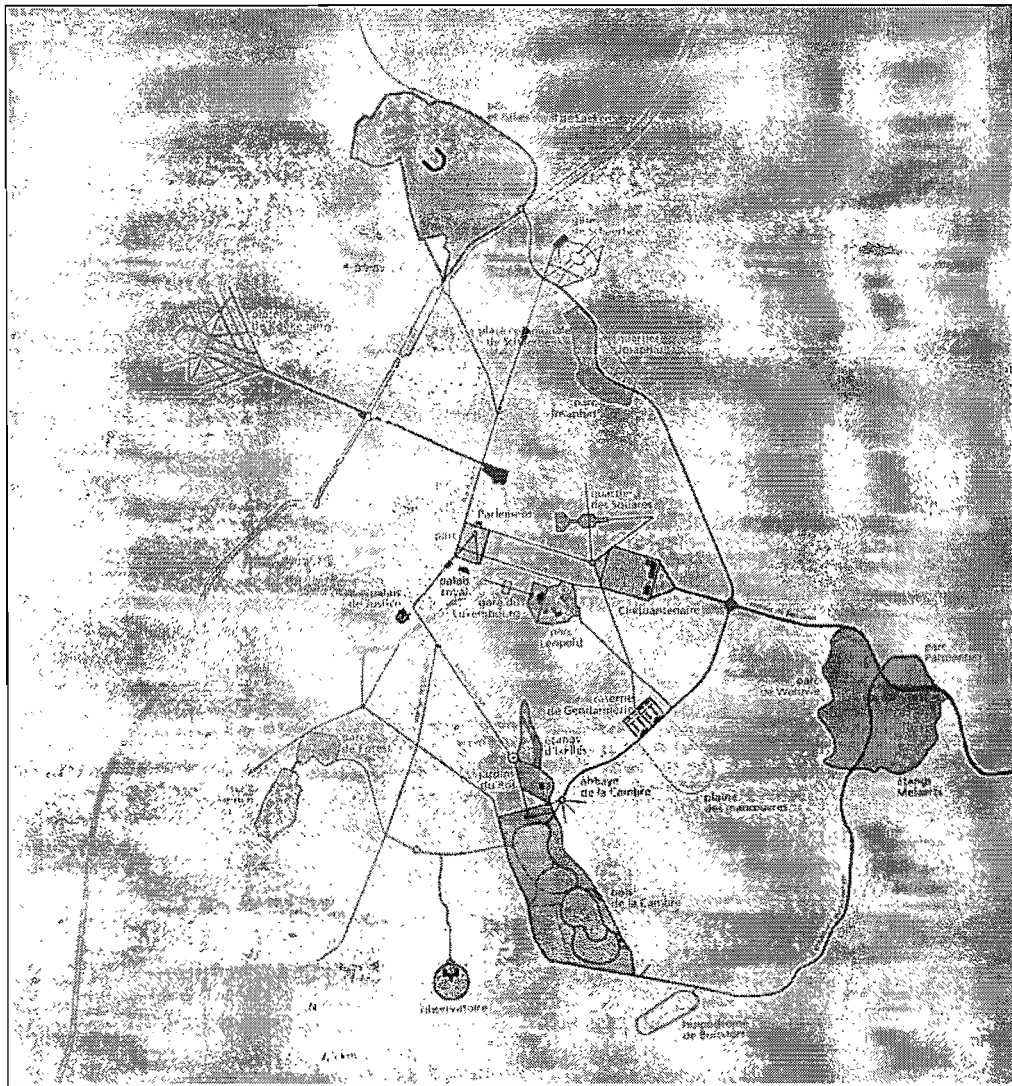


Figure 6 “La ville bourgeoise aménage sa périphérie: quelques tracés léopoldiens (1880-1910).” Illustration showing the central city, and the prestigious neighbourhoods constructed at the turn of the century. The industrial districts were located along the canal, running west of the city centre.⁴²

The influence of the industrial economy also extended beyond basic economic priorities. Political and bureaucratic structures, for example, were also intimately connected to the presence of industry within their jurisdictions. To the extent that these cities were dependent economically on industrialisation, it follows that both were directly affected by the legislation and policies concerning industrial production at

⁴² Billen, Duvosquel and Case, *Bruxelles*, 159.

provincial and national level of governments. Whether these concerned tariff rates, safety regulations or building codes, the political pressure exercised by and on urban interests also stemmed from their industrial realities. Closer to home, the organisation of municipal structures in Montreal and Brussels was heavily influenced by the powerful forces of industrialisation. Municipal politicians were accountable to an electorate that had among its main concerns the place of industry in the city. One of the main tasks facing the mayors and councillors of Montreal and Brussels was to diffuse an image of their respective cities that highlighted this spirit of progress and prosperity they sought to embody. And this had to be done in spite of pervasive challenges also associated with industrialised society, not the least of which were poverty, insalubrious housing and working conditions, workers' unrest and environmental degradation.

In both cities, the preoccupations of elected representatives were passed on to bureaucratic officials responsible for managing these problems on a daily basis. Indeed, the heavy presence of industrialisation in Brussels and Montreal required new planning initiatives, as well as strategies for dealing with industry's side effects. Roads had to be built and maintained, zoning and pollution regulations had to be elaborated and enforced, water and electricity had to be supplied, boilers and engines had to be inspected, and public health had to be protected, such that the municipal apparatus of these cities increasingly became the purview of engineers, architects, hygienists and other professionals.⁴³ In sum, municipal politics during this period involved a delicate balancing act in which industrial imperatives had to be met at the same time as voters' desire for an environment free from the more sombre effects of industry had to be ensured, and as this thesis will show, questions of industrialisation and urbanisation were central to citizens' engagement with local authorities.

⁴³ As Robert Gagnon explains, the complexity of governing large cities, along with the growth of elaborate technical solutions over the course of the nineteenth century meant that elected officials were less and less able to stay abreast of the possibilities available to them, resulting in their increased reliance on the advice of experts as they made political decisions. Robert Gagnon, *Questions d'égouts : santé publique, infrastructures et urbanisation à Montréal au XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 2006), 26. On the development of the Montreal municipal administration at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Chapters 1 and 2 of Michèle Dagenais, *Des pouvoirs et des hommes : l'administration municipale de Montréal, 1900-1950* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000). For the international context, see Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville : les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2006), Christian Topalov, "La ville 'congestionnée' : acteurs et langage de la réforme urbaine à New York au début du XXe siècle," *Genèses* (1990).

From an economic, political, demographic and geographic standpoint, then, Brussels and Montreal shared an important similarity in the extent to which the presence of industrialisation played a pivotal role in their shape and organisation. This offers a useful starting point of comparison for the period in question. I say starting point because my objective in this thesis is to examine how the marked presence of industry contributed in perhaps less obvious ways to the overall atmosphere that animated these cities and moulded their inhabitants' sense of self. For, as historian C.A. Bayly reminds us, "an economy is, after all, as much a matter of culture, social links, discourses and representations as it is a matter of brute materialism."⁴⁴ Industrialisation, I argue, shaped social and cultural referents as well, and the interest of comparing Montreal and Brussels as industrial cities goes beyond mechanical issues of economic productivity or political structures. It allows us to dig beneath this surface to explore how the context of urban industrialisation informed these questions of culture and social links. Despite their historical differences, and beyond certain structural similarities, my comparison of these two cities will revolve around matters of discourse and representations, of identities and interiorities. Processes of industrialisation and urbanisation will, in this study, constitute the painted canvas placed behind a theatre stage, offering the colourful backdrop against which human preoccupations are played out.

In his recent comparison of two industrial cities, Manchester and Chicago, historian Harold Platt bases his juxtaposition on the fact that both constituted "shock cities," representing "the horror and wonder of contemporary society on both sides of the Atlantic. They were different from the great centres of trade and the capitals of empires of the past. Instead, they became industrial cities: Cottonopolis and Porkopolis."⁴⁵ While this basis allows him to compare approaches to environmental reform, the interest in comparing Montreal and Brussels is precisely that both weaved together the horrors of industrialisation with the wonders of important capitals and trade centres. Viewed from this angle, Montreal and Brussels are comparable more than just as cities of similar scale attempting to carve their place in a global network of economic

⁴⁴ C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 65.

⁴⁵ Harold Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xii.

exchanges. At the turn of the twentieth century, they were also both dynamic centres where power was affirmed and contested, where cultural expressions were formed and articulated. These cities were poles of attraction that exercised a compelling magnetism over people from outlying areas and other parts of the world. Under the impulse of industrialisation, Montreal and Brussels concentrated a great deal of both creative and destructive energy from which dwellers drew their multiple identities, individual as well as collective. In a broad sense, sources of the period demonstrate how urban industrialisation shaped class, ethnic and gender dynamics. But they also show how it touched people on a more personal and intimate level. As urban environments in constant mutation and evolution, the spatial realities of both Montreal and Brussels affected people all the way to their physical senses, creating a constant dialogue between the urban landscape and the discourses and ideas that gave it meaning.

Above all, then, Montreal and Brussels can be compared as the shores on which struck this tidal wave of modernity, as fertile breeding grounds for the new ideas and aspirations it left in its path. Being among the most visible and farthest-reaching expressions of this phenomenon, the forces of industrialisation and urbanisation provide a solid hold on which to anchor these observations. To be sure, cities like London, Paris, Vienna and New York are most typically associated with nineteenth and twentieth-century modernity. For their part, Montreal and Brussels offer the opportunity to explore the development of modernity in somewhat less ostentatious contexts, to see how these forces operated in places that were not quite at the centre of this interconnected world, but constantly more attracted by this centre's gravitational pull.⁴⁶ And if no "natural" or obvious connections between these two cities in particular call for such a juxtaposition, the objective pursued is to go beyond the more evident empirical points of comparison I have raised in this chapter – population size, nature of economic production, social and cultural development – in order to make use of Montreal and

⁴⁶ As historian Alan Mayne argues, the surge of urbanisation in the nineteenth century meant that more people lived in "constellations of urban places" than in "the handful of metropolitan centres with populations over a million inhabitants." From a historical perspective, their interest lies in the way these smaller cities "were networked components of an interactive urban world system. The exchanges amongst this hierarchy of towns and cities consisted not only of products and capital, or even of the movement of peoples. They also comprised the circulation of ideas." Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Shum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 5-6.

Brussels as case studies in which can be examined the way global flows of ideas about modernity shaped the form and content of both European and North American cities.

II. WHY COMPARE, AND HOW?

Seductive in appearance, but potentially hazardous in practice, comparison seeks to nuance historical interpretation by testing the specificities of a given object in light of other cases that may appear quite similar or different on the surface. To complement this overview of Montreal and Brussels, this final section will offer some methodological thoughts on the nature of comparative history. What is to be gained from comparison? To what extent can our comprehension of the way urban dwellers forged their relationship with the urban environment in these two cities be strengthened by virtue of studying them in terms of one another?

Comparative history, practitioners agree, can enrich understandings of the past by bringing narratives out of the sometimes narrow contexts in which they lie, and into a wider frame of analysis. In this way, claims of particularities or exceptions on one hand, or of similitude or harmony on the other, can be legitimated through a more thorough form of verification. From a practical perspective however, one of the main difficulties for the comparative historian is that, while the discipline endorses these objectives, there exists no formal comparative history methodology. Although some historians borrow from more explicitly formulated rules in the social sciences, such methods are usually more suitable for quantitative analyses than for studies that rely upon the subjective nature of qualitative representations. Indeed, historians have generally proceeded on a case by case basis, adapting their observations to the nuances of the sources at hand, such that there are as many comparative methods as there are comparative histories.

Given this multiplicity of procedures, comparative history appears less an actual methodology, than a perspective, an attitude, a posture, a set of approaches, or a frame of mind.⁴⁷ The questions one asks comparatively depend on the ends toward which the comparison proceeds, and in particular on whether the objective is to compare societies,

⁴⁷ Deborah Cohen, "Comparative History: Buyer Beware" in Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2004), 59. See also Pierre-Yves Saunier, "Going Transnational? News From Down Under," *Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 31, no. 2 (2006), Pierre-Yves Saunier, "Circulations, connexions et espaces transnationaux," *Genèses* 57 (2005).

or to trace the developments that traversed and intersected them. As the editors of a collaborative study on the topic, historians Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, point out, it is important to distinguish from the outset between comparative history, strictly speaking, and a cross- or transnational approach. The former, they note, "is concerned with similarities and differences; in explaining a given phenomenon," while the latter "follows topics beyond national boundaries."⁴⁸ But, they and others in the volume add, the line demarcating the two is a permeable one, and fruitful enquiries might adopt both sets of objectives.

Comparison, as it has traditionally been understood, "means to discuss two or more historical phenomena systematically with respect to their similarities and differences in order to reach certain intellectual aims," notes historian Jürgen Köcka.⁴⁹ If the sustained references to a 1928 treatise in the most recent literature are any indication, proponents of this approach continue to feel indebted to historian Marc Bloch, who long ago noted that observing two societies in light of one another brought out elements of their history that were not visible when each was examined in turn.⁵⁰ Indeed, this quest for hidden treasures remains one of the great promises and allures of comparative history. By concentrating on the ways cultural and economic modernity took root in Brussels and Montreal, this thesis will seek to bring out certain specificities of people's subjective relationship to the urban environment that has escaped a historiography which tends to treat each city in isolation.

Yet, as Cohen argues, this chase for "the divine revelations that comparisons grant on occasion" has placed undue faith and raised unreasonable expectations of this approach.⁵¹ Indeed, this mode of questioning has recently been challenged on a number of fronts, having to do specifically with its continued tendency to rely on the nation as

⁴⁸ Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, "Introduction: Comparative History, Cross-National History, Transnational History – Definitions" in Cohen and O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*, xii.

⁴⁹ The author qualifies these aims as heuristic, descriptive, analytical and paradigmatic. Jürgen Köcka, "Comparison and Beyond," *History and Theory* 42, no. 1 (2003), 39.

⁵⁰ Bloch initially formulated his definition at the 1928 Congrès international des sciences historiques in Oslo. It was subsequently published in that year's December issue of the *Revue de synthèse historique*. For a more readily available reproduction in a collection of his works, see Marc Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes," in Marc Bloch and Léopold Benjamin, *Mélanges historiques*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Paris: SEVPEN, 1963), 17. See also Raymond Grew, "On the Current State of Comparative Studies," in *Marc Bloch aujourd'hui : histoire comparée et sciences sociales*, ed. Hartmut Atsma and André Burguière (Paris: EHESS, 1986).

⁵¹ Deborah Cohen, "Comparative History," 66.

the main unit of analysis, and the propensity to place causal explanations for historical development at the heart of its objectives.⁵² By its very nature, critics charge, comparative history tends to focus on similarities and differences between nations by casting them as static units, often frozen in time, reifying the nation as a category of belonging, and serving the cause of exceptionalist arguments that lean to classifications of superior and inferior.⁵³ Moreover, the search for the reasons that explain similarities and differences rests on a structural model of historical analysis that no longer sits well with historians interested in uncovering values, symbols and meanings.⁵⁴

How are these pitfalls to be avoided? As many have suggested, historians can move beyond causality and the nation by focussing on specific themes – gender, slavery, war, migration, or trade, for example – as they play out in various contexts: national, but local or global as well. “Cities, regions, or indeed empires can be and have to a degree become productive units of demarcation for comparative study,” historian Susan Pederson reminds us.⁵⁵ Whereas a national perspective risks overlooking varied experiences in favour of a unitary or dominant model, cities appear as useful objects of comparative history because they offer the possibility of analysing a wide range of common experiences. Urban growth during this period meant that city life constituted a daily reality for more people than ever before, including for those who did not live in cities but who encountered them through regular commutes.⁵⁶ Moreover, the growth of

⁵² This critique is taken up by several contributors to Cohen and O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*. As historian Robert Gregg argues, “the most severe limitation of comparative literature has been its national and nationalist bent.” Robert Gregg, *Inside Out, Outside In: Essays in Comparative History* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2000), 5-8.

⁵³ Nancy Green, “Forms of Comparison” in Cohen and O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*, 41-56. See also Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Penser l'histoire croisée : entre empirie et réflexivité,” *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58, no. 1 (2003), Khaldoun Samman, “The Limits of the Classical Comparative Method,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 24, no. 4 (2001).

⁵⁴ Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond.” See also Susan R. Grayzel, “Across Battle Fronts: Gender and the Comparative Cultural History of Modern European War” in Cohen and O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*, 71-84.

⁵⁵ She does, however, qualify this assertion by further noting that “such approaches remain marginal: for the most part, comparative historians continue to use the nation-state as their primary unit of analysis, whereas those interested in other geographical units only rarely cast their inquiries in a comparative frame.” Susan Pederson, “Comparative History and Women’s History: Explaining Convergence and Divergence” in Cohen and O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*, 93. See also Donald R Kelley, “Grounds for Comparison,” *Storia della Storiografia* 39, no. 1 (2001).

⁵⁶ As of the late nineteenth century, daily commuting was especially common in Belgium, where the state invested in subscription schemes geared at workers. See Christian Vandermotten, “La navette de travail vers Bruxelles,” in Serge Jaumain, ed., *Bruxelles et la Jonction Nord-Midi* (Bruxelles: Archives de la ville

cities was an increasingly global phenomenon, raising the possibility of comparing how a given set of changes took root in different local contexts.

To be sure, this does not imply that urban dwellers all experienced these processes in similar ways, even within a specific city.⁵⁷ However, although individual experiences of the city were variable, the urban setting offers a distinct material frame of reference from which we can explore people's relationship to the processes of modernity that characterised the period. For instance, as historian Stephen Mosley points out in his study of industrial pollution in Manchester, the atmosphere created by massive clouds of coal smoke affected the lives of all residents, irrespective of background.⁵⁸ While wealthy and poor, men and women, had different rapports to city life, they nonetheless shared this setting and structured their lives in reference to it. Here the objective is less comparative than cross-national. How did these realities play out in the distinct settings that were Montreal and Brussels? Rather than placing two units of comparison side by side, this approach seeks to understand the way they were connected, the linkages through which people, goods and ideas crossed national or regional boundaries.⁵⁹

Note Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, proponents of *histoire croisée*, this framework ceases to fix units of comparison as static categories, and places them in interaction, examining the "va et vient" between them.⁶⁰ This approach, however, implies a relatively high degree of communication, travel and exchanges between the societies in question. The turn of the nineteenth century was indeed a time of increased transnational mobility, and the international exchange of ideas about the city, the way it was experienced and managed, intensified during this period in large part as a result of these flows.⁶¹ But it must also be acknowledged that people did not travel between Montreal and Brussels in the same way as people went back and forth between

de Bruxelles, 2004), 99-113. See also Janet Polasky, "Transplanting and Rooting Workers in London and Brussels: A Comparative History," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 3 (2001).

⁵⁷ As historians Sally Sheard and Helen Power argue, inequalities and disparities within urban settings demonstrate that this shared residency did "not necessarily guarantee a genuine moral or cultural community." Sally Sheard and Helen Power, eds., *Body and City: Histories of Urban Public Health* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 1-2.

⁵⁸ Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001), 19-20.

⁵⁹ Saunier, "Going Transnational?"

⁶⁰ Werner and Zimmermann, "Penser l'histoire croisée."

⁶¹ Pierre-Yves Saunier, "Transatlantic Connections and Circulations in the 20th Century: The Urban Variable," *Informationen zur modernen Stadgeschichte* 1 (2007).

London, New York and Paris, or, for that matter, between Montreal and Boston, or Brussels and Berlin. Contacts between residents of our two cities certainly existed, and are related on a number of occasions in the chapters that follow, but this material is insufficient to allow for a sustained analysis.⁶²

How, then, can a cross-national analysis be implemented in cases where direct contact between the chosen societies was minimal? The answer lies in shifting the comparative focus away from local particularities, and on placing the themes and conceptual apparatus of the study at the heart of the investigation. Indeed, a look at the ways people interacted with their respective, yet outwardly different, environments can help us draw broader conclusions about the nature of urban space and people's corporeal and mental interactions with it. My analysis of Brussels and Montreal examines how similar – indeed global – processes of industrialisation and urbanisation were experienced by the residents of these cities on a local level. In some cases, I will argue, reactions were distinct, grounded in local cultural and historical settings. What explains these diverging responses and adaptations to similar trends from one city to the next?

Alternatively, we will also see that despite these unique settings, reactions to spatial transformations were often quite similar in both cities. This was a period in which cities were thought of in both doomsday and utopian language,⁶³ a time in which politicians, reformers, hygienists and writers perceived the city in organic terms, expressing concern for the proper functioning of its constituent parts, and believing that the environment had a direct influence on people's behaviour.⁶⁴ Following specific attitudes about the city and the body within two different places can thus help us think beyond questions of place, and bring our attention to specificities of the period. "We cannot compare apples and oranges if we want to understand the advantages or

⁶² For studies treating direct links between Belgium and Canada, see Ginette Kurgan-van Hentenryk, *Un siècle d'investissements belges au Canada* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1986), Serge Jaumain, ed., *Les immigrants préférés : les Belges* (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1999).

⁶³ On the tensions between utopian visions and fears of the city, see especially Stanley Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), Topalov, "La ville 'congestionnée'." Jean-Luc Pinol, *Le monde des villes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1991).

⁶⁴ The notion that the environment influenced people's behaviour is discussed in Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville : espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au 19e et 20e siècles* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006). See also Claude, *Faire la ville, Meller, Towns, Plans, and Society*, Topalov, "La ville 'congestionnée'."

disadvantages of different kinds of apples. But we may and should compare apples and oranges if our intent is to study fruit,” Haupt and Köcka astutely point out.⁶⁵ The idea is less to isolate the particularities of each city, as it is to examine, on a broader scale, the interactions between city and body, between vast global processes and subjective identities defined in reference to a local context.

As historian Susan Grayzel argues, “comparative cultural history sets itself the task of identifying elements of culture that are wider than the national, while paying close attention to specific contexts.”⁶⁶ This study of Montreal and Brussels will focus less on the extent to which industrialisation and urbanisation functioned in similar or different ways in each city than on how their residents interacted with these processes. Focussing on these common encounters, I will analyse how these experiences affected various individuals and groups in each city. What meaning did people give to this rapidly evolving environment? How did they see themselves and define others in terms of these experiences? A perspective that is at once comparative and cross-national allows us to observe some of the general tendencies that characterised people’s relationship to their environment during this highly charged period, while at the same time pin-pointing the ways in which these experiences were conditioned by the specific context in which they developed.

CONCLUSION

How, and to what ends, can turn-of-the-century Montreal and Brussels be examined together in a single historical analysis? Through an overview of the principal characteristics of these cities, this chapter has argued that, while distinct political and cultural traditions, as well as social and geographical realities, differentiated them, Montreal and Brussels at the turn of the twentieth century are certainly comparable in their shared experiences with the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that transformed urban environments in this period. Urban culture evolved as residents forged new understandings of their place in the modern world, and as they interiorised their encounters with these processes. Although they were not among the flagship urban

⁶⁵ Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Köcka, “Comparative history: methods, aims, problems” in Cohen and O’Connor, eds., *Comparison and History*, 27.

⁶⁶ Susan R. Grayzel, “Across Battle Fronts,” 82.

centres of the day, these two cities nonetheless served as major economic and cultural hubs for their respective regions and countries, and are representative of the spread of modernity beyond the major metropolises of both continents.

In this sense, observing them in reference to one another allows us to see how similar trends took root in analogous, though distinct, settings. One of the fundamental aims of comparative history is to shed new light on known subject matters by asking questions of one context that were inspired by the other. In light of more recent historiographical treatment of transnationalism, however, my objective is to draw upon the specific urban contexts of Montreal and Brussels to assess, in broader terms, the way urban dwellers constructed the relationship to the spatial environment of the industrial city. More than just tell us about what actually happened, a comparative approach helps us understand with greater precision and refinement the concepts with which we analyse the past, including, in the case of the present study, modernity, space, the body, and their interplay upon the urban landscape. These are the themes the following chapter will address, in order to demonstrate the theoretical framework of this study.

CHAPTER 2

THE BODY URBAN: MODERN CITIES, SPACE, AND CORPOREAL PREOCCUPATIONS

A cross-national and comparative approach, I argued in the preceding chapter, can shed new light on our understanding of industrialisation and urbanisation by considering the way these global processes played out in distinct local contexts. Because the objective of this thesis is to focus on the subjective ways in which urban dwellers experienced these dramatic transformations to the landscape and atmosphere of their cities, it is necessary to specify the terms on which this analysis will draw the connections between these transnational developments on one hand, and aspects of human interiority on the other. What was the nature of the material and cultural changes wrought by modernity? What is the significance of the spatial aspect of these cities' evolution during this period? What does a focus on the human body tell us about broader societal developments and the way residents of Montreal and Brussels made sense of these transformations?

These questions rest on concepts – modernity, space and the body – which together form the theoretical framework of this inquiry, and whose meanings were constructed in terms of evolving norms, practices and customs. The purpose of this chapter is to examine these ideas in reference to the current historiography in which this thesis is rooted, and to explain how they will be deployed and articulated throughout my analysis. While these notions can be approached from various angles, I will argue that they offer the tools with which we can analyse the way transnational global trends influenced local urban cultures and shaped the personal preoccupations of residents of turn-of-the-century Montreal and Brussels. Each concept will be the object of a separate section of this chapter, but before proceeding, the first section will narrate two minor, yet revealing, incidents of citizens' interactions with the municipal authorities of these cities during this period. These seemingly mundane episodes illustrate the way modernity, space and the body were interconnected in people's relationship to the city, and will set the scene for this investigation.

I. STREET SCENES

On 10 February 1883, Ferdinand Larcier, a well known legal publisher whose printing presses were located in the shadows of Brussels' gargantuan new courthouse, engaged his citizen's prerogative and addressed a letter to the city council, protesting against its plan to expropriate his property in order to move a school onto it. Indeed, the construction of this new temple of justice had taken such vast proportions and had so disrupted the urban fabric of the neighbourhood – displacing scores of the city's poorest residents in the process – that the municipal authorities now found themselves struggling to find a space in which the local school could pursue its activities. In the preceding weeks, the city had set aside the funds needed for this operation, and had proposed “d’acquérir une vaste propriété sise rue des Minimes, n°10, qui conviendrait parfaitement à cet usage.” So ideal was this property in the eyes of the city that the councillors specifically noted that it had to be obtained, “même par voie d’expropriation,” and this “pour cause d’utilité publique.”¹ Certain members had wondered about the appropriateness of the location in light of the fact that work on the courthouse was ongoing, raising the question of whether its continuing expansion would not eventually reach the chosen site, potentially making very short-lived the gains obtained from an expensive expropriation. But no one had given much thought to the property's existing use. Convinced by the mayor's assurances that the new school would be in no such danger, the council had adopted the plan as a regular order of business, the elected officials satisfied that the scope of their actions was in the best public interest.

The councillors, however, had neglected to predict Larcier's unwillingness to cede his property. In his letter, he pleaded with the members to understand that although he had had the opportunity to choose from among several properties, the Rue des Minimes location provided him with the perfect layout for his growing business. Finding the lot had been for him a “bonheur inespéré,” enabling him to “porter remède à l’intolérable situation faite à mon industrie, par des installations devenues plus défectueuses à mesure que mes affaires prenaient plus d’expansion.” With his

¹ All references to Larcier's petition to the city and the council's deliberations are from: Bulletin Communal de Bruxelles (hereafter BCB), January to March 1883, 24, 146-154.

bookstore, printing shop, warehouse and private home previously spread about in as many different places, Larcier saw a considerable business advantage in concentrating his various pursuits in one convenient location. However, the “préjudice matériel et moral” caused by this new development was such that his “santé elle-même en était altérée.” Had the city simply sought to acquire an empty building, Larcier would have understood, he insisted, but surely now that the property in question was being put to such profitable commercial use, the councillors would withdraw their expropriation order and look for a suitably unused locale for their school.

On the surface, this conflict was not exceptional. A prospering businessman found himself fighting over a tract of land with an elected body maintaining that it was acting upon its mandate to provide public education. As one councillor pointed out, “Une mesure d’intérêt général lèse presque toujours certains intérêts particuliers.” A closer reading of Larcier’s grievance, however, reveals that there was more at stake than questions of private property rights in a market economy. Before mailing his letter, Larcier had garnered the support of many other neighbourhood residents opposed to the building of a school in their midst, and after debating the specific merits of the industrialist’s claims, the council heard a petition signed by several people living and working in the area, broadening the issue beyond the interests of one individual.

The letter accompanying the appeal raised three principal objections to the project. With the first, the petitioners firmly establish their conviction that private interests should find the space needed to flourish in the modern city. This particular part of the Rue des Minimes, they point out, was already inhabited by shopkeepers and law offices. For the former, “il sera souverainement nuisible d’avoir dans le voisinage de leur établissement une école où, plusieurs fois par jour, viendront et d’où sortiront des enfants qui commettront toutes les espiègleries de leur âge.” As for the members of the bar, they had located their offices in the neighbourhood counting on “le silence et le caractère tranquille de la rue et sur les garanties qu’elle leur offrait au point de vue de la discrétion.” From the point of view of these lawyers and businessmen, this particular portion of the city was simply not compatible with the presence of noisy and rambunctious children. In their minds, the Rue des Minimes had to remain a place where professional activities could be carried out in requisite discretion and tranquility.

Such disinterest in the education of the city's youth, the petitioners knew, would fall upon deaf ears at the council table. Undoubtedly to make their objections more palatable, these pecuniary interests were framed as merely secondary to the real issue at hand – the children's safety and morality, both of which they felt would be compromised if the school were to indeed be built in the proposed location. Situated nearby, the petitioners noted, was a brewery possessing neither courtyard, warehouses, nor stables. As a result, it was forced to manoeuvre its barrels, carts and horses directly on the public thoroughfare, posing a serious risk to the schoolchildren's safety. Finally, and presented as being of the greatest concerns to these citizens, were the moral issues they wanted to bring to the council's attention. For the streets bordering the Rue des Minimes were known to be of ill repute, harbouring prostitution houses. "Les femmes de mauvaise vie s'y promènent et échangent des propos obscènes. Ces rues sont le théâtre constant de querelles, de batailles, de scandales qui ameutent le voisinage. Sont-ce là des spectacles à mettre sous les yeux des enfants?" they demanded.²

Beyond the expression of competing business and private interests, this letter exposes revealing, though at times contradictory, constructions of urban space. At the heart of the matter was the way in which these residents perceived the space they occupied, the rhythms of city life it represented, and the material and bodily dimensions that conditioned this interaction. If they initially presented the Rue des Minimes as unsuitable for a school because of the disruptions children would cause, the shops and offices were apparently not disturbed by the industrial activities of Larcier's publishing house or the daily commotions caused by the local brewery. Nor, in their search for tranquility and "discretion," did these merchants and lawyers seem particularly bothered by the presence of brothels, prostitutes and their quarrels from which innocent young eyes and ears had to be spared. Instead, it was the possible presence of a school that compromised the established spatial order. In this letter, the tensions of modernity are apparent in the transformations brought to the city by an industrialising economy, in the role played by an arm of a liberal state in attempting to reconcile its citizens' varying

² This plea to the councillors' sense of morality was ultimately unheeded, and when it was pointed out that the "directrice d'un pensionnat de demoiselles" had joined her signature to the list, the room burst out in laughter, presumably seeing a salacious double entendre in the evocation of such a *pensionnat*. What matters here, however, is not the council's reception of the petition so much as the terms on which its author saw fit to present his concerns.

priorities, in the rival interests vying to determine the shape of the city, but above all, in the way the highly charged atmosphere of the Rue des Minimes is related, where spaces and bodies combine to create a spectacle of paradox and contradiction.

The Rue des Minimes was what some might call a ‘liminal’ space, running along the flank of the steep hill that defines Brussels’ physical and social geography, separating the respectable, bourgeois and aristocratic ‘ville haute’ where courthouse, royal palace, luxurious shops and homes were located, from the suspicious, dangerous, ‘ville basse’ of prostitutes, paupers and other pariahs dwelling in dingy blind alleys.³ Apparent in this letter are the tensions that bubble to the surface when these competing spatial meanings collide, when opposing views of what city space is meant to represent meet head on. A school and a courthouse, the municipal administration, an expanding printing press and bustling brewery, prostitutes, lawyers and merchants all made competing claims for the Rue des Minimes. Each offered a different reasoning for what this area represented to the broader urban landscape, and through these tensions fuelled the atmosphere that characterized the modern city. Finally, these frictions were crystallized in the bodies of those who occupied this space: in the sound nuisances feared by the petitioners, in the body of Larcier, whose physical illness underscored his spatial demands, in the bodies of the schoolchildren, at risk in the dangerous setting of industrial activity, in the bodies of prostitutes whose work and presence added an edge of subversion to the mix.

Such conflicts involving perceptions of space and its uses in the context of a city facing the pressures and changes wrought by modernity, conflicts underpinned by differing social and bodily preoccupations, were current in Montreal as well. In one instance, occurring just a few years after Larcier and his neighbours had lobbied to keep a primary school out of their living and working environment, some fifty Montreal citizens pushed city authorities to prevent another public institution, a hospital, from expanding in their neighbourhood. All residents of the Saint-Louis district in the eastern part of Montreal, they were deeply troubled by the plans of the existing Hopital Général

³ As such, it corresponds well with anthropologist Victor Turner’s definition of liminal entities, that are “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 1969), 95.

to convert a nearby building into a sanatorium to house patients suffering from infectious diseases. “Ce fait est de nature à préjudicier grandement à la santé des occupants de ce quartier, comme aussi à déprécier la valeur des immeubles y situés, [sic]” they pleaded, before adding that “d’autres endroits, bien plus propices à ces fins pourraient être choisis dans l’Ouest.”⁴ In a city that was growing bigger everyday, and upon whose health and continued prosperity its residents depended, there was apparently no place for sickly bodies, particularly those perceived as a threat to the healthy. Modernity, which called for growth, progress, forward movement, created a perpetual tension over urban space and current economic and health imperatives nourished these spatial conflicts. As Montreal became more densely populated, sensitivities to these questions were heightened and, as we will see, urban dwellers found themselves shaping and negotiating their environment in constant reference to these physical imperatives.

In the end, Larcier won out, while the demands of the petitioners in Montreal were never met. Though the Brussels council was not particularly moved by the petition, Larcier wrote a second letter in March of the same year, threatening legal action against the city’s expropriation order. The question remained in suspense for over a year, but by August 1884 the council had come up with an alternative solution. Judging the complications in the Rue des Minimes case too cumbersome, the councillors voted unanimously to accept an offer from the minister of finance to locate the school in a building formerly occupied by the courthouse. In Montreal, the city health department reacted to the petition by sending inspectors to have a look at the proposed sanatorium. After examination and measurements, these officials found that sufficient space was left between the hospital and the private homes, noting that two streets, a square and a yard provided enough of a buffer zone to keep the residents safe.⁵ On the surface, the

⁴ Archives de Montréal, (hereafter AM), VM45, Fonds du Comité de Santé (hereafter CS), S1, petition dated 10 March 1894.

⁵ Thus simple physical distance from a possible source of contagion remained, in the eyes of these inspectors, a safeguard against possible infection, a belief that was nonetheless changing in the period. See Harold Platt, “From Hygeia to the Garden City: Bodies, Houses and the Rediscovery of the Slum in Manchester, 1875-1910,” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 5 (2007). Moreover, the inspectors argued, the sanatorium was to be used to house patients suffering from scarlet fever and diphtheria. Unlike other infectious diseases such as small-pox and cholera, these ailments were not considered contagious by “aerial diffusion.” Fears about dangerous germs flying through the air further speak to the close relationship between an understanding of the material atmosphere and the ideas that gave urban space its full meaning.

outcomes of these two episodes might speak to the relative influence private citizens could wield in the face of the respective city councils. But the deeper meaning here concerns how such conflicts defined city life at the turn of the twentieth century, illustrating how urban dwellers' preoccupations in the modern city drew on perceptions and uses of space, and on their bodily interaction with it.

II. MODERNITY

Though frequently drawn upon in urban historiography, the notion of modernity at times appears plagued with incongruence and contradictions. What does the use of the term imply, and in light of recent theoretical debates, to what extent is it helpful in interpreting the processes underway in cities like Brussels and Montreal? Modernity, as its critics decry, has a tendency to signify all things to all people, its meaning in constant flux. In a recent indictment, colonialism historian Frederick Cooper suggests that this failure to arrive at a clear definition essentially invalidates modernity as a category of analysis. The word "is now used to make so many different points," he charges, "that continued deployment of it may contribute more to confusion than to clarity."⁶

But the fact that modernity cannot be readily conceptualised in a clear cut or straightforward way, does not negate its existence as a historical process. The haziness that shrouds the concept of modernity should not be seen as nullifying the idea, but rather as one of its defining characteristics. As the poet Charles Baudelaire famously put it, the essence of modernity is "le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent."⁷ Modernity's multiple meanings are a reflection of the complexity and dynamism of the period, of the profound social and cultural changes under way in cities like Montreal and Brussels, of the many intertwined identities and strategies that people adopted in response to these pressures. Some decried this current; others held it up as an ideal to live by. That the

⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 113.

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," in *Oeuvres complètes de Charles Baudelaire*, ed. Jacques Crepet (Paris: Louis Conrad, 1922), 49. Notes art historian Briony Fer, "as soon as we try to pin modernity down or to define it in a simple formulation, we risk losing this sense that it is by definition, constantly subject to renewal, that it marks out shifting ground." See Briony Fer, "Introduction" in Francis Frascina, ed., *Modernity and Modernism: French Painting in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 10.

subjects of our historical inquiries saw themselves as modern requires that we think about what that condition might have meant to them, as well as how it structured their views of themselves and their environment.

a) *Renewal*

To affirm that Montreal and Brussels were modern and that this condition affected their residents requires us to assess the wide-ranging changes that marked this period. At a basic level, these were fuelled by the intense industrialisation of the global economy and were most dramatically felt in the transformation of the built environment in the spread of urban agglomerations, the construction of vast transportation networks, the advent of new technologies that altered the contours of daily life. These material changes were accompanied by shifting mentalities and the elaboration of new worldviews, political ideas, forms of cultural production, and as we will see, new ways of understanding the city and the body. Such changes combined to create a distinct atmosphere, one that had a profound impact on urban dwellers' fundamental sense of who they were, of their place in the world. Rather than holding up modernity as a verifiable, empirical model applicable to various cases, one that would attempt to impose a sense of order and clarity upon a world characterized by confusion and uncertainty, I prefer to adopt a more supple approach that attempts to tap into the subjectivity of those who experienced these profound transformations.⁸

In this sense, the conflicts over ownership and uses of space that preoccupied residents of Rue des Minimes or the Saint-Louis district were not modern in and of themselves. Instead, it is in the terms upon which these debates were framed, in the

⁸ As historian Ian McKay writes, "modernity is the lived experience of this unremitting process of rapid change and its social consequences. We are modern because we have learned to expect constant and radical transformation, dynamic growth, development at an ever more rapid rate." Ian McKay, ed., *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post-Confederation Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992), x. Mayne further posits that "the modern city – proud and optimistic in its celebration of modernity and community – was in fact a necessarily countervailing influence to the confusion and dismay with which city-dwellers often reacted to the discontinuous and kaleidoscopic qualities of urban society, and to the unpredictable and uneven outcomes of rapid change." Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Shun: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 25. For a recent critical analysis of scholarly use of the idea of modernity, see Chapter 5, "Modernity," of Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006).

nature and tone of the conflicts between individuals operating within a given space, and ultimately in the way these tensions conveyed a response to the specific pressures of city life at the distinct moment that we see this atmosphere of modernity in action. “As expressed in the politics of urban space,” explain urban historians Michael Peter Smith and Thomas Bender “modernity is a socially produced and highly contested articulation of discourses and practices deployed by a wide variety of social actors and agents acting in the name of the state, the city, elements of civil society, and various class, ethnic, and gender-based claims-making groups – all colluding and colliding in contests over place, space, and power.”⁹ Taken from this perspective, the framework of modernity opens up a number of possibilities for exploring how these discourses operated and what these contests over space, place and power looked like and signified.

To be sure, we must avoid reifying these processes and reducing the city to what geographer David Harvey calls a *tabula rasa*, obliterating the past from people’s consciousness. For Harvey, modernity is best understood in terms of “creative destruction,” or the idea that the nineteenth century’s break with the past was less about a negation of history than about a reconfiguration of society aimed toward the future. “The notion of a radical break,” he argues, “has a certain persuasive and pervasive power in the face of abundant evidence that it does not, and cannot, possibly occur.”¹⁰ Social and cultural continuities steadily underlay the material and exterior manifestations of economic and urban developments, but what is important here is the “persuasive and pervasive power” of this idea that the world was becoming an entirely new place. The perception of turn-of-the-century urban dwellers that their existence was bound up in constantly negotiating changes to established habits and customs is, in this study, more central than the measurable degree to which industrialisation and urbanisation modified the landscape. How did people feel about, experience, react to and interiorise this climate of change? How did it affect their sense of self and their understanding of their environment and those with whom they shared it?

⁹ Michael Peter Smith and Thomas Bender, *City and Nation: Rethinking Place and Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), 6.

¹⁰ David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

b) *Experience*

For literary scholar Marshall Berman, being modern is to be conscious of, and at some level, engaged in this complex reality, to confront its destructive forces and exalt its constructive potential. Indeed, his interpretation is premised upon this paradox of simultaneous destruction and construction – while modernity offers boundless possibilities for progress and renewal, it seems to do so only by destroying people's sense of security in who they are and where they come from:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology: in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air.'¹¹

As the chapters to follow will demonstrate, the spatial meaning of the streets, homes and factories of these two cities took shape as the result of their inhabitants' negotiation with, and articulation of, these paradoxes. It was, I will argue, the expression of what Berman aptly calls "a mode of vital experience" with space, time, the self and others.¹²

Berman's choice of vocabulary clearly evokes the intangible, subjective and emotional nature of the concept. It is in this sense that I refer to modernity as a pervasive atmosphere defining and defined by discourses and practices that stemmed from vast processes of material and cultural change – a febrile climate that was often felt

¹¹ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 15. Incidentally, Berman is cited by Frederick Cooper as being one of the great culprits in the apparent confusion surrounding the conceptualisation of modernity. "His is a restless modernity, avant-gardist, a project as much as a realisation," states Cooper in reference to this passage. "These are grand themes of intellectual and cultural history, but Berman's schematization does not do the necessary historical work in regard to Europe, let alone elsewhere. The interplay of change and stability in social thought and social behaviour is much more convoluted than his celebrationist/condemnatory rhetoric." Whether this critique might be justified in terms of the historiography on social thought and behaviour is a valid question, but it seems to miss Berman's point that modernity is less about broad-ranging, theoretical interplays of change and stability than it is a deeply personal way of dealing precisely with these interplays. See Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 127.

¹² Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 15.

more than it was thought or spoken – rather than solely as an ideology or set of beliefs. The point is not to deny modernity’s ideological dimension, characterised by what historian T.J. Jackson Lears refers to as “cultural authority,” both public in dominant modes of thought on themes such as the economy, politics, or the arts, and private in terms of the personal regulation of behaviour and practices to conform to evolving standards of health, hygiene and decorum.¹³ Instead of emphasising these exterior, social or communal ideas that are learned and alternatively adopted or rejected, and which preoccupy the bulk of the historiography on modernity, I concentrate on the realm of interior experiences and feelings, whose expression has garnered less attention, and, because they are of the subjective realm, deemed of secondary historical importance.¹⁴

c) *Antimodernism*

As a set of ideals, modernity called for a more orderly and efficient organisation of urban society, viewed by political authorities and reformers as falling prey to the chaos and congestion engendered by rapid and sustained transformations.¹⁵ They called for the application of a scientific, rational and professional vision to urban planning, premised on improved fluidity, circulation and hygiene.¹⁶ As historian Hellen Meller notes, this desire to “spread sweetness and light” was underpinned by a civilising project that viewed the orderly city as an ideal of culture, knowledge, progress and individual improvement.¹⁷ However, for many who experienced it during this period, modernity was not the triumphant march of progress it purported to embody, but the solidifying of

¹³ T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). See especially the first chapter.

¹⁴ My thanks to Nancy Partner, whose thoughts on this issue inform my reading of modernity (Personal correspondence, July 2006). Though the study of subjective experiences remain secondary in historical literature, it has begun to attract increasing attention, notably with the emergence of a new body of work on emotional history. See for instance: Keith Oatley, *Emotions: A Brief History* (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2004), Michael Roper, “Slipping Out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 59 (2005), Peter N. Stearns and Jan Lewis, eds., *An Emotional History of the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Christian Topalov, “La ville ‘congestionnée’: acteurs et langage de la réforme urbaine à New York au début du XXe siècle,” *Genèses* (1990).

¹⁶ Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville : les métiers de l’urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2006), 27-30.

¹⁷ Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans, and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 26.

a destructive tendency to stifle creativity and reduce urban life to the barest of mechanical functions. Indeed, the hegemony of this modernist discourse developed through a constant exchange with a persistent antimodern current.

This term must be used with caution, and it is important to point out that the relationship between modern and antimodern is not a binary one. Indeed, antimodernists were typically critics of modernity who were nonetheless engaged in its dynamics, seeking to orient it differently rather than rejecting it outright. In his pioneering study, Lears notes that, on both sides of the Atlantic, this quest for maximised productivity was met with a backlash, an “antimodern impulse,” apprehending “the reduction of the world to a disenchanting object to be manipulated by rational technique.”¹⁸ Many writers, journalists, politicians and planners argued that the pursuit for greater productivity and efficiency that motivated modern planners risked stripping the city of its human dimension, that the destruction of meandering lanes and rustic buildings would eradicate the last respite from the constant quest for progress. They experienced what Lears calls a “restive desire for a freshening of the cultural atmosphere,” a yearning to experience life in a way that seemed more “authentic.”¹⁹ As city dwellers, they looked back nostalgically to a time when loud and smoky factories had not yet obliterated what they remembered as the green pastures of their youth, when people seemed to move more slowly, when they did not feel suffocated by skyscrapers as they strolled through the city.

But this longing for a bygone, and in many ways imaginary, past should not necessarily be read as a regressive resistance to change. A product of modernity, this type of nostalgia encompassed a feeling of dissatisfaction with the state of the world in

¹⁸ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. This theme has also been explored recently in the Canadian context. See especially Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). Historian Allan Gordon argues that historical commemoration practices in Montreal were an antimodern response to “the feeling of individual loss that drove the antimodernists’ quest for an authentic, simpler expression of life.” With its “increasing mechanization,” the nineteenth century “brought profound changes in social and cultural production, giving rise to a society that prized reproduction.” It was this context, at the heart of my own inquiry, that made urban elites yearn for a more ‘genuine’ way of life, rejecting in the process some of the “stringent market disciplines and rigidities of modernity that guided their professional lives and buttressed their financial and social position.” Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 15-16.

the present, and while lost time was seen as irretrievable, this imagery steeped in the past served to imagine a better future.²⁰ As Lears notes, the objective was not to escape a difficult reality. Rather, “antimodern sentiments not only promoted eloquent protest against the limits of liberalism but also helped to shape new modes of cultural authority for the oncoming twentieth century.”²¹ If the impact of modernity had a quality of inevitability, there was nonetheless a “codependency between the modern ideas of progress and newness and antimodern claims of recovery of national community and the stable past.”²² Antimodernism can in a sense be seen as a literary foil, an alternative perspective against which the predominant discourse of modernity defined itself.

d) *Modernity and the metropolis*

The writings of the sociologist Georg Simmel clearly illustrate how this dialectic contributed to the atmosphere of modern cities. In his celebrated 1903 essay, “The Metropolis and Urban Life,” Simmel argued that the metropolitan experience created a type of individuality whose “psychological basis” was defined by a constant “intensification of nervous stimulation.” For the author, the frenetic atmosphere of modern life in big cities had a stultifying effect on people’s psyche. The atmosphere of modernity dehumanized urban dwellers, forcing them to calculate their every move as they negotiated the crowded streets, to rationalize their every choice as they found themselves regulating their daily lives – their watches and their movements – according to the rhythms of an ever-more pervasive “money economy.” For Simmel, the net result of these “threatening currents and discrepancies” of an “external environment” which menaced to “uproot” the “metropolitan-type of man” was to make him think and react more with his head than with his heart, at the expense of his own sense of who he was:

²⁰ Peter Fritzsche, “Spectres of History: On Nostalgia, Exile and Modernity,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (2001).

²¹ Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 6.

²² Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 19. Following Berman, “we might say that to be fully modern is to be antimodern.” Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 13.

“the reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality.”²³

In large urban centres, Simmel continued, the natural response to this overstimulation was to develop what he termed a “blasé attitude,” resulting from “the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves.” Metropolitan life so diminished people’s capacity to process these demands on their inner self, rendering them incapable of maintaining this fevered pitch. The nerves were torn “so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent; and if one remains in the same milieu they have no time to gather new strength. An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy,” dulling people to the world around them. Simmel’s antimodernism is quite evident in his writing: he criticises the effects of modernity on urban dwellers’ psyche, but he nonetheless engages modernity directly, experiences it and seeks to give it an understandable form. Simmel eloquently demonstrates the extent to which modernity and the city were thought of and experienced in these subjective ways. Although on the surface, modern city life involved rational calculations and linear movement, its deeper meaning for urban dwellers rested upon the ways in which they interiorised this atmosphere.

Simmel frequently contrasts these city experiences with the more tranquil and subdued nature of rural life, thereby emphasising the fundamentally urban nature of these modern dynamics, a defining feature of the modern experience, as emphasised by Berman and Harvey. The material reality of cities, the increasing flow of traffic, the construction of taller and taller buildings, the looming presence of factories, the gathering of crowds on busy streets created the energy which fuelled this atmosphere of nervous tension. For some historians, such as Paul Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, the equation of modernity with city life is problematic. “While the industrial city and the metropolis are widely used symbols of modernity,” they argue, “their interconnection has more intuitive and aesthetic appeal than logical substance, since

²³ References are to Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in Kurt Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950), 409-424.

both great cities and large-scale urban production have existed for centuries.”²⁴ However, their approach to urban life is highly pragmatic, resting on interconnected empirical models demonstrating how cities functioned in broader networks defined by social and economic developments. Absent from their study is an analysis of the subjective meaning of cities for their inhabitants. Viewed from this angle, modernity offers a framework from which to analyse individual experiences with this climate of transformation, one that, in the spirit of modernity’s tensions and contradictions, requires us to look beyond logical substance, the better to contemplate aesthetic traits and intuitions.

III. SPACE

Because the significance of modernity is underscored by the material dimension of urban developments during this period, it is necessary to think about the nature of people’s surroundings, and the ways they were imagined and represented. The spatial environment is not simply incidental to the story of people or events within a city. Rather, it contributes to the shape of that story. Space becomes a significant category of historical analysis when particular attention is paid to how individuals gave specific meaning to their material environment, to the ways in which their interaction with their surroundings informed their sense of self and community, becoming “constituent categories of identity.”²⁵ Notes historian Victoria Thompson, “space is more than a backdrop against which the narrative of history is played out, it is implicated in that

²⁴ Paul M. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000-1950* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 178.

²⁵ Victoria E. Thompson, “Telling Spatial Stories: Urban Space and Bourgeois Identity in Early 19th-Century Paris,” *Journal of Modern History* 75, no. 3 (2003), 556. In a similar vein, historian Pierre-Yves Saunier examines the discursive processes by which different neighbourhoods of 19th-century Lyon were identified as respectable or subversive. These “images socio-spatiales,” he argues, represent residents’ reactions to the “chocs de l’industrialisation et de l’urbanisation.” By examining these representations of urban space, he suggests, we can “traquer les débats sur l’identité de ces groupes, sur tout ce qui se joue pour définir ce qui les rassemble, ce qui les différencie des autres et ce qui fonde leur pérennité.” Pierre-Yves Saunier, “Représentations sociales de l’espace et histoire urbaine : les quartiers d’une grand ville, Lyon au XIX^e siècle,” *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 29 (1996), 51-52. Finally, on this theme see also, Paul Groth, “Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study,” in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-21.

narrative as a perceptual and ideological category.”²⁶ How does this relationship between individuals and their material environment take form?

a) *Geographical and social approaches*

Industrialization and urbanization created a new spatial dynamic in western cities during this period. In a recent study of Montreal, historical geographer Robert Lewis notes that the industrial districts that marked the urban landscape were the product of “manufacturing pathways, property dynamics, and growth politics.” Focussing on specific industries, the author shows “how the different strategies deployed by industries, the dynamics underlying firms’ locational decision-making process, and a variety of interfirm and interindustry linkages contributed to the formation and specialisation of manufacturing districts” in the central, eastern and western parts of the city.”²⁷ In the Belgian case, notes geographer Christian Vandermotten, similar “strategies” informed the decisions of economic actors determined to maximize profits. Adapting to previous uses of given spaces, they operated within a broader technological and socio-economic context that determined their ability to shape the environment. “Les stratégies spatiales sont sous la dépendance des phases longues de l’économie,” adds the author, “parce que ces phases sont celles à l’échelle de temps desquelles se produisent les mutations dans la nature des technologies mises en œuvre et des investissements dominants.”²⁸

These approaches to industrialisation analyse urban space in terms of geographical distribution, asking how the actions and choices of individuals or broader social forces resulted in the creation of certain types of spaces. The accent is on the exterior form of space, on the ways in which it is produced, modified and transformed, but little emphasis is placed on people’s experiences. Conversely, social historians interested in the lives of the residents of industrial cities, focussing on such issues as working and housing conditions, social and family networks or leisure activities, rarely

²⁶ Thompson, “Telling Spatial Stories,” 556.

²⁷ Robert Lewis, *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 5. On the spatial layout of industry in Montreal during this period, see also Brian Slack et al., “Mapping the Changes: The Spatial Development of Industrial Montreal, 1861-1929,” *Urban History Review* 22, no. 2 (1994).

²⁸ Christian Vandermotten, “La production de l’espace industriel belge (1846-1984),” *Cahiers marxistes* 13, no. 130 (1985), 14.

contemplate the specificity of the physical spaces in which these dynamics took root. Geographical and social approaches thus tend to emphasise alternatively the evolution of material spaces or the lives of their inhabitants, without necessarily questioning the link between the two.

b) *Spatial stories*

By combining these approaches we can consider the urban spaces created in the industrial boom of the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of people's adaptation to the challenges of modernity, drawing out the connection between the evolving landscape and the choices and motivations of those who constructed it. Theorist Michel de Certeau's idea of "récits d'espace" offers a useful starting point. According to Certeau, one must distinguish between places (*lieux*) and spaces (*espaces*). Places are the material forms that constitute the urban environment – streets, buildings, parks, etc. They become 'spaces' when they are infused with meaning as their occupants incorporate them into the narratives (*récits*) through which they relate their experiences and define their identities. The street on which I live is but pavement and buildings, devoid of meaning, until I exercise it as part of the experiences that constitute my life story.²⁹ To the extent that they construct spaces as fundamental elements of human experiences, these narratives are "fondatrice d'espace." Conversely, argues Certeau, "là où les récits disparaissent [...] il y a perte d'espace : privé de narrations [...], le groupe ou l'individu régresse vers l'expérience, inquiétante, fataliste, d'une totalité informe, indistincte, nocturne."³⁰

²⁹ Michel de Certeau, *Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1980), 208. Certeau reduces the notion of place to its materiality, and the notion of space to its social dimension, in order to emphasise his point that people's milieus gain significance when they are conceptualised as a fundamental part of their life. Geographers, however, point out that, in their discipline, this distinction is not so clear-cut. While the two terms are sometimes opposed to one another, evolving understandings in the field indicate that the physicality of place does not spare this concept from the weight of contingency and construction. For more on the geographical perspective, see the entries on "espace" and "lieu" in Jacques Lévy and Michel Lussault, eds., *Dictionnaire de la géographie et de l'espace des sociétés* (Paris: Belin, 2003). For historical perspective on this distinction, see Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 211 onward. Historian Dolores Hayden also reflects on the interactions of place and space in "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space," in Groth and Bressi, eds., *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, 111-133.

³⁰ Certeau, *Arts de faire*, 217.

The significance with which space is imbued is frequently the product of conflicts and compromises between competing spatial stories. As such, urban space can be seen as a theatre for the affirmation of these different forms of identification, along various class, gender, or ethnic lines. In many instances, and according to the power structures in place, control over the primary meaning attributed to certain spaces lay in the hands of the city's more influential residents. As the atmosphere of modernity swept over cities like Montreal and Brussels, urban elites sought to shape the landscape in ways that suited their needs and aspirations, both in their public and private capacities. In Montreal, for example, a modern ideology of growth and development found expression in the increased scale and concentration of business and commercial buildings, which as architectural historian Isabelle Gournay explains, projected the aura of an urban elite intent on consolidating its city's metropolitan status.³¹ For his part, historian Thierry Demey has examined major public works projects in Brussels, such as the tunnelling of the Senne River and the underground junction of the city's northern and southern rail terminals, in terms of the way political authorities labelled central working-class neighbourhoods as insalubrious and dangerous in order to justify their destruction, thereby ensuring the "prestige de la capitale du royaume."³²

But this shaping of the landscape must also be understood as the actions of a group whose influence was nonetheless precarious, and thus in need of constant overt affirmation.³³ Groups such as women and workers, who were typically marginalized from hegemonic spatial stories, also sought to appropriate urban spaces, and often did so in more subtle, but nonetheless visible ways. Historical geographer Julie Podmore, for instance, argues that since the late nineteenth century, the spatial significance of Montreal's Saint-Laurent boulevard has been defined by its role as a locus for the expression of subversive social and sexual identities. In the period that concerns us,

³¹ See Isabelle Gournay "Manifestations du gigantisme au centre-ville," in Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, eds., *Montréal métropole, 1880-1930* (Montréal: Boréal, 1998), 169-199.

³² Thierry Demey, *Bruxelles, chronique d'une capitale en chantier*, 2 vols., vol. 1 *Du voûtement de la Senne à la jonction Nord-Midi* (Bruxelles: P. Legrain, 1990), 31-44. Keenly interested in theories on city planning, Brussels mayor Charles Buls suggested that the picturesque centre should reflect the wealth and prestige of the elite while the "habitants qui coûtent sans rapporter" should be relegated to the "périphérie, avec plus de tramways pour leur permettre de travailler." See Marcel Smets, *Charles Buls : les principes de l'art urbain* (Liège: Mardaga, 1995), 93.

³³ Jürgen Kocka, "Modèle européen et cas allemand," in *Les bourgeoisies européennes au XIXe siècle*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Paris: Belin, 1996), 14.

women took part in its public life as consumers, or as participants in demonstrations of civic pride and identity, such as May Day parades and other street protests and strikes, subverting accepted notions of both gender and class, relying on “the anomie and moving chaos of city streets [...] to transgress and redefine norms of womanhood.”³⁴ The spatial stories of those who lacked the means to build large buildings or monuments were thus about what historical geographer Richard Dennis calls “‘tactical’ transgression of space, private and personal gestures which might not merit attention as acts of *resistance*, but which cumulatively prepare the way for more dramatic changes in the ‘natural’ spatial order” and contribute to the formation of “personal identities.”³⁵

In sum, both the uses and symbolic meanings of space were perpetually redefined in these agitated times. Historian Michèle Dagenais demonstrates how municipal administrations turned to the creation of city parks to shape the landscape but also to exert their authority by attempting to mould people’s behaviours through the rules that dictated the use of these spaces. Urban dwellers, however, did not always adhere to these norms, such that the resulting uses and meanings of these spaces were the product of these competing visions. “En étant attentif aux usages de l’espace,” notes Dagenais, “il devient possible de démontrer que même les tentatives les plus poussées de modeler les pratiques ne s’élaborent pas dans une démarche à sens unique et résultent plutôt des interactions qui se tissent, en l’occurrence, entre pouvoirs municipaux et populations urbaines.”³⁶ Spatial stories, then, must be read not linearly but as the hybrid products of competing narratives.

³⁴ Julie Podmore, “St. Lawrence Boulevard as Third City. Place, Gender, and Difference along Montreal’s ‘Main’” (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1999), 41. For perspectives on women’s role in shaping the Brussels landscape see: Eliane Gubin, “Bruxelles et les bruxelloises au XIXe-XXe siècles. Croiser l’histoire des femmes et l’histoire des villes, in Serge Jaumain and Paul-André Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville. Bruxelles et Montréal au XIXe et XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2006), 99-111, as well as Eliane Gubin and Jean-Pierre Nandrin, *La ville et les femmes en Belgique : histoire et sociologie* (Bruxelles: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1993).

³⁵ Richard Dennis, “Historical Geographies of Urbanism,” in *Modern Historical Geographies*, ed. Brian Graham and Catherine Nash (London: Hasbrow, 2000), 227. Urban historian Timothy Gilfoyle adds that, for marginalized groups, “certain city neighbourhoods provided unprecedented opportunities to escape traditional controls of family and community,” bringing city streets into processes of identity formation. Timothy Gilfoyle, “White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History,” *Reviews in American History* 26 (1998).

³⁶ Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville : espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au 19e et 20e siècles* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006), 14.

c) *Movement*

As a tool for analysing urban dwellers' subjective engagement with modern cities, space must thus also be understood in less tangible terms, in ways that attend to individuals' interior understanding of urban realities. Dennis astutely observes that the atmosphere of modern cities was the result of a dual mental and material process. Modernization, he explains, was "taking place on the ground, in the creation of new spaces, new scales and new patterns of segregation and specialization as well as new forms of technology." "But," he adds, it "was also taking place in the mind, in how cities were spoken and written about, how they were visualised, mapped, painted and photographed."³⁷ Indeed, the cultural significance of urban space rests upon the process by which an essentially inanimate background to human activity is endowed with meaning and becomes an integral part of people's lived experiences through discourse, usages, and the work done to mould it according to specific values and aspirations. Certeau helps us conceptualise this duality by suggesting that the symbolic dimension of spatial stories results from people's physical movement through space. "Il y a espace," he writes, "dès qu'on prend en considération des vecteurs de direction, des quantités de vitesse et la variable de temps." In sum, "*l'espace est un lieu pratiqué. Ainsi la rue géométriquement définie par un urbanisme est transformée en espace par des marcheurs.*"³⁸ Modern cities, characterized by their hurried atmosphere, by increasing concentrations of people moving further and faster along densely constructed spaces, are an ideal terrain for examining this mode of ascribing spatial significance.³⁹

Historian Nadine Roth makes this connection between the movement of people and the frenzy of modernity in her analysis of traffic control on Potsdamer Platz in early twentieth-century Berlin. With its five converging avenues in its centre, its railway, streetcar, automobile and pedestrian traffic, the square's bustle clashed with authorities' desire for an orderly environment. To give Berlin a public face that would prove its place among the major modern cities of the world, municipal authorities, through the police force and in newspapers, attempted to regulate the movement of citizens, showing them when and how to cross the street, teaching them the vigilance required to negotiate

³⁷ Dennis, "Historical Geographies of Urbanism," 240.

³⁸ Certeau, *Arts de faire*, 208. Author's emphasis.

³⁹ For more on movement and spatial significance, see Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, 211.

spaces designed to accommodate faster and more intense circulation. To cope with the chaos of modernity, Berliners had to learn both the mental and physical skills that would not only carry them safely through the streets, but also distinguish them from their less sophisticated, less modern, provincial compatriots.⁴⁰ Fundamental to this process of creating meaning from space is the physical act of moving through it, an act whose meaning goes beyond the simple bodily exertion involved.

d) *The self in space*

The experience of modern cities, then, reveals the central role of space in the construction of social identities. Perceptions of gender norms, of class or of ethnic divisions, were informed by understandings of who occupied which spaces, and in what ways they did so. The relationship to urban space can thus be viewed as one of many defining elements in the construction of these broad social categories. In conjunction with these referents of identity, this approach to space also opens up the possibility to explore less codified, individual experiences of the city. Reading the spatial stories chronicled in the sources thus tells us about the many levels on which urban identities were constructed, ranging from vast social ensembles to individual experience.

Intellectual historians have shown how variable understandings of the self can be, how it is as much a philosophical notion as it is a way of seeing one's individuality.⁴¹ Venturing into urban dwellers' personal and interior responses to the changing city environment is thus a risky endeavour as it presumes we are able to interpret actions, words and silences beyond what they express, and into the intimacy of their authors. To guide us in this task, it is helpful to follow historian David Gary Shaw in situating the self concretely within society. Referring specifically to the medieval city, Shaw

⁴⁰ Nadine L. Roth, "Policing Potsdamer Platz: Metropolitan Identity in early Twentieth-Century Berlin" (paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, York University, Toronto, 2006), 2. See also Nadine L. Roth, "Metamorphoses: Urban Space and Modern Identity, Berlin 1870-1933" (PhD Thesis, University of Toronto, 2003). For additional examples of how urban elites used movement in their attempts to inscribe their authority upon the landscape, see the literature on civic processions, notably Simon Gunn, "Ritual and Civic Culture in the English Industrial City, c. 1835-1914," in *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750*, ed. Robert J. Morris and Richard H. Trainer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), Stéphane Michonneau, "Société et commémoration à Barcelone à la mi-XIXe siècle," *Genèses* 40 (2000).

⁴¹ For a recent and extensive overview of dominant ways of thinking about the self in the modern West, see: Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

suggests that the self is essentially a “highly localized site of awareness” where individuals interpret the words, gestures and actions of those around them, defining their own ideas and values in the process. The biographical exercise of determining the contours of an individual’s sense of self, he notes, is contingent upon the availability of sources that allow them to probe into a single person’s inner depths. “But,” Shaw points out, “the self is fundamentally a self in society, in a culture. We do not have to extract selfhood from isolation. Much of the self is already on display in its dialogue with the world.”

The challenge then becomes to imaginatively interpret what the ideas expressed revealed about inner preoccupations, aspirations and fears. Reading the spatial stories of turn-of-the-century Montrealers and Bruxellois, paying attention to the language and the accents can thus be a way into the emotional responses, the nervous stimulations of modernity through which urban space gained meaning as the site upon which these interiorities were defined. This “embedded nature of the self,” adds Shaw, “should [...] make us confident that in tracking the social self we track the individual in the context in which he or she acted and interpreted,” a context defined by the social meaning of people’s background, relationships, actions and the language used to relate them.⁴² This exercise is especially relevant in the context of turn-of-the-century cities, where, as Simmel argued, understandings of the self, and of the society in which it was rooted, were continuously questioned and reappraised.

IV. THE BODY

Because spatial meaning depended largely upon movement, the final concept at the heart of this analysis is the object of this movement, the body. Historicising the body offers an ideal tool for understanding the spatial significance of modern cities – the body incarnates the duality between the physical and the mental aspects of modernity and space, functioning as the vector through which the materiality of the urban environment gained mental significance and shaped understandings of the self and

⁴² David Gary Shaw, *Necessary Conjunctions: The Social Self in Medieval England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 12-15.

society. In the modern city, the shift from physical reality to social meaning in urban space operated through an analogous shift from the bodies to the minds of urban dwellers. Indeed, through physical and sensory experiences, the body was on the front lines of individuals' interaction with space, and references to the way people physically moved through and behaved in the city were central to the construction of spatial stories in this period.

The turn-of-the-century city itself was an environment widely conceptualised in corporeal terms. Like the body, the city was understood as the sum of its constituent components, globally weakened by the ailment of any one part. As sociologist Christian Topalov explains, urban reformers, doctors and hygienists viewed the “congested” city much as they did a sickly body. Like the parts of the body, the different districts of the city had to be maintained in good health, in proper functioning order, and the emergence of a pathology in one area had to be attended to, lest it contaminate the whole.⁴³ This was a period in which the “medical gaze” equated the circulatory system of the body with the economic patterns of the city – free flowing circulation was essential to the well-being of both. “The care of the city and care of the body became as one, just as the health of the city and health of the body were one,” writes historian Patrick Joyce.⁴⁴

This discourse linking the health of the body with that of the city emerged after a century of urbanisation and industrialisation that had engendered uncomfortable, even dangerous living and working environments, particularly in industrial districts. Factories emitted vast plumes of black smoke, rendering the air thick and difficult to breathe. Crowded and unsanitary conditions made the poorest districts susceptible to contagious disease, periodically causing deadly epidemics. For much of the century, the urban poor were held responsible for their own misery. “Toujours imprévoyant, parfois débauchés, systématiquement paresseux et profiteurs, fréquemment tentés par la boisson, parfaitement imperméables aux exigences de la propreté, volontiers attachés à des habitudes anciennes et dangereuses, ils forgeraient de leurs mains leur triste condition,” notes historian Olivier Faure, summarising the stereotypes that characterised

⁴³ Topalov, “La ville 'congestionnée',” 90.

⁴⁴ Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, 65.

this perception.⁴⁵ However, as Faure and others explain, the moralising tactics of urban reformers determined to change people's behaviour, and thereby improve the moral and physical health of the city, were largely inefficient. Concomitant with discoveries that germs were the cause of diseases, beliefs gradually shifted to the notion that it was instead the physical milieu that influenced behaviour, and that it was through its improvement that physical and moral well-being could be achieved. Urban progressives, notes Platt, "were driven by idealistic hopes that a healthy environment would arouse uplifting moral impulses within the city's inhabitants."⁴⁶

Actions undertaken to "civilise" urban society by ensuring the physical health of the population through a more salubrious environment thus placed the body at the centre of urban concerns during our period. It is from this perception of the body as a link between urban space and the ideas that shaped it that the present study proceeds. Indeed, despite improvements resulting from increased public investments in health and sanitation programmes,⁴⁷ nuisances, material conditions and diseases that afflicted the body remained a feature of urban life at the turn of the century, and the battle waged by reformers and hygienists remained a work in progress. In light of this context, references to the body and to physical experiences were a standard feature of representations of the city. My analysis of this corporeal discourse thus seeks to examine understandings of the body in terms of the way it mediated the relationship between urban space and the self.

Indeed, as Shaw puts it, "the self is bound, at least for this worldly life, to a body. An important corollary of this principle is that the self identifies with its body and

⁴⁵ Olivier Faure, "Le regard des médecins," in Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 46-67. See also Georges Vigarello, *Histoire des pratiques de santé : le sain et le malsain depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 217.

⁴⁶ Harold Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 308. This theme is also discussed in Stanley Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ For the international context, see Sally Sheard and Helen Power, eds., *Body and City: Histories of Urban Public Health* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 6, Vigarello, *Histoire des pratiques de santé*, 217. On Montreal in particular, refer to Michèle Dagenais, *Des pouvoirs et des hommes : l'administration municipale de Montréal, 1900-1950* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 21-25, Benoît Gaumer, Georges Desrosiers, and Othmar Keel, *Histoire du Service de santé de la ville de Montréal* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002), 62.

expresses itself by its body.”⁴⁸ But perhaps it is because the body is so fundamental to human existence that its significance is difficult to grasp. Much as Shaw insists upon viewing the self within its social context, so does sociologist Anthony Synott argue that the body is intimately connected to the society in which it functions. “The body social,” he writes, is not only the “prime symbol of the self” but of broader society as well. It is something individuals have, but it is what they *are* as well.⁴⁹ In light of the emergence of rational, positivist and secular thought that characterised modernity, the body has been conceptualised as the essence of individuality. The western body, argues anthropologist David Le Breton, is “l’enceinte objective de la souveraineté de l’ego. Il est la part insécable du sujet, le ‘facteur d’individualisation’ dans les collectivités où la division sociale est de mise.”⁵⁰

Following the work of theorist Michel Foucault, historical interpretations often conceive of the body as a site on which power relations are exercised.⁵¹ For example, historian Simon Newman shows how attempts by local authorities to enforce class structures and exercise social power in Philadelphia through the classification, restraining and medical treatment of marginal citizens rested upon structural and institutional contexts that “embodied” the urban poor by means of demeaning language and coercive treatment.⁵² This approach emphasises the way social identities were formulated by opposition to the bodies of “others,” the poor, women, ethnic or racial minorities, children, the disabled, etc, rather than personal bodily experiences. In industrial cities, as we will see, issues such as the construction of housing and public health strategies were shaped by the way urban planners, municipal officials and sanitary

⁴⁸ Shaw, *Necessary Conjunctions*, 12.

⁴⁹ Anthony Synott, *The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society* (London: Routledge, 1993), 4. See also Michela Marzano, *Philosophie du corps* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007), 8.

⁵⁰ David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005), 8.

⁵¹ As Foucault explains, the body is directly “plongé dans un champ politique; les rapports de pouvoir opèrent sur lui une prise immédiate; ils l’investissent, le marquent, le dressent, le supplicient, l’astreignent à des travaux, l’obligent à des cérémonies, exigent de lui des signes.” Through these dynamics are constituted a “technologie politique du corps” in which the body is directly and indirectly implicated according to power relations structured around economic aims. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 30-31. See also 137-143.

⁵² Simon P. Newman, *Embodied History: The Lives of the Poor in Early Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

professionals perceived, even feared, the bodies, not only of the working class, but also of the indigent poor.

But, to understand the body's importance in the creation of the social self, it is imperative that we also consider how people viewed and experienced their own bodies. Theorist Paul Connerton underscores this point in his critical assessment of the social and political meanings of the body. "Frequently what is being talked about," he notes, "is the symbolism of the body or attitudes towards the body or discourses about the body; not so much how bodies are variously constituted and variously behave." If many scholars have argued that the body is "socially constituted," affirms Connerton, there is an inherent ambiguity in this notion of constitution, one that speaks to the double sense in which the body acquires social meaning. "That is to say," he explains, "the body is seen to be socially constituted in the sense that it is constructed as an object of knowledge or discourse; but the body is not seen equally clearly to be socially constituted in the sense that it is culturally shaped in its practices and behaviour."⁵³ How did this dual significance intervene in the mobilisation of the body in the discourse on urban space? Given the ubiquitous presence of the body in the urban experience and the corresponding range of possible ways of gleaning its significance, I have chosen to focus my analysis of the body and space on two discreet yet intimately connected aspects of human corporeal existence, namely bodily practices and sensory perception.

a) *Bodily practices*

Seemingly banal uses of the body are indeed deeply ingrained with social and cultural significance. By the early twentieth century, explained the sociologist Norbert Elias, Western society's understanding of "civilised" behaviour was based on a long evolution of ideas associated with such basic bodily practices as posture, nourishment, spitting and blowing one's nose, practices that resonated deeply into social and class-based relations. "Although human phenomena – whether attitudes, wishes or structures – may be looked at on their own, independently of their connections with the social life of people, they are by nature nothing but substantializations of human relations and of

⁵³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 104.

human behaviour, embodiments of social and mental life,” he argues. This is the case for “arts, science, economics and politics,” which are considered of major social importance, just as it is for the seemingly more trivial or worthless areas of human activity such as those at the centre of his study. “But,” comments Elias, “it is often precisely these latter, apparently trivial, phenomena that give us clear and simple insights into the structure and development of the psyche and its relations which are at first denied us by the former.”⁵⁴

As Connerton shows, the body’s movement, critical to our conceptualisation of space, is oriented on a vertical plane, flowing upward and downward, establishing “the postural base in our experience of lived space,” and projected into the language used in defining the values associated with modernity. Oppositions between “high and low,” “rise and decline,” “superior and inferior,” “looking up to and looking down upon” correspond to this axis along which moves the physical self. “It is through the essentially embodied nature of our social existence, and through the incorporated practices based upon these embodyings, that these oppositional terms provide us with metaphors by which we think and live,” he explains.⁵⁵ Proceeding from the framework suggested by Elias and Connerton, then, my consideration of bodily practices, in particular the act of walking in the city, the performance of industrial labour, as well as more intimate practices increasingly relegated to the home environment during this period,⁵⁶ such as personal hygiene, sleeping or even the use of sanitary installations, will thus seek to highlight the way the body’s behaviour contributed to mediating understandings of space, and the social relations formed within it.

⁵⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 99-100. Originally published in 1939.

⁵⁵ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 74.

⁵⁶ On this theme, see Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*, 65. Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 26, Jean-Pierre Goubert, *La conquête de l'eau : l'avènement de la santé à l'âge industriel* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1986), 87, Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville*, 3. Claire Billen and Jean-Michel Decroly, *Petits coins dans la grande ville : les toilettes publiques à Bruxelles du moyen âge à nos jours* (Bruxelles: Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles, 2003), 33.

b) *The senses*

The second corporeal dimension examined in this thesis relates to urban dwellers' sensory perception of their environment. On a fundamental level, human beings perceive the world around them through the senses. Of the city, historian Alain Corbin writes, "ses bruits, ses odeurs, son mouvement constituent l'identité de la ville autant que son dessin et que ses perspectives."⁵⁷ Perhaps it is because sensory experiences are at once pervasive in daily life and inherently subjective that they have, until the work of Corbin, received little historical attention as indicators of culture and identity. As Joy Parr notes, historians tend to "rank the rational over the intuitive, the distinctly cerebral over the otherwise embodied."⁵⁸ But as with bodily practices that appear trivial on the surface, seemingly insignificant ways of discussing smells and sounds can reveal unsuspected texture to urban dwellers' relationship with the environment.

This trend was already evident to Georg Simmel in 1907 when he published his essay on "The Sociology of the Senses," deploring the emphasis in the social sciences on the large and the clearly visible, and decrying the focus on states, unions, religion, family, guild and factory structures at the expense of the more intricate aspects of daily life through which the "real life of society" is constructed.⁵⁹ For Simmel, the senses were at the very heart of human relations, in the way one's physical presence affects others, and in how this becomes a way of knowing among individuals. Workers toiling on a factory floor, students gathered in an auditorium, soldiers in a battalion, he suggested, shared a sense of unity because of the commonly felt effect of each other's physical presence, especially in such cases when the structures of authority in place proscribed verbal communication. With its atmosphere of growth and grandeur, the

⁵⁷ Alain Corbin, "Du Limousin aux cultures sensibles," in *Pour une histoire culturelle*, ed. Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997), 112. For a recent historiographical overview of the concept of the senses within an urban context, see the Introduction in Alexander Cowan and Jill Steward, eds., *The City and the Senses: Urban Culture since 1500* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 1-22.

⁵⁸ Joy Parr, "Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth-Century Canada: The Timely, the Tacit and the Material Body," *The Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (2001), 730. For an anthropological perspective on sensory experience, one that expands beyond western understandings of the senses, see David Howes, ed., *The Variety of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ References to Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of the Senses," are from David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

modern city provoked the senses in new ways, directly contributing to its inhabitants' interior relation to it.⁶⁰

As urban culture evolved, city dwellers became increasingly sensitive to the sensorial displeasures caused by large and crowded industrial centres: "Indeed, I believe that the heightened sensibility in this direction generally brings much more suffering and repulsion than joys and attractions in its wake," argued the antimodern Simmel, anticipating the vocabulary Berman would use to describe the urban experience.⁶¹ Thirty years later, and on another continent, urbanist Lewis Mumford also drew on sensory understandings to decry modernity's failure to live up to the city's potential to shore up human culture. "The baroque dreams of power and luxury had at least human outlets, human goals," he wrote, in reference to the pre-industrial city, where "the tangible pleasures of the hunt, the dinner table, the bed were constantly in view." But in the industrial city, "the new dream of human destiny [...] had little place for even sensual delights: it rested on a doctrine of productive avarice, and physiological denial; and it took the form of a wholesale disparagement of the needs of life."⁶²

Despite these recriminations, the sensory experiences that marked life in the industrial city held marked cultural meaning. In the urban context, the most readily provoked of the senses is sight.⁶³ Streets, buildings, and traffic keep urban eyes perpetually occupied and the appearance of urban space is closely related to the ideas, means and aspirations of its occupants. As historian Bettina Bradbury writes, "some of the new factories were impressive complexes of brick buildings spreading over whole city blocks. They afford visible proof, hard architectural, material evidence that Montreal's Industrial Revolution was well under way."⁶⁴ This perspective affords the opportunity to view the urban environment, its changing skyline in particular, as a historical text from which to assess questions of space and interiority. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the clash between this industrial skyline and the more prestigious,

⁶⁰ Jacques Léonard, *Archives du corps : la santé au XIXe siècle* (Ouest-France, 1986), 213.

⁶¹ "The modern person is shocked by innumerable things, and innumerable things appear intolerable to their sense which less differentiated, more robust modes of feeling would tolerate without any such reaction," he continued. Frisby and Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture*, 118.

⁶² Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace and company, 1938), 144.

⁶³ Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, 107.

⁶⁴ Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrialising Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 26.

architecturally ornate forms, through which the city's elite sought to express its ascendancy, were clearly expressive of the visual nature of the tensions that animated modern cities.

Indeed, as Elias, Corbin and others have pointed out, seeing has generally been the most respected of the senses, gendered masculine and considered rational and logical as opposed to the feminine, unreliable and irrational nature of smell, for instance. "It is highly characteristic of civilised people that they are denied by socially instilled self-controls from spontaneously touching what they desire, love or hate," Elias wrote, evoking the social codes of bodily gestures. The use of smell, sniffing at food, for example, "has come to be restricted as something animal-like." In contrast, the eye evolved as the sensory organ through which civilised individuals could affirm their modern and rational temperament, observing, measuring, and ultimately mediating their impulses by maintaining a distance between themselves and the object of their desire.⁶⁵

But sight provides only part of the urban sensory portrait, and the other senses, sound and smell in particular, also played a part in the relationship to urban space.⁶⁶ Historian David Garrioch shows that "the auditory environment constituted a semiotic system... it formed part of people's way of navigating in time, space and in the social world of the city."⁶⁷ Just as what people saw spoke to social tensions, so too did the sounds people produced and heard. Before the advent of industrialisation, the sounds of bells, animals and human conversation were much more significant aspects of the urban experience, which, when taken together, produced significant cultural meaning. Sounds, notably those produced by church bells, brought people together into "acoustic communities" comprised of people who shared common experiences and references to important events and the passing of time.⁶⁸ But sound also underscored distinctions between people, reflecting the "power structures of cities." More prestigious parishes

⁶⁵ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 170-171. "Flairer assimilé à la bête," adds Corbin. Alain Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille : l'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIIe-XIXe siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), iv.

⁶⁶ Taste and touch are less amenable to my reading of the cultural significance of urban space. For more on these senses, see Ava Arndt, "Touching London: Contact, Sensibility and the City," and Janet Stewart, "A Taste of Vienna: Food as a Signifier of Urban Modernity in Vienna, 1890-1930," both in Cowan and Stewart, eds., *The City and the Senses*, 95-104 and 179-197.

⁶⁷ David Garrioch, "Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns," *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (2003), 6.

⁶⁸ Alain Corbin, *Les cloches de la terre : paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: A. Michel, 1994).

had larger and louder bells; drums, cannons and fireworks expressed masculinity, military authority and political sovereignty. “Among the urban elites,” adds Garrioch, further emphasising the subtleties of bodily deportment, “good manners increasingly outlawed belching, breaking wind and other bodily noises in the presence of others. Quiet demeanour came to be viewed as genteel, loudness as ill-bred.”⁶⁹

With the advent of industrialisation came dramatic transformations to the urban soundscape. Factory whistles, trains, automobiles and large machinery replaced church bells, horses’ hooves and artisans’ tools as the primary sources of sound, ascribing new significance to city life. As with the smokestacks, the urban noise of industrialisation carried important social significance. The din of factories, notes historian Peter Bailey, was frequently associated with the perceived disorderly and riotous nature of the working class, while “freedom from noise became a defining characteristic” of a bourgeoisie that sought refuge in quiet suburbs and peaceful gardens.⁷⁰ And yet, just as smoke clouds could be seen as evidence of a booming economy, so too were the roars of industrial machinery sometimes perceived as unmistakable signs of modernity and progress.⁷¹

Social cleavages have also historically been represented through smell, long considered the least “noble” of the senses. Smells are “objective,” explains geographer Jean-Robert Pitte, inasmuch as they are nothing more than gaseous molecules originating from various substances. Where they interest historians of subjectivity is in the discursive representations people make of them.⁷² Addressing the question only briefly, Simmel noted the close link between smells and human interiority, that

⁶⁹ Garrioch, “Sounds of the City,” 16.

⁷⁰ Peter Bailey, “Breaking the Sound Barrier: A Historian Listens to Noise,” *Body and Society* 2, no. 2 (1996). See also Emily Thompson’s detailed history of the early twentieth-century New York soundscape. A soundscape, she explains, “is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment; it is both a world and a culture constructed to make sense of that world.” More than just the sounds themselves, “the waves of acoustical energy permeating the atmosphere in which people live,” a soundscape is also comprised of the actual objects that make and destroy sounds. The cultural nature of the soundscape, she adds, “incorporates scientific and aesthetic ways of listening, a listener’s relationship to their environment, and the social circumstances that dictate who gets to hear what.” Comparing it to a landscape, Thompson notes that both are more about civilisation than nature. Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 1-2.

⁷¹ Peter Payer, “Age of Noise: Early Reactions in Vienna, 1870-1914,” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 5 (2007), 783.

⁷² Jean-Robert Pitte, “Introduction” in Robert Dulau and Jean-Robert Pitte, eds., *Géographie des odeurs* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1998), 7-8. See also Synott, *The Body Social*, 190.

something emitting a smell is literally drawn into our bodies, assimilated into “the centre of our being,” by virtue of the act of breathing.⁷³ In their ‘cultural history of smell,’ Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synott also associate this characterisation with a gendering of the senses, where sight “increasingly became associated with men, who – as explorers, scientists, politicians or industrialists – were perceived as discovering and dominating the world through their keen gaze.” Smell, however, expressed intuition, sentiment and seduction, all associated with women.⁷⁴ Much like the acoustic communities described above, smells that people experienced in different parts of the city contributed to shaping their sense of self and understanding of community.⁷⁵

Smell was a source of considerable tension in industrial cities, where “a chaotic combination of pungent odours originating from both domestic and industrial sources” marked the environment.⁷⁶ In the nineteenth century, there remained a widespread acceptance of miasma theory, which held that the odours given off by decomposing organic matter carried diseases. Working-class districts, which typically revolted middle-class olfactory sensibilities, were thus seen as centres of infectious diseases, a condition exacerbated by the perceived immorality of their inhabitants.⁷⁷ The discovery of bacteriology shifted the focus of concern about disease from the milieu itself to the bodies and behaviour of individuals,⁷⁸ and made people increasingly aware that imperceptible threats lurked around them, lessening the validity of smell as a weapon in the battle against disease and eroding middle-class confidence in the notion that keeping a safe distance from such districts was all that was needed to preserve their own health.⁷⁹ But despite this evolution in scientific knowledge and urban planning theory, the shift to

⁷³ Frisby and Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture*, 119.

⁷⁴ Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synott, *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London: Routledge, 1994), 84.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Lucienne A. Roubin, *Le monde des odeurs : dynamique et fonctions du champ odorant, Sociologies au quotidien* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1989).

⁷⁶ Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001), 78.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Annick Le Guérer, “Le déclin de l'olfactif : mythe ou réalité,” *Anthropologie et sociétés* 14, no. 2 (1990), 27.

⁷⁸ Michèle Dagenais and Caroline Durand, “Cleansing, Draining and Sanitizing the City: Conceptions and Uses of Water in the Montreal Region,” *Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (2006), 623.

⁷⁹ Platt, *Shock Cities*, 306, Georges Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale : l'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 218.

bacteriology occurred gradually, and miasma theory continued to hold credence among many urban commentators.⁸⁰ As Elias stated, olfactory repugnance predates germ-theory,⁸¹ and as we will see in the following chapters, the perception that the foul odours encountered in the industrial districts of Brussels and Montreal were indicative of immorality and disease continued to be articulated throughout the period under study. Despite the latest scientific research, unpleasant smells remained central to the class-based distinctions and stigmas that contributed to ideas about urban space.⁸²

Examining the subjective nature of these sensibilities does pose methodological problems. One challenge is the sheer quantity of sensory provocations in urban life, making a complete portrait impossible.⁸³ The task is complicated by the fact that sights, sounds and smells are no longer the same today as they were in the past, requiring that we interpret them as they were, not as we experience them now. “L’histoire de la ville sensible se trouve, de ce fait, plus que d’autres guettée par l’anachronisme,” warns Corbin. Moreover, sensory perception is a highly individual phenomenon, depending on one’s preoccupations, values or background.⁸⁴ Short of actually experiencing the sensory stimuli of the past, we must mull the panoply of descriptions and commentaries left to us by those who were there in order to understand their place in the discourse on space. What sights, sounds or smells were considered attractive or repugnant? By whom? In which parts of the city were these judgments made, and how did they structure social relations? These are the questions through which this thesis seeks to elucidate the corporeal nature of the way city dwellers’ perceived and related to urban space.

⁸⁰ Jacques Léonard, “Comment peut-on être pastorien?” in Claire Salomon-Bayet, *Pasteur et la révolution pastoriennne* (Paris: Payot, 1986), 65-139. See also George Vigarello, “Hygiène du corps et travail des apparences,” in Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 311, and Mosley, *The Chimney of the World*, 81. This was true of hygienic authorities as well. In Montreal, for instance, leading figures in the hygiene department continued to be heavily influenced by miasma theories at the turn of the century. See Gaumer, Desrosiers, and Keel, *Histoire du Service de santé*, 103-104, Robert Gagnon, *Questions d’égouts : santé publique, infrastructures et urbanisation à Montréal au XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 2006), 208.

⁸¹ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, 134.

⁸² Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille*, 169.

⁸³ “Dans les conditions ordinaires de la vie, un courant sensoriel ininterrompu donne sa consistance et son orientation aux activités de l’homme. Les images ou les sons notamment tapissent en permanence le champ perceptif,” writes Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité*, 102.

⁸⁴ Corbin, “Du Limousin aux cultures sensibles,” 112-114.

CONCLUSION

Grounded in rich historiographical traditions, the concepts of modernity, space and the body can lend themselves to a multitude of approaches. Bringing these key ideas into a collective framework, this chapter has demonstrated how their points of interconnection can form a lens through which to observe the changing nature of industrial cities at the turn of the twentieth century, and deepen our understanding of the way urban dwellers constructed their relationship to the environment. Indeed, when viewed from this perspective, ostensibly trivial conflicts over the proposed location of a school or hospital reveal layers of priorities and preoccupations with respect to the shape and uses of the urban environment. At the turn of the twentieth century, cities like Montreal and Brussels were immersed in an atmosphere of change and renewal, both in terms of their expanding physical layout and of the new ideas and attitudes that animated them. Rather than focussing on the actual shape of these transformations, I have argued that these touched people on an emotional and interior level, such that understanding the dynamics of this atmosphere requires us to question the experience of modernity in terms of people's subjective responses to these developments.

The ideas that fuelled modernity, scholars have shown, thrived in the commotion and clamour of the metropolitan context. I have argued that particular attention to the way urban dwellers built, thought about, discussed, and laid competing claims to the spaces they occupied allows us see the material environment of the city as more than a mere setting for historical events. By considering people's physical movement through space, and the way they recorded their experiences with the city in the narratives through which they gave it meaning and significance in their lives, this thesis draws upon a historiographical current which situates the materiality of space as an integral part of the urban story. Approaching the sources for this study in terms of these interior encounters will help us shed light on the way the environment informed both the development of people's individual experiences of modernity, as well the broader gender and class-based norms through which collective identities and social relations were constructed in this period.

To grasp the interplay between the material and the mental dimensions of the modern city, my analysis focuses specifically on the corporeal nature of people's relationship to this changing environment. Like space itself, the body was also understood in terms of its physical reality, in tandem with evolving norms of behaviour and deportment. Furthermore, bodies were sites upon which modern urban spaces took on their fullest significance in the lives of thousands of city dwellers: it was through their physical encounters with material space that residents of Montreal and Brussels constructed the social and cultural meaning of the urban landscape. Being attentive to the way people described and debated the sensorial environment of the industrial city, as well as the bodily practices they performed and observed in others, tells us about the way the body itself was understood, but also about the ways it intervened in their relationship to the environment, placing these subjective experiences with modernity at the heart of the present analysis.

The purpose of this chapter having been to offer a panorama of the literature through which I define the concepts that frame my investigation, I propose we now turn away from these theoretical considerations, and stroll up to the elevated viewpoints from which people contemplated the panorama of their cities, and consider not just what they saw, but also what they felt.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGE MAKERS: INSCRIBING URBAN IDEALS UPON THE LANDSCAPE

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the turn of the twentieth century was a period in which the city was increasingly viewed in its entirety, as an organic object comprised of multiple, interconnected parts, upon each of which the moral and physical health of the citizenry was understood to depend. This chapter will thus discuss the way residents of Montreal and Brussels represented these cities in their totality, as the aggregate of the places, ideas and activities that embodied inhabitants' expectations and aspirations. In this context, panoramic representations, which showed the urban core from above and from a distance, contributed to this totalising discourse by displaying an overall portrait of the city, a portrait in which flaws were overlooked in favour of a harmonious and orderly whole. But these imperfections could only be hidden to a certain extent, and others portrayed the organic city as a frightening beast, spreading its tentacles in all directions, forming, around the centre, dark labyrinths that threatened physical and moral perdition. Although these two perspectives could be adopted to formulate discourses that both glorified and criticised the modern city, the tone and emphasis shifted according to the point from which the city was observed.

The first section of this chapter will thus concentrate specifically on the use of panoramic representations in the construction of the image of Brussels and Montreal. In the totalising vision it offered, the panorama gave urban elites a powerful rhetorical tool with which to reinforce the values of order and prosperity they wished to inscribe upon the urban landscape. Elevated vantage points allowed observers to appreciate the scenery not just in terms of its individual elements, but rather in all of its splendour and immensity. This mode of viewing manipulated the relationship with space, imposing upon it modern principles of beauty, pride and pleasure.¹ From the heights of panoramic

¹ Through, historian Philippe Dubé notes, a "tête-à-tête où l'esprit se grise de plaisirs transitant par l'œil insatiable du regardeur qui cherche obsessivement l'effet visuel." Philippe Dubé, "La villégiature dans Charlevoix : une traduction séculaire, un patrimoine encore vivant," *Téoros* 14, no. 2 (1995), 4. In the case of Montreal, art historian Isabelle Caron offers an overview of certain key panoramic representations of the second half of the nineteenth century, without, however, questioning the nature of the trope to any great extent. See Isabelle Caron, "Montréal de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle. Vue Panoramique et

viewpoints, the sense of sight was directly called upon to mediate between the physical environment and the ideas through which its meaning took form.

The second section focuses more directly on some of the blemishes that were nonetheless perceptible from this vantage point, namely the industrial neighbourhoods adjacent to the city centres. When commentators described the city from the industrial periphery, the ills of modernity seemed more apparent and the material reality of these districts clashed with the orderly panorama. Visually, the city now seemed barren and desolate, and within these outgrowths, the more instinctual, irrational senses of sound, and especially smell, suddenly became more prevalent in the corporeal relationship to space. Critics seized the opportunity to condemn the effects of modernity upon the city and its populations, while proponents of industrial expansion sought to efface their discomfort and normalise these spaces by ascribing to them nothing less than a panoramic image of tidiness.

I. CONTEMPLATING THE PANORAMA

The panoramic genre has long been employed in artistic and literary representations of the city.² A few lines of nineteenth-century literary prose provide a rich illustration of how the panorama incarnated ideas about the self and the city:

Rastignac, resté seul, fit quelque pas vers le haut du cimetière et vit Paris tortueusement couchée le long des deux rives de la Seine où commençaient à briller les lumières. Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer. Il lança sur cette ruche bourdonnante un regard qui semblait par avance en pomper le miel, et dit de ces mots grandioses : 'À nous deux maintenant!'³

In this famous closing scene of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, the protagonist, Rastignac, experiences a coming of age as he surveys the Parisian panorama from the

fondation d'un discours unificateur," in Lucie K. Morisset and Luc Noppen, eds., *Identités urbaines : échos de Montréal* (Québec: Éditions Nota bene, 2003), 285-300.

² Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 112; Wyn Kelley, *Melville's City: Literary and Urban Form in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Michel Laurin (Laval: Beauchemin, 2004), 337-338. Balzac's novel was initially published in 1835.

heights of the Père Lachaise cemetery. From there, the city lays at his feet. Below him, the lights shimmering on the banks of the Seine, the place Vendôme with its luxurious homes and prestigious column, and the golden dome sheltering a fallen hero in the Invalides symbolically come together in his field of vision to create a powerful visual and emotional stimulus, provoking in the young man a new understanding of his place in the restricted world of an urban high society whose ranks he yearned to join. As if challenging the rooftops to a duel, the defiant words he cries out crystallize the charged moment of self-realisation, showing him ready at once to take on the city and to adopt the values he believes it incarnates, becoming a new person in the process.

Particularly significant about this passage is the way Rastignac's epiphany is intimately bound up in his appreciation of the urban skyline. His desire for self-affirmation finds its expression in the topography and buildings that constitute the material context of his reverie. Balzac's words are a clear example of how individuals found within the city a profound link between the spaces they inhabited and their sense of self. The present section of this chapter will examine the frequent use of panoramic representations in the discourse shaping urban space in Montreal and Brussels at the turn of the century. When people looked out from a particular point of elevation, when their gaze swept across the landscape, taking in the geographical features and the various elements of a rapidly burgeoning skyline, they produced ideas about the city and about themselves, about their place in the paradigm of modernity that increasingly shaped their view of the world. I will consider the process by which panoramas of the city were constructed: from where was the city viewed? What was included or left out of the picture? What type of language was used to describe the city thus beheld? Panoramic representations, I argue, were key to the dynamic by which the material elements of the environment became signifiers in the discourse that urban dwellers used, like Rastignac, to affirm their place in the modern city.

Montreal and Brussels, it is worth noting, share the geographical particularity of being situated on considerably steep slopes, offering splendid vistas of both the cities themselves and the surrounding countryside, rendering their skyline prone to musings from both above and below, from atop the hillside as well as from afar, looking upward. Proud of their city's accomplishments, many saw in the panorama a grand layout of

modernity's promises for wealth and progress, the material realisation of human intellectual and entrepreneurial potential. Others, however, noted that this development could not have been possible without the polluting factories tarnishing the horizon with their black smoke, and the hovels of misery hiding behind the dark plumes.

Montreal urban reformer Herbert Ames aptly characterized this duality in his well-known 1897 survey of poverty in which he famously distinguished between the city "above" and the city "below" the hill. "Looking down from the mountain top upon these two areas," he noted, "the former is seen to contain many spires, but no tall chimneys, the latter is thickly sprinkled with such evidences of industry and the air hangs heavy with their smoke."⁴ Through his sociological research, and political and philanthropic engagement, Ames actively sought out the city below, but many of his contemporaries preferred simply to view the city *from* the hill. Maintaining this panoramic perspective allowed for a reconciliation of these troubling contradictions.

Panoramic representations during this period were indeed produced primarily by what can be termed an urban elite: wealthy, literate and actively involved in the economic, social and cultural transformations wrought by industrialisation and modernity. The texts and images I refer to circulated in novels, journals, monographs, studies, travel guides, and political debates accessible mainly to those leisured enough to consult such works; those, in essence, who would have lived in what Ames called the city above the hill. But while certain tendencies emerge in these visions of the city, the various discourses nonetheless demonstrate that they were by no means uniform.

a) *Orderly cities*

In Montreal and Brussels, viewing the landscape in these "pleasurable ways"⁵ allowed elites to tap into the language of optimism, even utopianism, through which the possibilities of the city were described in the period.⁶ Whether the city was observed from above or from afar, panoramic representations were, above all, relied upon to

⁴ Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill. A Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montreal, Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 6.

⁵ Kelley, *Melville's City*, 38.

⁶ Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 269, Jean-Luc Pinol, *Le monde des villes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1991), 45, Stanley Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 15.

consolidate elites' sense of mastery over the complex realities of the urban context. In the prevailing atmosphere of modernity, in which twinges of uncertainty always simmered beneath an outward veneer of confidence, feelings of mastery could hardly be taken for granted. Viewing a scene from a distance conceals many details, including some of the more unpleasant aspects of industrialisation. Rather than feeling overwhelmed by the expansion of the urban fabric into the surrounding countryside, by the dizzying insalubriousness of working-class tenements, by the rapid pace of movement and traffic in the city's busy streets, panorama viewers could instead retreat to a somewhat safer distance and view the action below from above the fray. In sum, it afforded a tangible expression of the ideal of the orderly city, prevalent among elites of the time.⁷

Consider, for example, the panoramic representation of Montreal printed on the cover of a commemorative book published in 1907 by one of the city's largest dailies, *The Gazette*.⁸ [Figure 7] Its authors, unnamed, couched the advertisement of their newspaper within the glorifying discourse of Montreal as the hub of exchanges for the whole country, associating it with the pleasant, confidence-inspiring terms that held currency at the turn of the century. This strategy commences on the cover page with a view of Montreal from its harbour, one of the city's trump cards in the promotion of its image on an international commercial scale, over which block letters boldly affirm the city's status as "The Commercial Metropolis of Canada." In the foreground, a number of large vessels are sailing into the port and docking at its imposing jetties, recently built at considerable expense in order to attract shipping interests from around the world. The smokestacks on the boats are active, giving movement to the picture and showing that Montreal's port is one of perpetual activity, but their exhaust is not voluminous enough to spoil the clear blue sky and the vivid light in which the city basks. A few individuals, on foot or with horse and cart, provide a human presence in the scene, and show

⁷ On the notion of order as an urban planning ideal in this period, see Christian Topalov, "La ville 'congestionnée': acteurs et langage de la réforme urbaine à New York au début du XXe siècle," *Genèses* (1990), David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Helen Meller, *Towns, Plans, and Society in Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁸ *Montreal, the Metropolis of Canada: The rise, progress and development of its industries, commerce, transportation facilities, resources, banking and real estate values; the men who have made and are making Montreal, with a history of The Gazette from its establishment in 1778* (Montreal: The Gazette, 1907).

Montrealers busy at work. As our eyes leave the harbour, the adjacent warehouses, grain elevators and factory buildings further testify to Montreal's ambient industrial activity. In the background, the buildings spread out in an orderly fashion towards Mount Royal, the imposing landmark which dominates the scene, adding a touch of nature to the urban frame, its peak furnishing the image with an almost stoic sense of security. The colours used to depict the city are warm, while the soft hues of the image create a tranquil atmosphere, one that succeeds in evoking a quite pleasurable impression of the industrial city. The hustle and bustle, the noise and the heavy smoke that we might otherwise associate with industrialisation are clearly underplayed: evoked, but far from overwhelming. Indeed, observing the city from this angle, viewers would have had their backs turned to the neighbourhoods in which industrial production was concentrated.



Figure 7. “The Commercial metropolis of Canada,” on the cover of a commemorative edition of the *Gazette* in 1907.

A similar message is conveyed in the portrait of Brussels [Figure 8] appearing in a richly printed book entitled, *La Belgique illustrée*,⁹ in which several prominent writers outline the country’s history and current state of economic and social development. The section on Brussels heralds the city’s rustic charms while emphasising its predominant role as the hub of economic, political and cultural activity in the fledgling Belgian state. In this image, the city is also viewed from afar, but instead of being at its doorstep, as in the Montreal image, the viewer here is placed in the surrounding countryside. The city

⁹ Émile Bruylant, ed., *La Belgique illustrée. Ses monuments, ses paysages, ses oeuvres d'art* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe et Cie, successeur Émile Bruylant, 1889).

itself is off in the distance, a garland atop the scenery, its greatness implied rather than overtly stated. Here, the specific details of the industrial city are distinctly subtle, and the viewer is left only with the impression of a quiet stroll through the countryside, dimly aware that something big looms in the distance. To the left of our field of view, barges float smoothly along the canal, carrying the coal that fuels the city's industrial production. Further along their route we see a pair of smoking chimneys, hinting at the presence of this industrial landscape, but the route the viewer would take into the capital follows a tree-lined and unpaved road. Along the way, we pass a castle-like building while horse-drawn carts cross our path. Visually speaking, the city's physical modernity is minimised. Nevertheless, the symbols of industrialisation are not far beneath this romantic surface. They are sufficiently visible to make their presence felt, but not enough to dampen the pleasurable sentiment evoked through the use of panoramic representation. Industrialisation is shown as an outward sign of prosperity within an urban environment protected from the potentially chaotic forces that nourish its growth.

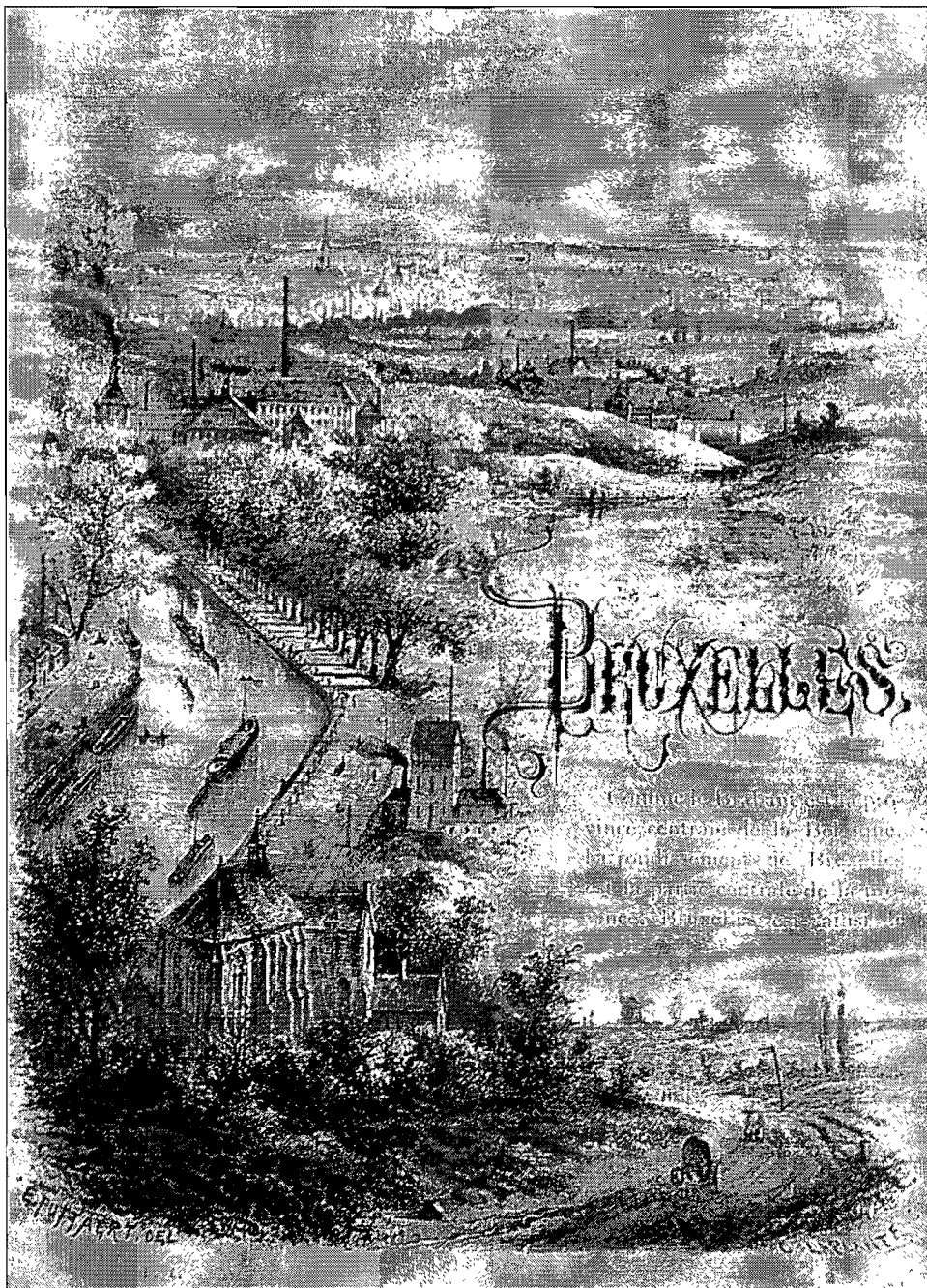


Figure 8 E. Puttaert and C. Laplante, “Bruxelles,” opening the section on Brussels in *La Belgique illustré*

Both of these illustrations represent the city from afar, subtly elevating it as the jewel in a crown of natural beauty and human ingenuity. Somewhat more typical of panoramic representations during these years were those that viewed the city from a

point of elevation, giving the viewer a sense of dominance over the scene. For the Reverend A.J. Bray and the journalist John Lesperance, “the finest view of the city can be had from the mountain.”¹⁰ In the turn-of-the-century panoramic vogue, an immediately popular belvedere had been constructed on the summit of Mount Royal. As the 1906 annual report of the Montreal Parks and Playground Association indicates, the construction of this lookout mobilised considerable public interest, given the popularity of the site. Vaunting its influence on the matter as it stood before the city council, the Association notes in its report that “the plan finally settled on by the Council secures, for the first time, a solid, simple, and dignified structure, befitting the outlook, which may now well stand comparison with other famous points of view in the great cities of the continent.”¹¹



Figure 9 “Montreal – a ‘look out’ on Mont Royal.” Undated photograph, BAnQ, collection numérique.

Though this is little more than a passing comment in the organisation’s annual report, it brings to light to significant aspects of panoramic observations during the period. First, the specific vantage point was primordial to the overall experience, and it

¹⁰ A.J. Bray and John Lesperance, “A Glimpse from the Mountain: Montreal” in George Monro Grant, ed., *Artistic Quebec: Described by Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1888), 105.

¹¹ Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association, Annual report for year ending November 1906, 6. McGill University Archives, MG 2079nC9

was deemed necessary to construct a “dignified structure.”¹² The scene had to be properly set and the installations had to be worthy of the most distinguished individuals who would visit the summit and whose experience would contribute to the terms upon which the image of the city was discussed. Secondly, the presence of a suitable lookout point is presented here as a necessary condition for Montreal’s rank among the most modern and prestigious of cities. In Brussels, the walkway fronting the extravagantly built courthouse would, for its part, serve these decorative needs.

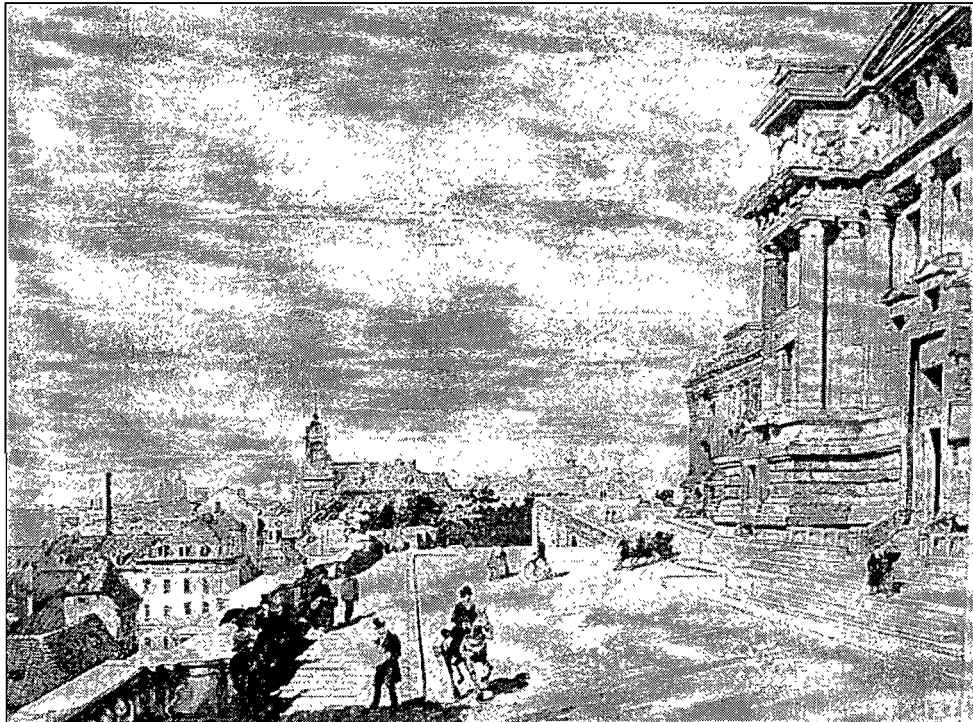


Figure 10 “Le palais de Justice – façade vers la rue des Minimes.”¹³

b) A natural frame

Before the fateful moment at which one’s eyes caught sight of the view, one had first to reach the lookout point. In Montreal, the act of viewing the panorama was thus more than just about seeing, as the journey to the top of Mount Royal implicated the

¹² On the architecture of lookout points, see Dubé, “La villégiature dans Charlevoix,” 4.

¹³ Unsigned illustration in Bruylant, ed., *La Belgique illustrée*, 92.

whole body in the overall experience. Walkers made their way upward along a winding path, “by steps suggestive of lungs and nerves, and a swimming head and death by falling.”¹⁴ One visitor to the city, preferring to forego such thrills in favour of a carriage ride, described the drive to the top as “delightful.” Writing in 1912, the American author Eleanor Farrell reminisced about the “winding drive around the mountain, through a long stretch of picturesque wood-land, with its varied beauties of foliage, ferns and flowers, with here and there frequent glimpses of tiny, silvery rivulets, trickling and tumbling in miniature cascades down the mountainside.” Along the way, one sees the palatial homes of the city’s wealthiest residents, surrounded by imposing trees – “monarchs of the forest” – as well as humble “little cottages nestling in the mountain.”

The trip thus offers a transitional moment in which visitors remove themselves from the city, the better to appreciate its vastness from afar. Breathing the fresh air affords both a physical and mental tranquility, and is the beginning of this pleasurable experience. “Once the summit is gained,” continues Farrell, “an indescribable, beautiful panorama of the city and surrounding country presents itself to view.” The eyes feast on the city peacefully resting below, “with no sound of the bustling activity of the city, save the shrill whistle of the locomotive and the sounding blast of the passing steamboat on the majestic St. Lawrence.”¹⁵ This description of the experience that constituted a trip to the Mount Royal lookout highlights the extent to which such representations played on pleasurable sensory experiences. Nature offers a soothing and romantic backdrop and the mountain provides enough distance to escape the unpleasant noises of bustling industry. Farrell hears only the noble and powerful locomotive and steamboats, representative of Montreal’s commercial superiority and symbolizing the merchant princes’ valorous accomplishments.¹⁶

To this day, one of the founding symbols surrounding the origins of Montreal remains the story of a Breton explorer’s encounter with the view from the mountain upon setting foot there in 1535, apparently unable to stifle a cry of admiration at the

¹⁴ A.J. Bray and John Lesperance, “A Glimpse from the Mountain: Montreal,” 106.

¹⁵ Eleanor Gertrude Farrell, *Among the Blue Laurentians: Queenly Montreal, Quaint Quebec, Peerless Ste. Anne de Beaupré* (New York: P.J. Kennedy and sons, 1912), 13-14.

¹⁶ On the glorifying discourse represented through Montreal’s panorama, see also Rhona Richman Kenneally, “Depictions of Progress : Images of Montreal in Contemporary Guidebooks, 1839-1907,” *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 23, no. 1 (1998).

grandiose scene.¹⁷ Commentators embellished Jacques Cartier's narration of his climb to the summit to present it as a passionate emotional experience, and the journalist and author Julius Chambers even imagined the mariner "standing at my side," as he looked at the view.¹⁸ One poem, signed only Mrs Leprohon, relates the author's emotion, steeped in sensory experiences, at the idea of sharing this view with Cartier across the centuries. She could almost see him gazing over the scene "by October's golden light," his "dark eyes, earnest, thoughtful/ Lit up with a softer ray/ As they dwelt on the scene of beauty,/ That, outspread, before him lay."¹⁹ Much as nature was used as the frame within which to present the city's modern accomplishments, the story of Cartier's voyage served to underscore Montreal's continuous, and apparently unceasing, march toward progress. "La scène à bien changé depuis," notes one author, pointing out that the trees Cartier would have seen had been replaced by a forest of domes, bell-towers and chimneys.²⁰ And where Cartier would have "heard only the rippling current" of the river, the modern soundscape is now filled with ships "ply[ing] the rushing waters" and the resounding "shrieks of the locomotive."²¹

In a particularly aroused commentary, the doctor and poet William Henry Drummond marvelled at the changes wrought to the landscape by the centuries since Cartier. "Then the savage tribes of Iroquois and Huron were the sole inhabitants of our Island city," he remarks. "The red children of the forest have gone, and where once stood the rude wigwams of these dusky warriors a great and beautiful city has sprung up, a "city of churches," a city with its magnificent cathedrals, hospitals, colleges and schools of learning; a city with one of the finest harbours in the world, and one of the

¹⁷ *Montréal, son passé, son présent et son avenir. Histoire, commerce, industries depuis 1535 à 1889* (Montréal: Chaput Frères, 1890), 5.

¹⁸ Julius Chambers, "The Imperial City of the Dominion: Montreal of Yesterday and Today," in Lorenzo Prince, Julius Chambers, and B. K. Sandwell, *Montreal, Old, New: Entertaining, Convincing, Fascinating, A unique guide for the managing editor* (Montreal: International Press Syndicate, 1915), 56. Though Cartier noted the beauty of the panorama, the emotional impact it had on him was undoubtedly the product of these authors' imaginations. See Jacques Cartier, *Voyages en Nouvelle-France*, ed. Robert Lahaise and Marie Couturier (Montréal: Hurtubise, 1977), 104-105.

¹⁹ Cited in Montreal Board of Trade, *The Board of Trade Illustrated Edition of Montreal : The splendour of its location, the grandeur of its scenery, the stability of its buildings, its great harbour, its stately churches, its handsome homes, its magnificent institutions, its great industries, fully illustrated and described* (Montreal: Trade Review Pub. Co., 1909), 4.

²⁰ *Montréal, son passé, son présent et son avenir*, 5.

²¹ John Parratt, ed., *Montreal, Pictured and Described* (Halifax: The Canada Railway News Co. Ld., 1889), 39.

strongest banking institutions on the continent of America.”²² The poetic but condescending reference to native populations and their ways of occupying the land leaves little doubt as to the author’s broader social beliefs in the progress of modern civilisation, while the wild forest’s replacement by an urban landscape filled with magnificent public and private institutional edifices is a source of manifest pride. Though the river, hills, and pastures offered a beautiful framework, nature was nonetheless associated with a time and a way of life that preceded the dynamism of the modern city.

c) Hidden industries

Playing with the contrast between images of the past and those of the contemporary city, panoramic representations thus clearly situated this perceived “uninterrupted progress”²³ within a narrative of economic, commercial and industrial development. Particularly striking in many of these types of representations, however, is the conspicuous absence from the picture of the actual forces that fuelled this progress. Aside from the occasional and highly symbolic wisp of smoke or the distant sound of a steamboat or locomotive horn, the panorama of the industrial city was often represented in ways that soothed rather than jarred the observer’s senses.

One might wonder where the city’s factories and tenements might have been located when contemplating the image below, frequently reproduced in books and pamphlets about Montreal at the turn of the century. [Figure 11] Appearing in a turn-of-the-century collection of photographs assembled with the objective of displaying Montreal’s metropolitan status, it presents a panoramic view that gives visual form to the written descriptions such as those cited above.²⁴ The mountain’s greenery is still abundant at its base, and as nature meets the city, trees continue to line the streets of Montreal’s most prestigious residential neighbourhood, at the end of which the dome of

²²William Henry Drummond, *Montreal in Halftone. A souvenir : Over one hundred illustrations, (plain and colored) showing the great progress which the city has made during the past seventy years : with historical description* (Montreal: W.J. Clarke, 1901).

²³ *Montreal, the Metropolis of Canada*, 15.

²⁴ No author, or precise date, are specified in this collection of photographs.

the Cathedral is clearly visible. In the background, the Saint-Laurence and the hills of the south shore round out the city's natural framework. Also clearly visible, the Victoria Bridge, a celebrated engineering exploit, the gem and most powerful symbol of Montreal's metropolitan success, proudly spans the river. The city's commercial district, located between the riverbanks and the foot of the mountain is mysteriously out of focus, with only a large grain elevator visible through the smudge. It is difficult to tell whether this is intentional tampering, or simply the unintended result of early photographic equipment and techniques, but the visual impact of the many industrial buildings lining the riverfront would have clashed with the tranquil and comforting atmosphere conveyed by the rest of the image. What *is* perfectly clear, however, is that the cut-off point of the picture is at the foot of the bridge, near the mouth of the Lachine Canal, at the precise location where Canada's most highly industrialised urban district began its westward sprawl. These industries would have been clearly visible from the lookout, but by removing them from the picture, the anonymous photographer creates an idealized image, emphasising the orderly aspects of the panorama that pleased the senses and corresponded to modern ideals about the urban landscape.

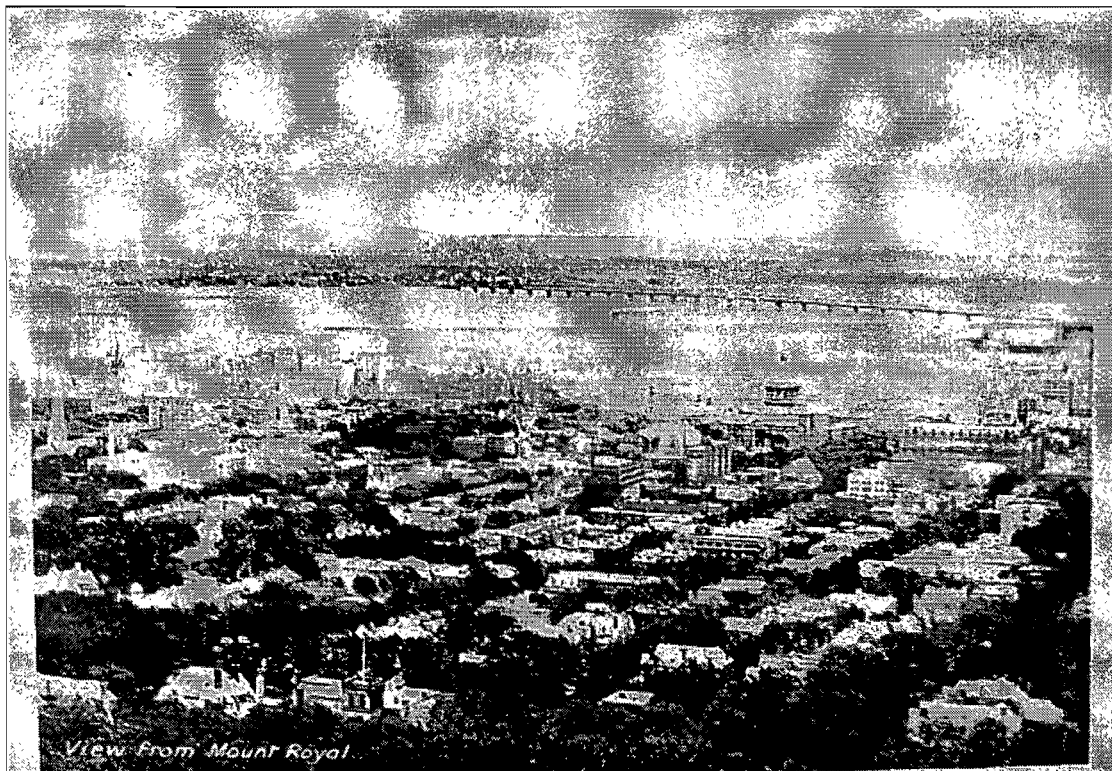


Figure 11 “View from Mount Royal.”

In the late 1890s, a Belgian engineer, Georges Kaiser, recalled his arrival into Montreal by train, noting only the feeling of “gaîté” his arrival in the city had inspired. He marvels at the width and brightness of the streets, the stylish garden-adorned houses, and the fresh briskness of the air, but the professor, and factory inspector, does not write a single word about the busy industrial districts west of downtown, and through which his train from Boston would have taken him. Kaiser was perhaps just waking up as he arrived into Montreal, early in the morning. Or perhaps the comforting realisation that he would meet at every step “des gens parlant ma langue” made him oblivious to the more sombre aspects of the city’s environment, and he more than likely forgot about the sights and sounds of industry the instant he checked into his room at the luxurious Windsor Hotel. His description of Montreal is typical of the period in its focus on the pleasant and bubbling atmosphere of the metropolis.

If we return to Kaiser’s homeland for a moment, we see that a similar dynamic shaped panoramic representations in Brussels. As there is no topographical

equivalent to Mount Royal in the capital of the *plat pays*, panorama viewers flocked to the vast esplanade located in front of the newly constructed courthouse. This massive, architecturally eclectic edifice dominated the entire skyline from atop the steep escarpment that divides Brussels geographically and symbolically into its upper and lower halves. From this and other nearby vantage points, boasted one guidebook published by the municipality itself, “l’on découvre de superbes panoramas d’horizon étendu, des campagnes situées à l’ouest de la ville.” Here too, the emphasis is on the natural beauty that surrounds the city. The author fails to mention that the city’s most densely industrialised neighbourhoods were also located directly to the west of the city – they are erased from the panorama, as if the viewer could somehow look straight over them and see only the verdant pastures beyond. Indeed, the author of the guidebook, the writer Alfred Mabille, explicitly stresses the pleasurable nature of the atmosphere in Brussels, noting that with its large and clean streets, its residents’ dedication to giving their homes “un aspect riant et coquet,” the variety of new neighbourhoods and the walkways adorned with majestic beech trees “inspirent à l’étranger une impression qu’on ne saurait mieux traduire qu’en prenant un mot qui nous est fourni par l’anglais, une impression de ‘comfort’ et de bien-être.”²⁵

Moreover, to many commentators, such as the author Camille Lemonnier, Brussels’ charm lay in its ability, threatened though it was, to resist the onslaught of industrialisation and preserve a sense of its historic identity in its urban landscape. Though Lemonnier cannot completely ignore the “tourbillon des fumées des quartiers industriels,” the physical presence of industry has essentially no bearing upon his way of seeing of the panorama.²⁶ In fact, for Lemonnier, the Brussels’ historic rooftops are a line of defence against the tidal wave of industrial growth. In industrial cities like

²⁵ Alfred Mabille, *Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Bureau officiel de renseignements gratuits pour étrangers, 1914), 4. Travel guidebooks are a particularly useful source for panoramic representations, as their aim was to present the city to visitors in ways that would strike their interest. As Joycè notes, they describe movement within the city, orienting travellers’ itineraries in a way that shapes their perspective on the places they visit. Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 198. On the heuristic value of guidebooks, see also Laurent Tissot, *Naissance d’une industrie touristique : les Anglais et la Suisse au XIXe siècle* (Lausanne: Payot, 2001), 13-25, Kenneally, “Depictions of Progress,” 7. With particular reference to Brussels, see Serge Jaumain, “L’image de Bruxelles dans les guides touristiques (XIXe-XXe siècles),” in Jo Braeken, Paulo Charruadas, and Eric De Kuyper, eds., *Bruxelles, 175 ans d’une capitale* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2005), 155-166.

²⁶ Camille Lemonnier, *La Belgique* (Bruxelles: Alfred Castaigne, 1903), 66.

Antwerp, “la vie halète et gronde,” but Brussels conserved a more refined image: “les grandes villes furieuses ouvrent là-bas les métaux, labourent les entrailles terrestres, font ronfler les machines; mais Bruxelles est la colonnade symétrique et pavoisée, dressée comme un décor sur les horizons embrasés.”²⁷ The author creates a distinct physical and symbolic distance between the tremors of industrialisation and the overall progress associated with it. The picture accompanying his words shows a tranquil panorama of Flemish style architecture, at the centre of which is the famous spire of the city hall. These types of sentiments were periodically echoed within that very building, as in 1908 when, during a debate on construction by-laws, a council member pleaded that permits not be granted for the construction of skyscrapers within the limits of the city. From every point of elevation, argued the councillor, Brussels offers “un panorama qui constitue l’une des beautés de la Ville et auquel je demande qu’on ne gâte rien.”²⁸

d) *Signs of progress*

But if the smokestacks and factories could be hidden from the page, in reality they were difficult to avoid when actually looking out at the city. To address this contradiction, other authors chose instead to engage with the physical traces of industry directly, but generally in an attempt to rehabilitate the smoke and sirens in order to present them not as nuisances, but as evidence of growth and prosperity. In one celebratory portrait of Montreal, for instance, smokestacks are put forth as concrete symbols of the city’s unquestionable progress and serve to define its “metropolitan character.” Describing the panorama as it might strike a “stranger from the old world,” the authors present industry as the city’s most visible feature: “The smoke emitting from thousands of busy chimneys hovering like a vast cloud in mid-air bespeaks the great manufacturing centre.” The Victoria Bridge, its “light and fairy-like” in the distance, and inland, futuristic “electric cars – shuttles in the loom of industry – fly back and forth among market gardens and suburban residences.” Further along, they continue, “axemen are busy felling the trees of a beautiful orchard, preparatory to the commencement of work upon the construction of terraces of mechanics’ residences.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁸ BCB, 19 December 1908, 1265. (De Locht)

Here is a new factory ready for the machinery; there, and there, and there, other new hives of industry just beginning operations.” The destruction of the natural landscape has a brutal quality to it, but, in the eyes of the commentators it is an obvious sacrifice to make. At the same time, the allusion to the hive underscores the frenzy of this development while the repetition of the word “there” in pointing to ubiquitous spread of industry emphasises the nature of this growth and heightens the emotional charge of their interaction with panorama.²⁹

It is worth noting that, while this type of discourse also existed in Brussels, such open glorification of the industrial landscape was much less frequent there. This constitutes a significant difference between panoramic representations in the two cities. While Montrealers were frequently willing to assert their pride in the city’s growth and development as they contemplated the spectacle from afar, commentators in Brussels often expressed a sense of nostalgia at the changes occurring on the landscape of their much older city. “Grâce à sa situation, au développement sans cesse accru des chemins de fer, à sa dignité et à son charme de vaste cité projetant chaque jour plus loin l’expansion des bâtisses,” wrote the journalist Franz Mahutte in the 1890s, “Bruxelles, ce que d’aucuns regretteront, s’est fait cosmopolite.”³⁰ Indeed, many saw in the charged fin-de-siècle landscape a sense that the city’s true identity, rooted in centuries of beer brewing and *joie de vivre*, was being sold out to modern imperatives of progress and profit. For his part, the celebrated Belgian architect Jules Brunfaut, speaking before his fellow members of the Commission royale des monuments, recounted the distressing experience of climbing to the top of the “vieille tour Sainte-Catherine” in the city centre and experiencing la “sensation de la mort lente du panorama de Bruxelles, dépecé par des tracés de rues incohérents et banalisé par d’encombrantes bâtisses à la silhouette effarante remplaçant de délicieux documents du 18^e siècle et submergeant les monuments anciens,” which, he argued, should instead have formed the principal ornamentation of the newly developed neighbourhoods.³¹

²⁹ Prince, Chambers, and Sandwell, *Montreal, Old, New*, 40-41.

³⁰ Franz Mahutte, *Bruxelles vivant* (Bruxelles: Bureaux de l’anthologie contemporaine des écrivains français et belges, 1891), 10.

³¹ Speech published in *Tekhné* 2 (8 June 1912).

How would the city have looked, asked the author Émile Leclercq, if, “tout en détruisant les ruelles puantes et en faisant des ruines de ces vieilles habitations qui n’étaient plus en harmonie avec les nécessités de la vie moderne,” this development had taken place not through countless demolitions, but through the renovation of medieval and Renaissance architecture. “Au lieu de ces rues interminables, de ces échiquiers à angles droits, de ces habitations sur le même modèle froid ou d’une architecture luxueusement monotone,” he regrets, constructors could have maintained a diversity in forms, paint and architectural detail, in sum, all that gave Brussels its unique local colour. Like Mahutte, he denounces the city’s growing “cosmopolitanism,” seeing in the atmosphere of change and modernity not a forward movement, but a renunciation of a form of collective identity. Embarking on the trends of wide avenues and large modern buildings, Brussels, was becoming a “cité étrangère” and was losing its “personnalité.” This sense of loss was clearly inscribed on the urban skyline.³²

This point of view tapped into what historian Françoise Choay termed a “culturalist” approach to urban planning, which sought to conserve architectural forms and a layout that were traditional, asymmetrical and eclectic.³³ It nevertheless shared with the more pragmatic approach a vision of the panorama bound up in the aspirations and values of the city’s inhabitants. For commentators like Leclercq, Brunfaut and Mahutte, the deeper meaning of the material landscape, as it was viewed from a distant perspective, lay in the visual effect impressed upon the viewer by the scenery. To them, the panorama had much to say about the direction in which their society was going, prioritising profitability over aesthetic considerations. They also believed that the experience of viewing the panorama was fundamentally about the pleasurable sensation through which the viewer felt a bond of attachment with the urban environment. The solution they proposed was not necessarily to stop the changes altogether, but rather to adopt a tamer approach to modernity, one whose break with the past was less radical.

³² Bruylant, ed., *La Belgique illustrée*, 62-63.

³³ Françoise Choay, *L’urbanisme. Utopies et réalités* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 21-30.

e) *The crushing weight of the urban landscape*

To be sure, the panoramic trope was also used to put forth more virulent criticisms of modernity. The journalist and commentator Louis Dumont-Wilden, for instance, considered the Brussels panorama to be obscure and sinister, “a monstrous heap of mysterious lives,” to translate his words. Evoking the excessive stimulation of modern urban life that so preoccupied Simmel, Dumont-Wilden explains how his nerves, “vibrant jusqu’au malaise, l’âme hésitante et meurtrie” often kept him awake at night. To lighten this mental burden, he would take long walks through the silent streets and along the endless boulevards of the sleeping city. As he walked, a host of impressions struck him with sharpness and pain, he explained. “Vous plongeant dans la ville moderne,” he wrote, “vous aurez la sensation d’en sortir et de fuir vers le pays nostalgique de l’hors nature, du rêve artificiel.” This was an age of increased and accelerated mechanised transport – trains, tramways, and automobiles – that separated the individual from the physical act of movement. Walking, in the direct, corporeal contact with the city it afforded, thus became a privileged method of gaining spatial knowledge. As Certeau explains, “l’énonciation piétonnière” was central to the constitution of spatial narratives, as a way of appropriating one’s surroundings, of actualising the relationship with environment through movement, and of understanding points in the city in reference to one another.³⁴ Indeed, the spatial stories of the period were frequently narrated in the setting of a walk through the city, and, as historian Joachim Schlör notes in the case of turn-of-the-century metropolises, “walking aimlessly,” particularly at night, was a way not just to know the city, but to “search for oneself” in it.³⁵

Dumont-Wilden’s walks took him through the suburbs and into the city centre, where he followed the boulevards to the heights of the courthouse and its esplanade. To him, this was not a space of prestige and luxury, but the ominous catafalque of a dying city, from which there was no ignoring the physical presence of industrialisation. As he gazed out over the city from the same place at which Mabilie had seen only verdant pastures, he was struck by the fact that, “ça et là se dressent les hautes cheminées des

³⁴ Michel de Certeau, *Arts de faire* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1980), 18-183.

³⁵ Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930*, trans. Pierre Gottfreid Imhoff and Dafydd Rees Roberts (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 272.

usines, puis des masses sombres, monuments indistincts : par endroit la lune, quand les nuages la découvrent, jette un rayon brutal sur quelque toit de verre, qui fait paraître plus noirs encore les fossés que tracent les rues.” Rather than seeing on the Brussels panorama a symbol of economic growth and industrial development, he decries the suffering these changes have engendered and portrays his city as an immense cemetery where people fall like overworked animals. “Une horreur indicible émane de toutes ces vies contrariées,” he continues, “de toutes ces individualités insatisfaites, de tous ces corps entassés les uns sur les autres, unis seulement dans la fraternité de la douleur.”

If those who used the panorama to express a confident vision of the city considered that the actual lookout point formed part of the overall picture, Dumont-Wilden also reinforced his criticism in reference to the place on which he stood. As he leaves the courthouse along the large ramps leading to the lower city, he notes the massive structure’s dominance over the panorama, the long, oppressive shadow it cast over the poor neighbourhoods below. The building represents not a just and generous law, but a law “qui fixe la routine suivant laquelle tous ces hommes vont s’entre-déchirer pour le pain de chaque jour; c’est elle qui consacre la souffrance des individualités contrariées, de toute l’autorité que lui ont légué les siècles de douleur et de labeur patiemment supportés par ce ‘grand troupeau’ éternellement renouvelé pour l’éternelle souffrance.”³⁶ One wonders how much good his walk did for his insomnia that night.

f) *The workers’ panorama*

Though comments on the panorama made by industrial workers themselves are absent from the sources, the novels of the Belgian author Marius Renard, a socialist politician directly engaged in workers’ causes, offer a perspective on the skyline based not on prestige and privilege, but on the concerns of those who toiled on the front lines of industry. The plot of one of his most successful books, *Notre pain quotidien*, revolves around the burgeoning relationship of a young working-class woman, recently arrived to the city, with a politically engaged machinist, also attempting to adapt to the industrial suburbs of Brussels after migrating from the Walloon countryside. Both are

³⁶ Louis Dumont-Wilden, *Coins de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1905), 41-45.

faced with material and emotional hardship, but through the author's moralising prose they come into their own as responsible adults striving for the uplift of the working class. Renard draws an explicit parallel between the interiority of the characters, their personal journeys, the confrontation between their sense of self and their place in a society driven by an industrial economy, and their appropriation of the city. The character development is solidly rooted in the urban setting, and it is as they physically move through the streets, as they take note of the atmosphere of the modern city, its lights, sounds and energy that Madeleine and François develop a fuller understanding of their identity.

The author evokes the two characters' interaction with the panorama at a crucial turning point in the story. Having overcome the odds, having managed to secure a regular income and establish a decent home, the young couple appear to be reconciling themselves to their new urban reality. They do not know it yet, but their life is about to change dramatically as François will be imprisoned for his participation in a worker's uprising, leaving a pregnant Madeleine to fend for herself. In a moment of calm before the storm, the two are taking their regular dominical walk on the outskirts of the city. François asks his wife to stop for a moment on the top of a hill to better appreciate the "poésie du soir tombant, la beauté de l'émouvant décor formé par l'immense cité." Immediately before them, they see the industrial suburbs of Anderlecht, Curegem and Molenbeek, and, along the sinuous banks of the canal, they observe the factories, the chimneys emerging high above the rooftops. "La magie dorée du soir perpétuait sur les choses un poudroisement lumineux qui semblait vibrer sur les toits rouges, les larges verrières des ateliers et le miroir des eaux," writes Renard, emphasising the impressionistic side of this colourful atmosphere.

However, Brussels, further afar, "apparaissait comme un océan gris où moutonnaient d'énormes vagues." Here too, the author evokes the city's distant beauty likening the skyline to the rhythms of the sea under the day's falling shadows. But compared with the warm tint of the suburbs, the impression created by the central city is quite different. The scattered clouds of smoke fluctuating through the atmosphere evoke a tremulous existence:

De la marée émergeaient les flèches des églises et des tours, les masses pesantes des édifices, la lourde silhouette du Palais de Justice. Les

lumières des rues ne s'apercevaient pas encore. Mais vers l'ombre de l'espace un halo rosé montait comme la lumière d'un invisible soleil. Ce qui donnait une impression de mystère, c'était la rumeur qui s'évadait de l'immense chaos, un bruit sourd où l'on ne distinguait rien, mais qui avait la force lourde d'un ahan de bête monstrueuse cachée sous les ombres. Et cela seul évoquait l'idée d'une humanité, d'une vie énorme en marche, d'un destin qui luttait sans trêve.

Les pensées songeuses du mécanicien assimilaient cette chose obscure à son rêve.³⁷

Whereas the industrial areas where the couple had begun to feel at home basked peacefully in the evening light, Brussels, at the same moment, casts an almost eerie halo. Under the heavy shadow of the courthouse, amid a vast chaos, the city emits a low rumble whose beastly quality intensifies its peculiar atmosphere.

But beneath this disquieting surface shines a ray of hope. In the eyes of the characters, Brussels is also a place where battles for a better fate are waged, and François's own dreams are closely bound to his vision and physical experience of the city as he walks through and around it. As Renard expands on this connection, he describes how the distant city brought to the surface all of the young man's deepest emotions: his pain, his rancour, but his longings as well. For François, social struggles were about creating a better life, and although he saw himself as only a humble worker who could not quite grasp the grand strategies devised by the party he supported, writes Renard, "il espérait des jours où les plus malheureux auraient leurs joies et leur part de pain." Though Renard's opus will never be compared to Balzac's, an obvious parallel can be drawn between François's experience and that of Rastignac, whose personal aspirations took shape through his contemplation of the skyline.

At a time when urban discourse increasingly presented the city as an organic whole, panoramic representations reveal the tensions and contradictions that shaped this conceptualisation. Against predominantly pleasurable and orderly visions of a forward-moving, progressive world were confronted the panoramas of destructive cities whose sprawl oppressed residents and destroyed nature, making explicit the link between the material landscape and the broader ideas about society it embodied. These ideas were constructed through people's bodily interaction with the scenery, as they walked to the

³⁷ Marius Renard, *Notre Pain Quotidien* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1909), 175-178.

vantage point, as their eyes spanned the horizon, as their ears interpreted the sounds exuded by the city. Ostensibly a way to present a scene in its entirety, the panorama served to construct this totality according to a variety of individual understandings of the environment. These representations tell us less about specific material realities than about how this materiality informed subjective feelings, and the way panoramic images gave shape to the expression of individual emotions rooted in the experience of the city.

II. OF TENTACLES AND LABYRINTHS

Panoramic representations were contrasted with a conception of the city as a labyrinth, where spatial significance was constructed directly from the ground. The perspective from the street, notes literary scholar Wyn Kelley, created an altogether different impression of urban space, giving it a tenser, more restricted quality, where “often the urban environment closes in on the viewer, cutting off the spectator’s freedom of movement and breadth of vision.”³⁸ Leaving the panorama, the second part of this chapter will examine these ‘labyrinths,’ more precisely the growing industrial districts located adjacent to the city centres which urban elites sought to construct as symbols of wealth and prestige. Urban planning ideals of the time called for a city centre “surrounded by gardens and open spaces, again representing the triumph of civilised values over market forces.”³⁹ The realities of industrialisation, however, meant that market forces occupied increasingly large swathes of territory around the centre of Montreal and Brussels. As their gaze shifted away from the comfort of the broader panorama to the sites on which industrialisation was transforming the city, urban commentators grappled with the significance of these spaces. The various strategies used to construct the image and significance of the panorama were deployed in similar ways deep within these labyrinths, where individual preoccupations were expressed through discourses that ran the gamut between misery and splendour, between ruthless criticisms and attempts to cast these developments in a more civilising light.

³⁸ Kelley, *Melville's City*, 44.

³⁹ Meller, *Towns, Plans, and Society*, 28.

As we come down from the vantage points overlooking central Montreal and Brussels and step into their peripheral industrial districts, we might reflect on the words of Charles Buls, Brussels burgomaster during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, concerning his city's outward expansion:

Autour de Bruxelles [...] s'étend et se développe une ceinture de faubourgs où malheureusement aucun effort ne vient atténuer la banale sécheresse, l'insignifiance absolue de longues rues uniformes, de quartiers lotis uniquement au point de vue de la vente des terrains; [...] aucun monument, aucune plantation ne viennent corriger le manque d'intérêt que présente cet amas informe de maisons déjà plus nombreuses que celle de la cité mère.⁴⁰

The passage is brief, but significant. From the mayor we might have expected more enthusiasm about the expansion of the city and the corresponding economic development. But as he refers to this growth, his tone is sad, almost discouraged. The very word *faubourg*, used to designate the industrial municipalities surrounding the central city, possessed a slightly pejorative connotation.⁴¹ At the heart of the matter lay the difficult relationship between the image of the older central districts of these cities – the distinguished avenues and edifices that elated panorama viewers – and their periphery, expanding in time with the successive waves of the industrial revolution. Disappointed in the lack of attention paid to the built environment of these areas, weary of the purely speculative considerations pushing this soulless development, Buls' emotional language was indicative of the way in which individuals' relationship to urban space was constructed through the interplay of their intimate preoccupations, fears and aspirations; in sum, though their interiority.

⁴⁰ Charles Buls, *Esthétique des villes* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe & Cie, 1893), 22-23.

⁴¹ 'Faubourg,' imperfectly translated here as 'suburb,' was a medieval term used to refer to settlements that grew outside the fortifications of walled cities, usually in an unregulated fashion such that an aura of marginality, suspicion and even danger hovered above them. During this period, the term 'banlieue,' was also increasingly used, but generally in reference to more independent, and still largely rural, localities, situated at a somewhat greater distance from the central city. For more on this distinction, though in an earlier period, see Sylvie Freney, "Les faubourgs : cette non-banlieue (18e - 19e siècles)," *Études canadiennes* 60 (2006). Though the label 'faubourg' applied to the entire ring of municipalities around Brussels, it was most frequently used in reference to the emerging industrial districts. As Marius Renard pointed out, "les faubourgs pauvres" were "les vrais faubourgs," adding that, "le mot faubourg donne toujours une impression un peu spéciale." Marius Renard, *Le Faubourg* (Bruxelles: J. De Clercq, 1930), 9. Wealthier suburbs were more typically referred to as "quartiers bourgeois" or "aristocratiques," even when they formed part of this first ring. "Des faubourg, le moins faubourien est Ixelles," commented the author Franz Mahutte in Alexandre Braun, Maurice Benoit, and Franz Mahutte, eds., *Notre pays*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Librairie national d'art et d'histoire, 1909, 1919), 242.

Indeed, though Buls pursued his interest in urbanism to a very personal level,⁴² his comments can be situated in a broader debate that was taking place in many industrial cities like Montreal and Brussels at the turn of the twentieth century. Image makers concerned with promoting their city as a reflection of their modern achievements, were forced to reconcile their totalising vision with the presence of more unpleasant aspects of industrialisation upon the urban landscape, in particular smoke nuisances and the growth of working-class neighbourhoods, associated with the vice and disorder that were seen as threatening the city's well-being. These developments were taking place in close proximity to the prestigious central districts, both within the city limits and in former *faubourgs*, once sparsely-populated rural villages that were being transformed into veritable cradles of industrialisation. Resulting from this proximity, was a paradoxical relationship between these districts and the central cities they surrounded. While industries were indispensable to the realisation of the dream of progress and prosperity inscribed on the panorama, their concentration around the centre constituted a nuisance to the celebration and exaltation of this same dream. These spaces, easily overlooked from panoramic heights, were, in the eyes of many observers, the unpleasant labyrinths referred to by Kelley, the sickly sores that compromised the overall health of the city. They preoccupied the cities' politicians, hygienists, journalists, writers and promoters who, in constructing the image of their city, alternatively condemned these spaces, continued to ignore them, or attempted to rehabilitate their image as symbols of prosperity. In these representations, we see the central role played by people's sensorial interaction with urban space in the formulation of ideas about the city during this period.

In both Montreal and Brussels, practical considerations motivated the outward movement of industry, specifically, the need for vast and affordable spaces on which to build ever-expanding installations, as well as direct access to transportation routes and sources of energy. Historical geographer Robert Lewis has identified three

⁴² Both during and after his political career, Charles Buls spent considerable efforts perfecting his knowledge of urbanism and working to preserve Brussels' built heritage. He spearheaded campaigns to protect the city's historic buildings and layout, collaborated closely with renowned specialists of urbanism and published a well-received treatise on the subject, entitled *L'esthétique des villes*, from which the passage above is quoted. For more on this aspect of his career, see Marcel Smets, *Charles Buls : les principes de l'art urbain* (Liège: Mardaga, 1995).

“fundamental forces” at play in this process: “different production pathways presented the opportunities for firms to decentralise their production functions; the workings of the property market opened up suburban land for development; and growth politics created the ideological and material foundations for suburbanisation.”⁴³ As the industrial economy grew in the two cities, so did the population of these neighbourhoods. Around Brussels, most remained politically autonomous, but, in Montreal, the annexation of 24 communities to the central city between 1874 and 1918 meant that industrial districts found themselves administratively within the larger municipal entity.⁴⁴ In the present analysis, whether these districts were technically within or outside city limits, however, was of less importance to image makers than the spatial dynamic through which the city they sought to represent as a “uniting symbol of capitalist progress”⁴⁵ was confronted with the “contexte responsable de sa richesse.”⁴⁶

a) *Dullness and desolation*

As the example of Buis lamenting the prevailing “banale sécheresse” demonstrates, one of the principal reactions to this tension was to denigrate the environment created by industrialisation, the better to heighten that of the central city. The author Émile Leclercq expressed the feelings of nostalgia provoked by such development: “after vaunting the beauty, intelligence, taste, refinement and civilisation with which Brussels’ “fathers” had shaped the city, Leclercq deploras the shape of the new districts on the outskirts of the modern city. Citing the example of Laeken, a working-class commune in which was also located the royal residence, the author bemoans the lack of “art” in the streets, the absence of “picturesque” homes, and the absolute mastery of “le nécessaire et l’utile.”⁴⁷ Thus, for some, the main problem was cultural and aesthetic. If

⁴³ Robert Lewis, ed., *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 77. Linteau discusses the incentives, particularly tax breaks, offered by outlying municipalities to attract industrial establishments in Paul-André Linteau, *Maisonneuve, ou Comment des promoteurs fabriquent une ville : 1883-1918* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1981). See especially Chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2nd ed. (Montréal: Boréal, 2000).

⁴⁵ Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 17.

⁴⁶ Jean Puissant and Michel De Beule, “La première région industrielle belge” in Arlette Smolar-Meynart and Jean Stengers, eds., *La région de Bruxelles : des villages d’autrefois à la ville d’aujourd’hui* (Bruxelles: Crédit communal, 1989), 268.

⁴⁷ Émile Leclercq, “Bruxelles” in Bruylant, ed., *La Belgique illustrée*, 160.

industrialisation promised progress, the neighbourhoods in which it took place also threatened the city's heritage and historical identity by creating spaces devoid of beauty and sophistication. Though he notes the effervescent human activity that animates the city, Leclercq's equation of the spread of industrial suburbs with the predatory tentacles of a terrible octopus creates an unmistakable sense of anxiety, conferring upon the urban environment an inhuman and menacing quality:

on pourrait comparer Bruxelles... aussi bien à un poulpe armé de ses tentacules, qu'à un cœur ou à un cerveau avec ses affluents. Chemins de fer, canaux, grand'routes, chemins innombrables aboutissent à ce centre agité, où la vie humaine bouillonne, où l'esprit est toujours en mouvement... Les faubourgs sont les corps avancés de cet animal terrible, qui fait sa proie de tout ce qui se hasarde à sa portée. Et par les nombreuses artères partant de son corps monstrueux, il répand au dehors les produits de ses usines variées.⁴⁸

Use of these troubling metaphors echoed currents of thought that blamed the urban environment for the perceived physical and moral degradation of its inhabitants.⁴⁹ The socialist poet Émile Verhaeren popularized the expression "ville tentaculaire" in his 1895 anthology which offers a rather grim portrait of the modern city. The following lines provide a sense of the poet's tone with respect to the industrial suburbs:

Au long du vieux canal à l'infini,
Par à travers l'immensité de la misère
Des chemins noirs et des routes de pierre,
Les nuits, les jours, toujours,
Ronflent les continus battements sourds,
Dans les faubourgs,
Des fabriques et des usines symétriques.⁵⁰

Verhaeren's verse presents the image of a forbidding place, oppressing its surroundings with the dull throbbing of machines. The poem alludes to the canal, along which the industries of Brussels, as of those in Montreal, were located. As such, they constituted physical and imaginary frontiers between the central areas that municipal authorities strove to make clean and uplifting, and the adjacent gloomy industrial zones.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁹ As Choay notes, other metaphors equated these spaces with cancers or warts. Choay, *L'urbanisme*, 13.

⁵⁰ "Les usines" in Émile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires précédées des campagnes hallucinées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 122.

Indeed, while officials in both cities vaunted the initiatives they took to sanitize an environment sullied by industrial activity, the neighbouring suburbs typically lacked necessary infrastructures, leaving a tenacious stain on the image of the city, and further emphasising the contrast between centre and industrial periphery. The Montreal health inspector, A B LaRocque, for instance, noted the importance of maintaining good public health in light of the city's rapid population growth, adding that this was indispensable to the fulfilment of its destiny as a major commercial centre. In his 1883 annual report on the sanitary state of the city, he insisted that Montreal's economic viability "exige en même temps que la salubrité des municipalités environnantes, séparées de nous par une ligne imaginaire, soit aussi dans de telles conditions à ne pas exposer la santé publique."⁵¹ LaRocque's words are noteworthy, for if the boundary between Montreal and its industrial suburbs was indeed an "imaginary" one, his anxieties demonstrate that it held real physical implications in his perception of the spatial layout.

For his part, the doctor and socialist militant César de Paepe also addressed the issue of public health as a division between centre and periphery in his appearance before the 1886 Labour Commission, but on a very different tone:

Bruxelles est certainement une des capitales les plus salubres de l'Europe [...]; c'est assez dire que je parle de Bruxelles, ville, et non de l'agglomération. [...] On a ainsi chassé les pauvres dans les faubourgs et le bien réalisé à Bruxelles a amené un encombrement funeste dans l'agglomération : la salubrité s'est accrue au centre, pour les riches; elle a décré à la périphérie, pour les pauvres.⁵²

With these words, the witness marks a clear delineation between Brussels and its industrial suburbs, rooting his argument in the discourse that connected urban environment and health. Whereas central areas had been transformed to ameliorate the physical experience of the city, its industrial periphery had been neglected, charges Paepe. As a result, it was the working-class residents of these districts who, through threats to their health, bore the brunt of this spatial inequality upon their bodies.

⁵¹ A B Larocque, *Rapport de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour 1883*, 3.

⁵² Testimony of César de Paepe in Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d'enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Bruxelles: A. Lesigne, 1887), 66.

By presenting urban space in these terms, both Paepe in Brussels and LaRocque in Montreal drew on conceptions of the city inherited from nineteenth-century reformers like Edwin Chadwick and Ebenezer Howard, who had popularised the idea that the solution to the social ills of impoverished neighbourhoods rested in cleanliness and sanitation.⁵³ These distinctions between clean and unclean, healthy and unhealthy, shaped the construction of people's mental maps of their city. Ames, for instance, connected the city's physical geography with a social geography whose poignancy was felt through shifting impressions as one moved from the city's wealthy areas to its industrial zone at the mouth of the Lachine Canal. "To pass from the former into the latter," he wrote, "it is necessary to descend a considerable hill and with this descent becomes noticeable a marked change in the character of the inhabitants and in the nature of their surroundings."⁵⁴ Similarly, in his musings on the "city as an organism" the Montreal sociologist Charles Dawson gave a visual dimension to this way of conceiving the city by representing it as a series of concentric circles. The centre, with its theatres, businesses, shops, and public buildings constituted the heart of the city, situated within the first circle. The immediate periphery, represented in the second circle, was characterised by "light manufacturing," resulting in high rates of land speculation and a concomitant deterioration of housing conditions. The result of this material degradation, notes Dawson, were "underworlds of vice and crime," contributing to the dissolution of the "social order." "It is the 'city-bad-lands,'" he writes, "the home of the border drama and the burlesque show." Such "shack-towns," he concludes, "are the most inexcusable of all ills in a city."⁵⁵

b) *Industry and nature in the urban periphery*

The tensions surrounding the changing spatial significance of the city as it radiated away from its historical centre were also expressed in terms of its clash with the surrounding countryside. Although many commentators viewed the modern city as the

⁵³ On the discourse surrounding the sanitation of urban slums in an international context, see Christopher Otter, "Cleansing and Clarifying: Technology and Perception in Nineteenth-Century London," *Journal of British Studies* 43, no. January (2004), Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*.

⁵⁴ Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, 6.

⁵⁵ C.A. Dawson, "The City as an Organism (with special reference to Montreal)," in Paul Rutherford, ed., *Saving the Canadian City: The First Phase, 1880-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 277-278, 282.

showcase of human achievement, its image as a place of harmony and well-being depended largely on the availability and proximity of nature. Received wisdom in the period was that life in the clean air of the countryside was healthier and more invigorating than life in the thick and congested environment of the city. Yet the growth of industry and opportunities for employment fed a constant flow of migrants from the countryside of Quebec and Belgium toward the industrial neighbourhoods of urban centres. The Belgian scholar and critic of city life, Edmond Nicolaï, framed this situation in specifically corporeal terms, arguing that, “au point de vue physique,” this exodus contributed to the deterioration of people’s bodies. Although cities were places of intellectual and cultural activity, and despite modern developments such as the construction of gymnasia for physical exercise, “il est incontestable que l’agriculteur, sous ce rapport, se trouve dans une meilleure situation,” he affirmed. “Par le fait de sa profession, il s’adonne presque toute la journée à des exercices physiques, si favorables au développement musculaire et à la santé, et il a cet avantage de les effectuer dans une atmosphère salubre et fortifiante.”⁵⁶

If the urban landscape incarnated production and prosperity, this had to be balanced with the availability of opportunities to escape the bustle of urban modernity.⁵⁷ Peripheral industrial districts must thus also be understood in terms of the contradiction they posed to the notion that the health of the urban population depended on the availability of green spaces. Here too, we see attempts to minimise the presence of industry on the urban landscape. Travel guides, for instance, recommended to visitors that they stroll through some of the more picturesque *faubourgs* in order to take in their peaceful, authentic atmosphere. One such volume recommended a walk away from the centre and to the west of the city, toward Bodeghem-Saint-Martin and its nearby woods. The stroll is splendid, remarks the author, who guides visitors along tree-lined roads on

⁵⁶ Edmond Nicolaï, *La dépopulation des campagnes et l’accroissement de la population des villes* (Bruxelles: P. Weissenbruch, 1903), 52. Writing in the pages of the *Journal d’hygiène populaire*, the Montreal doctor J. I. Desroches also conceded the city’s importance for people’s intellectual development, but nonetheless emphasised the notion that “la ville sert d’arène aux maladies de toute espèce; la campagne, ce ciel ouvert, ce temple de la nature, protège l’heureux campagnard des maux qui affligent le citadin, et lui permet de grandir au soleil, comme les fleurs.” J. I. Desroches, “Hygiène des villes,” *Journal d’hygiène populaire*, 3 no. 5 (1886), 49.

⁵⁷ As the development of urban parks in this period demonstrates. See Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville : espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au 19e et 20e siècles* (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2006), in particular Chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6.

which they can taste the charms and invigorating qualities of nature. Interestingly enough, the route there takes the *promeneur* directly through the “faubourg industriel et fort peuplé” of Molenbeek, but this section of the walk is glossed over very quickly, and we can only suppose that the intention was to avoid a discomfiting evocation of the contrast in atmospheres that would be felt along the way.⁵⁸ Though he ignored the presence of industry as he contemplated to panorama of Brussels on the eve of World War I, Alfred Mabile had expressed his discomfort with the transformations underway as early as 1888. In a guide devoted entirely to Brussels’ greener and lesser-known suburbs, he expresses his anxiety about the changing landscape: “tout se transforme ... peu à peu,” he noted, “la ville se tassant, les maisons s’élevant sans cesse, l’air commence à manquer au Bruxellois et déjà, comme le Parisien, il éprouve le besoin de prendre sa volée le dimanche et de s’en aller, en famille, se nettoyer les poumons de l’air impur respiré durant la semaine.” The interplay of modernity and body is evident, the one presented as a threat to the other, with frequent trips to the countryside represented as the antidote to the physical pressure of the city.

The problem, however, was that this remedy was becoming increasingly scarce. Referring to Molenbeek, Mabile observed that upon its outskirts, Brussels’ towers and turrets had been supplanted by factory chimneys: massive, heavy, dark and smoky, and interspersed with rows of tenements. The countryside was constantly receding, he deplored, and each day, “la ville en prend, ogre jamais rassasié, une bande de terre pour y faire une rue et pour substituer à la haie d’aubépine le trottoir à dalles bleues.” Those who took the cleansing strolls of which he extolled the virtues now had to walk further then before to find places unspoiled by pretentious villas and tacky *guinguettes*, and to find respite “là où la grande ville n’a pas encore étendu sa tâche d’huile.” Only after pushing on in this way could one purify both body and soul, by escaping the “atmosphère empestée respirée par quatre cent mille bouches.” Having reached this distance, one is again able to dream, to experience the impression of a calm and steady

⁵⁸ *Environs de Bruxelles. Guide de l’excursionniste au point de vue historique, descriptif et humoristique* (Bruxelles: Alfred Castaigne, 1890), 25. In a similar vein, another guidebook author declared that while the most heavily industrialised commune, Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, may have been one of the most populous in the entire agglomeration and destined to a “très grand avenir,” it remained “absolument dénuée d’intérêt pour le touriste.” Eugène Nève, *Bruxelles et ses environs. Guide historique et description des monuments* (Bruges: Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie, 1888), 177.

hand caressing the brow and removing from it the wrinkles of worry and anxiety. Further along this path, adds the author, the constant buzz of the city became softer, the overexcitement, passions and fears it produced, subdued. From this distance, Mabilie seems happily indifferent to the remote panorama: “les dômes et les tours de la ville ont beau profiler au loin leurs masses ou leur flèches, solliciter le retour de notre imagination à la cité obsédante : les feuilles et les fleurs ont tôt fait de dissiper le cauchemar et nous gardent le cœur en paix.”⁵⁹ For Mabilie, urban life required this balance, and the growth of the industrial suburbs, a grey zone between city and nature, was thus problematic in his understanding of the environment. His references to the physical experience of countryside and city attest to the centrality of the body in the construction of this significance.

In Montreal, the artist and businessman John Fraser underlined the virtues of walks to the surrounding countryside in a similar way. He encouraged young men to avoid the nocturnal temptations of the metropolis and to rise early to enjoy pleasant summer morning strolls, “far away from the dust and turmoil of the town.” As he awakes on a June morning, his appreciation of the city is fully sensorial, but here, as well, the absence of the industrial landscape is striking. His senses are instead titillated by the plum, cherry and apple orchards, the scent of the hawthorn, and the cool spring breeze, while his “inward feelings” are uplifted by golden fields, flowery meadows and bubbling brooks. “There is an unspeakable pleasure,” writes Fraser, “to pace at early morning the streets of our city, when silence reigns supreme and naught is heard save the sounds of one’s own footsteps on the stone pavements, or the shrill chirp of some disturbed sparrows [...]” The author’s subjective appreciation of Montreal, the personal meaning he constructs, is thus premised on an evacuation of the sensory stimuli that typically characterise the urban environment.

However, on his daybreak walks, encounters with the tangible evidence of industrialisation were inevitable. Leaving from the foot of McGill Street, Fraser inhales “the fresh morning air from the noble St. Lawrence as it flows silently but majestically past the sleeping city.” He marvels at the “mammoth sea-going steamers” in the port, but is disappointed that Montreal’s riverfront has been destroyed by an “unsightly” dyke,

⁵⁹ Alfred Mabilie, *Les environs de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: A-N Lebègue et Cie, 1888), 10-36.

the usefulness of which he nonetheless concedes. As he enters the industrial suburbs to the west, Fraser thinks back longingly to a time when “there was not over a score of buildings between Grey Nun Street and the Lachine Canal bridge.” He recalls when the canal was much smaller and is almost shocked to watch the passage through “this now enlarged canal” of steamers “drawing from 10 to 12 feet of water.” Looking out at all the factories and workshops, he remembers open fields all around, interrupted only by a few modest farms. “Those days have passed away,” he comments as he enters into Wellington Street at sunrise, “and those fields are now no longer fields, but form two large suburbs of the city of Montreal,” namely Pointe Saint-Charles and Saint-Gabriel.⁶⁰

While Fraser does not decry this development in so mournful a fashion as Mabile did in Brussels, the emotional impact of watching grazing fields being replaced by an industrial landscape transpires in his writing. This is further reinforced by his recounting of historical anecdotes along his stroll, and his stated objective to sensitise the fading historical memories of contemporary youth. As in Brussels, Montrealers too had to walk further and further to clean their lungs from the soiled air of a factory-laden city, and the industrial suburbs they traversed on these strolls were a constant and forceful reminder of the extent of these transformations.

While Fraser and Mabile mused upon the expansion of industrial suburbs on a resigned, if rather nostalgic tone, others were more virulent in their criticisms. The writings of Franz Mahutte again provide a telling example of just how deeply the spread of these modern tentacles could resonate within people’s personal and emotional understanding of urban space. Mahutte, too, framed his comments in the context of a “marche à travers la ville,” making a clear distinction between Brussels proper and the *faubourgs*. He lambastes the commonly used expressions “agglomération bruxelloise,” for the way it glosses over the complexities of an “organisme personnel, nettement distinct de chaque faubourg et chacun de ceux-ci se différencie des autres.” As we follow Mahutte through the various neighbourhoods, new and old, we get a sense of the depth of his despair at the extent of the spatial transformations around him. Recounting the story of different buildings and monuments, he makes his way to the Allée-Verte, once a favoured stroll of the bourgeoisie, now the nocturnal oasis of ruffians and

⁶⁰ John Fraser, *Canadian Pen and Ink Sketches* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Co., 1890), 236-241.

prostitutes, littered with the bricks, barrels and wagons of the nearby industries. He continues along to where the river Senne, vaulted to protect residents from its stench and infection, once flowed freely through the city and the memory of the buried river provokes in the author a venomous diatribe against modern industrialisation. He bemoans the destiny of the ill-fated waterway that has been “confisquée par cette raison d’État : les nécessités de l’industrie!” An industry, he adds, that could not care less about the needs of the river, about its “prétention, légitime après tout à errer, polluée [sic] parmi les blondissantes campagnes.”

Mahutte proceeds with a tirade against industrialisation itself, against the profiteering mentality that has corrupted public officials at every level of governance. Having bought off the integrity of state, the forces of industry were claiming not just human affairs but all of nature as well. “L’industrie saccage la nature,” he writes, it rips open the bedrock and devastates the forests, poisoning the “innocence” of the rivers:

un matin d’avril, même, deux moutons m’apparurent au rez d’une usine, sous un piston muet qui dispersait incessamment des flocons de vapeur blanchâtre; devant eux le courant, nuance d’une suie qui serait plombée, s’appesantissait; malgré qu’ils fussent là pour paître, ils n’avaient pas l’air de croire que c’était arrivé et d’un broutement sceptique, tondaient une herbe fabuleuse; des ponts traversés de passants au loin, arrangeaient un arrière-plan de paix brugeoise; soudain le piston, impatient de son mutisme, darda une térébrante strideur [sic]; les moutons épouvantés bondirent bêlants : l’industrie avait chassé l’églogue.⁶¹

The language used and the mood created by Mahutte translate his dismay at the effects of industrialisation on the outskirts of Brussels. Where he could once stroll through quiet countryside and watch as sheep quietly grazed in peaceful pastures, the city had extended its tentacles of industry, chasing away nature and terrorizing innocent creatures with its noise and pollution. The author’s physical discomfort reinforces the negative meaning he associates with the expanding city. Later in the text, when he names the commune of Molenbeek specifically, he evokes massive brick buildings that block out the sunlight, the miasma-ridden courtyards where no plant could grow, the corrosive smoke spit out by brick chimneys and the heavy and dull sounds of machines and motors, giving rhythm to the pulsations of labour. “On devine que des centaines d’êtres

⁶¹ Mahutte, *Bruxelles vivant*, 300-301.

triment et crèvent là-dedans; rien de plus moral : ce trimage [sic] engendre l'or et nous ne sommes pas des anthropophages," he comments with an irony that emphasises the importance of physical experiences in his understanding of space.⁶²

c) *Suburbs of optimism*

Representations of industrial suburbs were not always so grim. Even the tentacles of industry could be reconciled with more optimistic, and in some cases triumphant, conceptions of the modern city. Marius Renard, for instance, frequently represented these spaces as being the liveliest, most authentic areas of the city. Contradicting many bourgeois understandings of *faubourgs* as places of vice and disease, he instead presents them as the incarnations of virtue and hard work. He chides his readers for not knowing these suburbs intimately enough, in some cases for living in them without even feeling them, and he emphasises precisely the importance of walking through them and experiencing them on a physical level. "L'as-tu regardé, l'as-tu entendu?" he asks his walking companion. As he makes his way through the maze of streets, he comments on the atmosphere, the business in some parts, the quietness in others, the sights, the smells, the sounds. For him, the poor suburbs where the factories and tenements were concentrated constituted the "real" suburbs, free of the "impression d'apparat ostentatoire" that reigned in the city's more prosperous areas. Describing the ambiance of a typical morning when workers flocked from all direction and fill the streets with their presence, he dwells upon the unique soundscape created by this daily activity.

Les portes des ateliers sont ouvertes. Des cloches tintent. Des sirènes vrillent l'espace. On entre. Derrière les portes, maintenant closes, il y a encore une minute de silence. Puis vibre une légère rumeur. Des choses indistinctes. Enfin, d'un coup, le grand tumulte. Le branle est donné. Et battent les pilons, et vrombissent les ventilateurs, et crissent les cisailles, et s'essoufflent [sic] les décharges de vapeur et ronflent les presses et les turbines, et tapagent les tôles, les poutrelles et les barres, que l'on manœuvre, les gailletteries que l'on décharge, les eaux qui gargouillent en coulant dans les bras de la Senne. L'ahan de l'homme est perdu, il n'y a plus que le bruit de la matière, des outils, des machines.⁶³

⁶² *Ibid.*, 305.

⁶³ Renard, *Le Faubourg*, 24.

The excerpt is revealing in the way it clearly brings out the sounds of industrialisation as defining features of the spatial environment. The reference to human suffering serves to nuance his generally sympathetic portrait of the industrial suburbs, but significantly, the sounds of the machines and motors are not presented as nuisances or seen in a destructive way, as they were by Mahutte. Rather they are the heartbeat of the neighbourhood. Renard's attribution of such qualities as hard work and authenticity to these areas, and his position in broader debates about morality and class relations, are thus shaped in large part by his sensorial experiences of these spaces.

Not surprisingly, the rehabilitation of the image of industrial neighbourhoods, the attempt to present them, not as threatening tentacles, but as integral parts of a larger, harmonious whole, served the interests of the bourgeois and governing classes, and reinforced the image of the city centre. This was quite deliberate in Brussels, where massive beautification efforts in the downtown area involved the destruction of large portions of working-class neighbourhoods, whose residents, it was hoped, would relocate in peripheral areas. Despite these initiatives, large sections of the centre remained inhabited by working-class families, often in conditions that did not correspond to the sanitized ideal which political and economic leaders promoted. Within this context, municipal authorities found themselves in conflict with low-income families who refused to be removed from their homes. Commenting on the discourse of an unnamed "popular politician" who asserted that workers had the same "droit absolu" as anyone else to live within their native city, a prominent housing reformer refuted the very notion: "Ce droit nouveau d'habiter Bruxelles, quoique non codifié, paraît élémentaire, mais c'est – malheureusement pour ceux qui s'en targuent – un droit sans sanction, un droit que chacun doit payer."⁶⁴ Those wanting to benefit from the sanitized environment being created within the centre of the city would have to pay, went the message. The rest would have to be convinced that they could be lodged just as well elsewhere.

This was precisely what burgomaster Émile De Mot was attempting to do in an address to a working-class audience. Endeavours to transform the city's older

⁶⁴ Charles De Quéker, "Les Maisons ouvrières à appartements en ville," in *Ville de Bruxelles. Comité officiel de patronage des habitations ouvrières et des institutions de prévoyance, Rapport sur l'exercice 1905* (Bruxelles: Imprimerie des institutions de prévoyance, 1906), 97.

neighbourhoods and narrow streets into large boulevards was part of the city's "devoir impérieux," as the national capital, as well as for strict conformity to the laws of hygiene. The needs of the capital superseded those of its workers, he suggested. And though he acknowledged to his audience that they were the ones faced with the obligation to move, he expressed puzzlement at the apparent "patriotisme de quartier" holding them back. But, he consoled, those who seek more air, more light and more space in the surroundings of the vast agglomeration would be rewarded in the long run. "Ah ! combien je préférerais chaque ménagère de Bruxelles, habiter [sic] non plus dans l'étroite mansarde, dans des impasses ou dans des ruelles, mais bien dans le riant paysage de nos campagnes, ou dans nos faubourgs, un modeste pavillon."⁶⁵ The mayor's speech is revealing, not simply in the way it pressures members of the working class to leave the centre, but also in the way the image of the industrial suburbs to which they were being sent has been cleared of the negative, polluted and disease-ridden aura so often associated with them, and by a sleight of hand metamorphosed into cheerful, spacious and agreeable neighbourhoods corresponding to the clean, bright and well-ventilated ideal put forth by housing specialists of the period.

Intellectuals and reformers discussed the issue in similar terms on the other side of the Atlantic, as well. Addressing the Canadian Club of Montreal, the political scientist Adam Shortt declared that the remedy to the "great problem" of urban overcrowding in industrial districts lay in the construction of extended transportation infrastructures in order to enable workers to live further away from the central city, in the clean country air.⁶⁶ Promoting this type of discourse, specialists of urban expansion were in this way directly involved in the rehabilitation of the image of industrial suburbs. In the way they dwelled on the physical discomforts of the current situation in these growing cities, as well as on the potential for greater physical well-being that would ensue from the enactment of their recommendations, we see the extent to which bodily considerations, the importance of the way city neighbourhoods were experienced in a physical sense, pervaded understandings of where people should live and work; in

⁶⁵ Émile De Mot, speech transcribed in "Rapport sur la distribution solennelle des Prix du Concours d'Ordre et de Propreté entre Mères de Familles ouvrières 1904," in *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶⁶ Adam Shortt, "The social and economic significance of the movement from the country to the city," in *Addresses delivered before the club*, ed. Canadian Club of Montreal (Montreal: 1913).

sum, of how space should be arranged. Peripheral areas were presented to workers not as physically and morally dangerous, but as the ideal, salubrious solution to their housing problems, offering an environment amenable to the moral order housing authorities advocated in the period.⁶⁷ Rarely was it mentioned that such strategies might simply result in a relocation of urban problems as they existed in the overcrowded districts. These examples suggest that the central, if often unstated, objective of authorities in the matter seemed to have less to do with the fate of working-class families than with a will to render central urban spaces more amenable to the image of order and prosperity that, as we have seen throughout this chapter, held a profound resonance among the preoccupations of the political, economic and cultural actors in Brussels and Montreal.⁶⁸

Finally, even the most triumphant images of the modern city could draw upon the tentacle analogy, provided that a safe distance was maintained. Referring to the growth of manufacturing suburbs, Montreal's building inspection department confidently predicted that "si la marche en avant continue dans les mêmes proportions, tout fait prévoir que d'ici peu d'années, la Ville de Montréal couvrira toute l'île et deviendra peut-être la ville la plus importante de l'Amérique du Nord."⁶⁹ In a booster pamphlet designed to attract investors to the newly created city of Maisonneuve, located a few kilometres east of Montreal, the promoters vaunt the suburb's newly built infrastructures, its prestigious public buildings, the availability of labour, the diversity of industries, the number of banks, schools and other services, and the low tax rates, claiming for themselves the status of "principal faubourg industriel de Montréal" while remaining "une ville attrayante de résidence."⁷⁰ This type of enthusiasm is palpable in the historian Adrien Leblond de Brumath's promotional writing on the Canadian metropolis in which he describes the overall impression one has upon arriving in the city. "L'arrivée par paquebot transatlantique se fait généralement le matin," he writes,

⁶⁷ Patricia Van Den Eeckout, "Brussels," in M.J. Daunton, ed., *Housing the Workers, 1850-1914: A Comparative Perspective* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 69.

⁶⁸ On housing strategies in Brussels, see Marcel Smets, *L'avènement de la cité-jardin en Belgique : histoire de l'habitat social en Belgique de 1830 à 1930* (Bruxelles: P. Mardaga, 1977), especially Chapters 5-8 for the turn of the century

⁶⁹ Premier Rapport Annuel du Bureau des Commissaires de la cité de Montréal (1910), 10.

⁷⁰ *La Ville de Maisonneuve. Le principal faubourg industriel de Montréal* (Montréal: The Commercial Magazine Co., 1911), 35.

“et alors Montréal apparaît dans toute sa splendeur avec ses innombrables hautes cheminées témoignant de son industrie; les forêts de mâts de ses vaisseaux; les pointes religieusement dressées de ses églises; ses somptueuses résidences étalées dans la côte; et à l’arrière plan, l’imposant mont Royal dominant toute la scène.”⁷¹ Here the chimneys of industry do not chase away the eclogue, but rather combine with other powerful symbols – and symbols of power – in a forceful expression of splendour, wealth and prestige.

In Brussels, a pair of authors rejoiced at the “jeunesse éternelle” promised to their city and waxed lyrical about the fact that

les fosses qui entouraient la cité ont disparu et des quartiers nouveaux se sont étendus de tous côtés, au nord et au sud, à l’orient et à l’occident, les uns peuplés d’usines et d’ateliers, d’où émergent d’énormes cheminées, faisant flotter sur les toits l’ombre de leurs fumées, les autres sillonnés de rues régulières qui s’allongent en parallèles, se coupent à angles droits, bordés de somptueux hôtels à façades monumentales. De petites villes, plus vastes que des chefs-lieux d’arrondissement de Flandre ou de Luxembourg sont venues s’attacher à la grande ville, pour ne plus former avec elle qu’un seul corps vivant d’une vie unique.⁷²

The reconciliation between the modern, prosperous city and its industrial periphery seems complete here, as chimneys and luxurious residences combine harmoniously on the landscape. The neighbourhoods growing on the edges of the city are not seen as terrible tentacles, but rather as vital organs essential to the health of the entire urban body. Yet, in the final analysis, these sources demonstrate that this rehabilitation can only occur from a distance. While the *faubourgs* are specifically mentioned, these authors are decidedly not writing from within the labyrinth. The harmonious image of the industrial neighbourhoods they present functions only when these are seen in the wider context of the entire city, alongside its churches, homes and assorted public buildings. Bringing us full circle – exposing the happier side of the spatial contradictions that defined the atmosphere of modernity required a panoramic perspective after all.

⁷¹ Adrien Leblond de Brumath, *Guide de Montréal et de ses environs* (Montréal: Granger Frères, 1897), 50.

⁷² Henri Hymans and Paul Hymans, *Bruxelles à travers les âges.*, 3 vols., vol. 3: *Bruxelles Moderne* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe et Cie, successeur Émile Bruylant, 1889), 8.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the proud, optimistic, nostalgic or despaired tones and coloured imagery in representations of the city illustrate how the transformations under way in Brussels and Montreal resonated deeply for citizens involved with these processes. In discussing urban space, the city dwellers we have listened to expressed their ambitions for the future of their city as well as their fears over the sense of danger and loss that these changes represented, thus tapping into the fundamental reality of modernity as a pervasive atmosphere of change, of uncertainty and of hope, as a set of transformations that occurred both on the ground and in the mind. Central to the meaning associated with space was the way individuals moved through it, taking late-night or early-morning walks, passing from the centre to the suburbs and into the surrounding countryside, looking at the view, listening and smelling to the sounds and aromas. These basic, daily gestures were banal on the surface, but fundamental to the way Montrealers and Bruxellois, particularly those among the more privileged authors of such representations, found personal meaning in the spaces they occupied.

In his discussion of industrial Hamilton, historian Dominic Alessio identifies numerous inaccuracies in panoramic representations of the city at this time. Arguing that attempts by economic and political elites to attract investors and encourage civic pride led to a considerable amount of exaggeration, he sets out to “qualify the scale of artistic imagination” in such portraits of the city.⁷³ But, in seeking a perfectly accurate portrait, we risk missing the profound significance of this artistic imagination in urban representations. As art historian Jonathan Crary explains, the nineteenth century witnessed a shift in the way people saw the world around them. New instruments and techniques of visuality emphasised the subjectivity of the observer over the empirical reality of what was being observed, steeping the act of seeing in an increasingly personal framework.⁷⁴ As such, this chapter has not sought to discuss the panorama and

⁷³ Dominic T. Alessio, “Capitalist Realist Art: Industrial Images of Hamilton, Ontario, 1884-1910,” *Journal of Urban History* 18, no. 4 (1992). With its steep escarpment and numerous industries, Hamilton was fertile ground for panoramic representations of modernity and industrialisation. For more on this, see also Walter G. Peace, “Landscapes of Victorian Hamilton: The Use of Visual Materials in Recreating and Interpreting the Past,” *Urban History Review* 18, no. 1 (1989).

⁷⁴ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*.

industrial neighbourhoods of Montreal and Brussels as they were, but rather as people saw them.

Panoramic and labyrinth tropes were mobilised by both supporters and critics of modern urban form. From both standpoints, urban commentators created a wealth of contradictory ideas about the modern city, praising the philosophy of progress it symbolized to some, condemning the destructive force it represented to others, and attesting to the multiplicity of impressions, emotions and values it embodied. But certain broader tendencies also emerged from the spatial perspective from which one viewed the city, from the choice to contemplate a sweeping vista of the landscape or to confront its individual elements in a direct sensorial encounter. As urban historian Françoise Choay explains, planning debates in this period were shaped by tensions between “descriptive” tendencies that sought rational and orderly solutions to the problems posed by urban growth, and “polemic” approaches put forth by critics whose sensitivities were confronted by the expansion of industrial cities.⁷⁵ In a general sense, panoramic representations, relying on the sense of sight, considered most noble, best translated the descriptive perspective that put forth the elegant image of a broad, powerful and forward-moving landscape. In the labyrinth of industrial neighbourhoods, on the other hand, the less rational senses of smell and sound were agitated, inspiring more intuitive, polemical diatribes against the path on which industrial society was engaged.

In its ability to create a harmonious image, one that reinforced wide-spread understandings of the city as a total object by glossing over more unpleasant details, the panorama was the favoured visual perspective of businessmen, promoters and other individuals who had a vested interest in the development of the city. In a febrile period of unprecedented social transformation, of industrial advancement and of urban growth, the elites of western cities worked hard to project their achievements upon the urban landscape. Responding to developing cultural standards of beauty and refinement, pleasurable representations of panoramic scenes were a useful strategy in this process of self-affirmation. By summing up the city into one broad scene, these individuals wanted to express their mastery over the landscape, their ability to step back and understand the

⁷⁵ Choay, *L'urbanisme*, 13.

complex environment as a single, manageable entity designed according to their values and aspirations. The urban panorama thus had to exude a balance of professional accomplishment and cultural sophistication, leaving little room for the dark and smoky realities of an industrial economy. When they discussed the peripheral industrial districts, they did so in ways that rehabilitated the image of these criticised areas, that brought them into the optimistic fold, and, ultimately, that presented them in reference to the broader panorama.

This perspective stood in marked tensions with that of antimodern writers and urban reformers who were more critical of what they saw, and could not help but notice the smoking chimneys in the distance. For them, the changes they witnessed provoked a fear of decay, a sense of loss, and in some cases a betrayal of their heritage. As their gaze narrowed from the breadth of the skyline to the narrow labyrinths below, their criticism became more severe, and their reservations about modernity more acute. The pleasurable atmosphere one could experience by gazing at the panorama was much harder to feel in the streets of the *faubourgs*. While some preferred to ignore these realities altogether, such as guidebook authors who discussed the outskirts with no reference to industrial districts, others openly criticized and denigrated these suburbs, bringing out a more prosperous and orderly image of the centre, and deploring the effects of industry on the natural environment. As with panoramic descriptions, the tone and language used in reference to these various images of industrial suburbs were personal and emotional, showing the resonance of urban modernity into the interiority of those who commented upon the significance of these spaces.

Finally, it is worth noting that glorifying panoramic references were more common in Montreal than in Brussels. This can be attributed in part to the presence of Mount Royal, a topographical symbol that not only offered an unrivalled lookout point, but was also celebrated, by residents and visitors alike, as the crowning gem of the panorama itself. However, this contrasting language is also indicative of nuances in cultural traditions and understandings of the city that underlay global processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. Brussels, where we find more allusions to the labyrinths of the industrial suburbs, was the product of layer upon layer of built forms inherited over centuries of history; streets, buildings and natural elements imbued with

deeply-rooted feelings of attachment. The apparently unbridled spread of industry, often seen in Montreal as heralding the advent of progress over the vast and open hinterland around the city, was experienced in Brussels with a greater sense of irrevocability. The next chapter thus continues the comparison through a focus on the powerful motors that propelled these modern transformations, namely the industries and the bodies at work to make them function.

CHAPTER 4

ENCOUNTERS WITH INDUSTRIAL SPACE: LANDSCAPE, LABOUR AND BODY

Upon completing his nearly twenty-year reign as first magistrate of Brussels, Charles Buls pursued his research in urbanism and embarked on a series of trips that took him across Europe and around the world. In the late summer of 1903, he traveled to North America, first visiting New York, Toronto and Niagara Falls. On 11 September, he described in his diary his “arrivée fantastique” into Montreal after crossing the Lachine Rapids and seeing “l’immense pont du Grand Trunk, peut-être le travail le plus considérable de chemin de fer.” From the first moment of his encounter with Montreal’s industrial landscape, the old mayor’s senses were irritated and offended:

Le soleil se couchait et répandait une lueur rouge dans le ciel, la ville, toute enveloppée de fumée noire ne se définissait que par la silhouette de ces cheminées d’usines, de ses élévateurs et de quelques skyscrapers, se reflétant vaguement dans les flots livides
vraie cité infernale –
cité dantesque. –
des cars électriques vous attendent et vous conduisent à travers une cité noire, mal éclairée, sans beaux magasins comme à Toronto et d’aspect sale et sinistre –

Buls’ judgement of the city was clearly premised on his bodily appreciation of the environment: the light, the smoke and the dirt affecting his senses in displeasing ways. Seeing the glowing red sky, the city covered in a shroud of black smoke and the outline of a few towering industrial buildings, Buls has the impression not of arriving in a place of modernity, progress and prosperity, as many in Montreal described their city, but rather of descending into the pits of hell, an impression reinforced by his reference to Dante.¹ As he discovered the city the following day, he noted only its limited architecture, its wooden sidewalks, its neglected streets. Nor was he particularly impressed with the panoramic view from Mount Royal, mentioning once more the

¹ Travel diary of Charles Buls, 1903. Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles (hereafter AVB), Fonds Buls, Box 95. He goes on to note how entirely disagreeable he had found the trip from Ontario itself. Though he had appreciated the scenery in the Thousand Islands region, he was indifferent to the Lachine Rapids, felt that the trip was too long, and recorded the unpleasant conditions in which he had journeyed, “sur un steamer encombré, où il faut faire queue pour déjeuner, luncher et dîner.”

omnipresence of smoking chimneys. That these impressions were hastily scribbled into a private journal further attests to the personal and intimate nature of this reaction.

It might well be argued that Buls overstated his reaction, that his known aversion for industrial landscapes skewed his observations of Montreal. Nevertheless, it is evident that the sometime mayor touched upon a sensitive matter in the city he was visiting. Montreal's boiler inspector, Édouard Octave Champagne, frequently denounced the effect of what he called the "scourge" of industrial smoke generated on the city's image. Only a few years after Buls' visit, he noted that, despite smoke abatement measures for factories, the 320 trains rolling into the city each day and the numerous steamboats filling its harbour continued to sully the landscape, and suggested that "on se plaindra et avec raison de l'intervention de la fumée dans les vues et les paysages de la ville."² In this context, Buls' condemnation of Montreal vividly demonstrate how bodily experiences with the atmosphere of the industrial city conditioned the discourse that shaped its meaning. Buls does not mention whether the Montreal melon, river trout, grilled lamb and quail he ate at the Windsor Hotel the next day sufficiently pleased his senses to change his impressions.³ Likely not.

In cities like Brussels and Montreal, whose status as modern metropolises rested largely on the rate of their industrial production, the nature of the spaces in which this industrialisation took place shaped inhabitants' relationship to the environment. The present chapter will examine this dynamic by focussing on the way representations of these cities' factories and workshops drew on sensorial experiences and understandings

² Édouard Octave Champagne, "Rapport annuel de l'inspecteur des chaudières de la Cité de Montréal pour l'année 1907." Smoke nuisances were a heated issue in many industrial cities at the turn of the century. While some decried the unpleasant atmosphere, the threat to public health or the inefficient waste of energy heavy smoke represented, others saw smoke emissions as the sign of economic vitality, or at least as a low-ranking issue on the scale of urban problems. Stephen Mosley, *The Chimney of the World: A History of Smoke Pollution in Victorian and Edwardian Manchester* (Cambridge: White Horse Press, 2001). See also Bill Luckin, "Demographic, Social and Cultural Parameters of Environmental Crisis: The Great London Smoke Fogs in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," in Christoph Bernhardt and Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, eds., *Le démon moderne. La pollution dans les sociétés urbaines et industrielles d'Europe* (Clermont-Ferrand: presses universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2002), 219-238. And despite Buls' admonitions of Montreal, a Brussels factory inspector noted, "Nous avons remarqué que d'année en année, les habitants de l'agglomération bruxelloise se plaignent davantage des inconvénients occasionnées par les fumées d'usines et de fabriques. Il est certain que, dans certains quartiers, la situation devient peu tolérable et que des ennuis sont causés par la chute de suie." Émile Van de Weyer in *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 7^e année* (1901), 7.

³ On 12 September, Buls attended a luncheon hosted by the "Officers of the Canadian and the British Life Assurance Companies located in Montreal," the menu of which he kept in his papers. AVB, Fonds Buls, Boxes 46 and 95.

of the body. Because these establishments transformed the landscape in such a marked fashion, we will first examine them from the outside, reflecting on the messages their architectural form etched onto the landscape, but also on the way riparian residents interpreted, indeed resented, their loud and smoky presence. In the second section, we will cross the threshold of their imposing doorways, and, drawing on labour commission proceedings and factory inspections, I will argue that the tensions between employers and labourers that marked this period found an embodied form in the way workers experienced the factory atmosphere. In light of the centrality of the body in the way people made sense of their environment, the final section will examine the ways doctors, hygienists, factory inspectors and writers thought about the worker's body itself, representing it as a metaphor for industry, and as the incarnation of their views about work, hygiene, class and gender dynamics in modern society. The perspectives examined in this chapter range from distant impressions to direct contact with the manufacturing process, and we will see that the experience of industrialisation varied considerably according to gender and social status. Through this diversity of viewpoints, we will see that the intensifying industrial activity that transformed Montreal and Brussels in this period escalated the physical experiences and ideas about the body through which the spatial meaning of these establishments was constructed.

I. THE INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE

a) *Palaces of industry: Aesthetics and functionality*

For the industrialists whose fortunes materialised in these transformations of the landscape, this expansion was a welcome result of modernity. Not long after Buls' visit, but decades after the start of this industrial expansion, the Montreal Board of Trade boasted that, thanks to "the foresight and perseverance of the great princes and captains of trade and manufacture," the city "is rapidly, very rapidly, becoming a veritable hive of industry." The spread of industrialisation propelled Montreal's metropolitan status and the prominent smokestacks on the skyline were seen as the foundations on which

entire communities were built.⁴ While the overall industrial landscape exercised an undeniable sensorial and psychological impact on urban dwellers, the individual constructions that comprised it were also designed to provoke the senses and shape mentalities. Indeed, many of the factories and workshops constructed during this period displayed innovative architectural qualities and frequently drew on an elaborate sense of ornamentation and aestheticism with which their exterior appearance was remarkably embellished. In both Montreal and Brussels, these installations were the outward and visible expression of the economic elite's sense of pride and accomplishment.

To be sure, industrialists did not invest in gigantic structures out of simple megalomania – they needed space in which to house the machines, materials and workers with which they attempted to keep pace with the growing opportunities for production. New construction techniques and innovative building materials played a determining role in the look of industrial buildings.⁵ As Brussels historian Peter Scholliers reminds us, this landscape was, above all, the product of decisions made by investors, legislators, bankers and other dominant groups whose influence rested in the amount of capital they controlled and whose motivations lay in their will to maximise profits while maintaining the social order.⁶ In this light, some scholars are uncomfortable contemplating nineteenth-century manufacturing space from the point of view of its aesthetics.⁷ To architectural historian Adriaan Linters, the decorative elements on such structures constituted only an inopportune and inappropriate form of aestheticism, one hastily applied to the facade, “dans le souci d’effacer le contenu du

⁴ Montreal Board of Trade, *The Board of Trade Illustrated Edition of Montreal : The splendour of its location, the grandeur of its scenery, the stability of its buildings, its great harbour, its stately churches, its handsome homes, its magnificent institutions, its great industries, fully illustrated and described* (Montreal: Trade Review Pub. Co., 1909), 2.

⁵ Paulo Valente Soares and Guido Vanderhulst, “Le patrimoine industriel en région bruxelloise,” *Maisons d’hier et d’aujourd’hui* 112 (1996), 39. For more on the evolving form of industrial buildings during this period, and in particular on the role of concrete in this process, see Peter Collins, *Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: US Industrial Buildings and European Modern Architecture, 1900-1925* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), Claire Poitras, “Sûreté, salubrité et monolithisme : l'introduction du béton armé à Montréal,” *Revue d'histoire urbaine* 25, no. 1 (1996).

⁶ Peter Scholliers, “L'archéologie industrielle : définitions et utilités,” *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie* 8 (1990), 62.

⁷ Michel De Beule, *Itinéraire du paysage industriel bruxellois : 30 km de Forest à Evere* (Bruxelles: Société Royale Belge de Géographie - La Fonderie - Commission Française de la Culture, 1989), 11. My thanks to Michel De Beule for sharing his thoughts and suggesting sources on nineteenth-century industrialisation and urbanisation in an interview, 1 July 2005.

bâtiment, de gommer le fonctionnel.”⁸ The rosettes, cartouches and engravings decorating factories in these cities were thus merely cosmetic touches. And if they could be said to express a message, it was simply one of deceit, a false representation on the part of industrialists wishing to conceal the social realities that hid behind a seemingly unbridled rate of production.

Without denying these utilitarian considerations, however, interpreting the industrial landscape as purely the result of brute economic forces fails to account for the complexity of the reigning atmosphere of modernity, for the roles played by economic transformations and material developments in the ways individuals understood their sense of self vis-à-vis a society defined by its constant mutations.⁹ Notes historian Anders Aman, this was undoubtedly “une époque qui n’aurait certes pas refusé la règle *la forme suit la fonction*, mais qui accordait une grande valeur au contenu symbolique des formes ainsi qu’aux associations esthétiques qui y étaient reliées, et qui pour cette raison concédait une marge plus grande aux exigences purement formelles.”¹⁰ Beyond their primordial economic and functionalist surface, what do the forms of these new and unique urban spaces express about the interiority, the ambitions and preoccupations of those who, in conceiving them, were major players in the reconfiguration of the urban environment? As historians have noted, the industrial bourgeoisie desired a setting that corresponded both to its economic ambitions and to the aspirations of artistic refinement it entertained. The form of their buildings was rooted in an idyllic vision of the past, inspired by ancient, roman, or gothic styles, decors designed to intimidate workers, impress clients and display a “théâtralisation de l’environnement usinier” that reflected the educated elite’s passion for historical dramas and romantic operas.¹¹

⁸ Adriaan Linters, *Industria : Architecture industrielle en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Pierre Mardaga, 1986), 42.

⁹ See, for instance, Desmond Bliet and Pierre Gauthier, “Understanding the Built Form of Industrialisation along the Lachine Canal of Montreal,” *Urban History Review* 35, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁰ Anders Aman, cited in Maurice Culot’s preface to Lise Grenier and Hans Wieser-Benedetti, *Les châteaux de l’industrie. Recherches sur l’architecture de la région lilloise de 1830 à 1930* (Bruxelles et Paris: Archives d’architecture moderne et Ministère de l’Environnement et du Cadre de Vie - Direction de l’Architecture, 1979). See also Luigi Bellello’s mémoire, in which he presents the factory as a “lieu de représentation de l’industrie.” Luigi Bellello, “Un quartier industriel face à la ville : Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, 1812-1900” (Mémoire de l’Institut supérieur d’Architecture de l’État - La Cambre, 1984), 110.

¹¹ Grenier and Wieser-Benedetti, *Les châteaux de l’industrie*, 20-21. See also René Leboutte, Jean Puissant, and Denis Scuto, *Un siècle d’histoire industrielle, 1873-1973 : Belgique, Luxembourg, Pays-Bas : industrialisation et sociétés* (Paris: SEDES, 1998), 45.

In their visual – sensorial – impact, these structures thus carried the preoccupations of the industrial bourgeoisie. Here, an important distinction arises between the more imposing presence of industry in Montreal and its material form in Brussels, where factories tended to be of small or medium scale, housed in correspondingly diminutive installations, often hidden from public view behind rows of shops and houses. As historians Soares and Vanderhulst point out, Brussels presents somewhat of a paradox in this regard, as the subtlety and simplicity of many of its industrial buildings did not correspond to the city's overall importance as a manufacturing centre during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But while the capital did not display gigantic industrial installations like in Montreal, or even like those of the coal and steel centres of Wallonia, many of its industrial buildings constructed in this period contributed to the powerful visual language of modern industrialisation in the city.¹² Striking examples include the AJJA tobacco manufactory in Molenbeek, with its five large arches crowning three stories of windows in symmetrical and rhythmic force, the central *Palais du Vin*, with intricate coloured engravings in the arches that represent important wine-producing regions,¹³ and the *Établissements Delhaize*, also in Molenbeek, which typified a modern and rational structuring of industrial space, each constituent “sub-space” used for a distinct, precise and coordinated activity.¹⁴

¹² Valente Soares and Vanderhulst, “Le patrimoine industriel en région bruxelloise,” 39.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 40-41. On the Palais du vin, see also Cristina Marchi and Nicolas Verschueren, *Le Palais du Vin et les grands Magasins Merchie-Pède 1898-2007* (Bruxelles: CIVA, 2006).

¹⁴ Archives d'Architecture Moderne, “Inventaire visuel de l'Architecture industrielle à Bruxelles 1-3 B: Molenbeek,” (Bruxelles: 1980), 33-34.

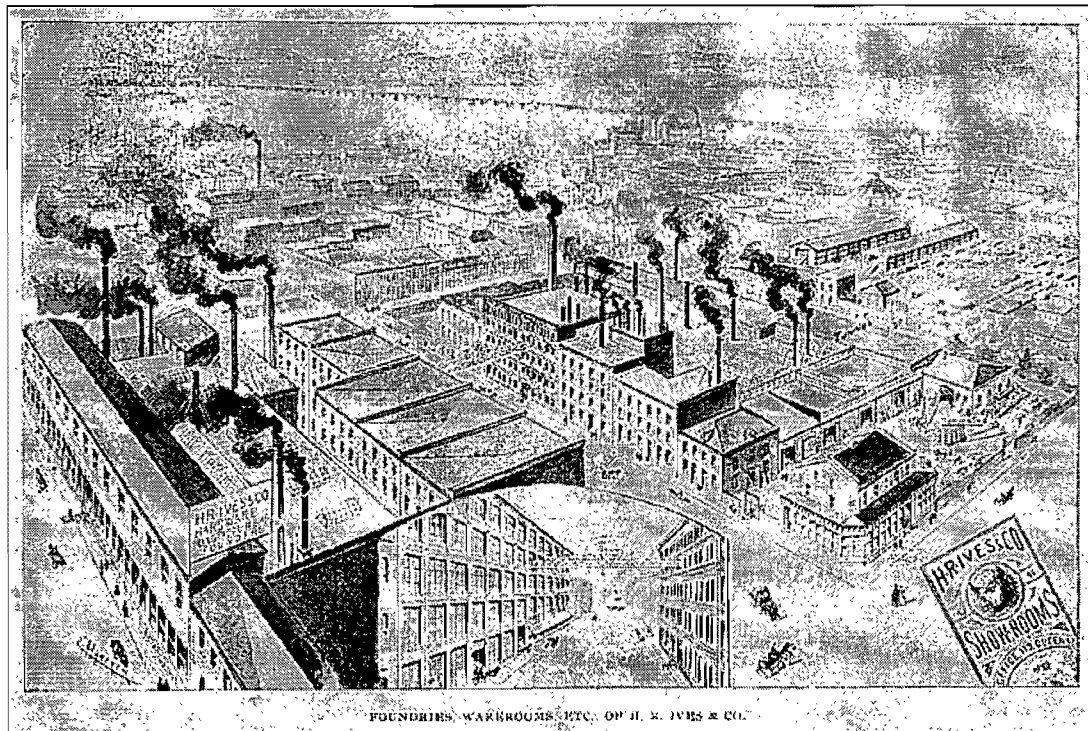


Figure 12 “Foundries, warerooms, etc., of H.R. Ives & Co.” Illustration of a prominent Montreal firm in the city’s main industrial district, along the Lachine Canal.¹⁵

In Montreal, gigantic mills, refineries, breweries and shipyards had a more forceful presence in the city than did the workshops of Brussels, which had to find their place upon an already loaded landscape. The impact of Montreal’s installations was compounded by the scores of elaborately decorated smaller workshops that completed a highly industrialised urban fabric. With its stone foundations, layered brick façade, metallic window frames and enormous decorative *œil-de-bœuf*, the Royal Electric headquarters in the heart of the Griffintown district, for example, reminds the observer more of a temple of worship to the miracle of electricity than of a simple power plant.¹⁶ Around the corner, the delicate and nuanced patterns of the Arts and Crafts movement-

¹⁵ *Special number of the Dominion Illustrated devoted to Montreal, the commercial metropolis of Canada* (Montreal: Sabiston Lithographic & Pub. Co., 1891), 195.

¹⁶ On the building and its presence in the surrounding urban fabric, see Douglas Koch, *Les Quartiers du centre-ville de Montréal I : Récollets* (Montréal: Sauvons Montréal, 1977), as well as the text, photos and video in *Cité Multimédia Montréal et al., Les promenades architecturales de la troisième Biennale de Montréal* (Montréal: 2002), CD-ROM.

inspired Darling Brothers Foundry contrasted starkly with the hot and heavy smelting going on inside.¹⁷ As people moved through neighbourhoods such as these, their senses would undoubtedly have been stimulated not just by the loud hum of industry, but also by an aesthetic language that espoused much softer and more pleasing accents, aimed at taming the harsh physical realities of industrial work, and on putting a celebratory face on the changes striking the city.

b) *Monuments of decay*

“Nos cheminées sont nos minarets, souvent plus belles que les minarets des cités d’Orient dont les voyageurs s’extasient, toujours pris de la manie de trouver beau ailleurs ce qu’ils ne remarquent pas chez eux,” proclaimed the Belgian architectural journal *L’Émulation* in 1893.¹⁸ The description of factory chimneys on terms that evoked such a level of beauty, refinement, exoticism and even religiosity, reveals the extent to which industrial architecture was understood in terms that surpassed simple functionality. But if this architecture was to strike the senses in pleasurable ways, offering a formal aesthetic that sought to legitimize industry’s appropriation of space in the urban context, the impact of industrialisation could hardly be dissimulated under such polished facades, and these factories were also responsible for the plumes of black smoke, the clouds of harmful dust, the loud and repetitive noises that conditioned people’s experiences of city living. Indeed, the ever-growing presence of industrial establishments in Montreal and Brussels heightened people’s sensorial awareness of urban space, making this period of economic expansion one in which corporeal experiences were especially vital to the construction of the relationship with urban space.

¹⁷ Although this firm – “one of the most reliable in the city” – was “fully supplied with modern tools, lathes, and machinery operated by a 35 horse-power steam engine, and 40 skilled workmen,” the Darling brothers nonetheless desired to add a delicate touch to their rugged operations. *Montreal illustrated, 1894: its growth, resources, commerce, manufacturing interests, financial institutions, educational advantages and prospects, a brief history of the city from foundation to the present time* (Montreal: The Consolidated Illustrating Co., 1894), 203. See also Guy Mongrain, “Le site initial de la fonderie Darling : un siècle de métallurgie à travers des témoins remarquables,” (Montréal: SDM, 2000), 17-19.

¹⁸ “Les minarets industriels,” *L’émulation* October 1893, 154. While the author is not named, the piece is attributed to the journal *L’Art moderne*.

The words of the poet Émile Verhaeren are once again helpful in assessing this shift from physical experiences to the formulation of ideas about modernity and space. Playing on the familiar pastoral theme in which the city consumed the now mournful and gloomy plains surrounding it, the poet describes the factories not as architectural accomplishments but as “formidable” and “criminal:” The arms of these “hyperbolic machines” slaughter the angelic sheaves of wheat, scare away the melancholy old farmer, “dont le geste semblait d’accord avec le ciel,” while the smoke and its trails of soot have soiled the wind and reduced the sun to emptiness. Where bright houses and golden orchards formerly stood, “On aperçoit, à l’infini, du sud au nord,/ La noire immensité des usines rectangulaires.”

Having set this dreary context, Verhaeren goes on to relate his understanding of how industry affects not just the physical environment, but also the bodies of those who occupy it. Behind the walls of these beastly factories, “Le ronflement s’entend, rythmique et dur,/ Des chaudières et des meules nocturnes.” The ground vibrates as if in fermentation, the sewers carry a “fange velue” toward the “rivière qu’il pollue,” while a twisted mass of ruined trees, nettles and manure frame the scene. Referring explicitly to industrial materials, he continues on a venomous tone: “Ciments huileux, plâtras pourris, moellons fendus,/ Au long de vieux fossés et de berges obscures/ Lèvent, le soir, leurs monuments de pourritures.” After decrying the destructive effects of industry on the environment, the author continues by expressing his dismay over the physical degradation of those who toil under these thundering and heavy hangars, by day and by night, without air, sleep or sunlight. “Morceaux de vie en l’énorme engrenage,/ Morceaux de chair fixée, ingénieusement,/ Pièce par pièce, étage par étage,/ De l’un à l’autre bout du vaste tournoiement,/ Leurs yeux, ils sont les yeux de la machine,/ Leurs dos se ploient sous elle et leurs échine...”¹⁹ Evoking the difficult realities of factory work, these lines seem to blur the very distinction between machine and human body, a theme which I shall return to later in this chapter.

In some ways, Verhaeren’s representation of industrialisation as an undesirable encroachment upon a pristine landscape is rather hackneyed and nostalgic. Yet his

¹⁹ Émile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires précédées des campagnes hallucinées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 83-85.

arresting imagery shows how this emotional response was constructed in reference to bodily experiences. In Montreal, where such literary traditions were less established, such criticism was typically expressed in more down-to-earth, though no less spatial and corporeal, language. In a 1910 investigation into tuberculosis in Quebec, the doctor R. Leduc held Montreal's industrial establishments and transport infrastructures, and the thick clouds of smoke they sent over the city, largely responsible for the poor state of health of many citizens. "On s'empêche de respirer normalement," he commented, "d'où il résulte une oxygénation moindre des poumons et du sang." Furthermore, he added, the cloud of smoke over the city reduced people's exposure to sunlight and its therapeutic effects. The physical layout of Montreal's industrial neighbourhoods was especially relevant here, as the high density of construction, the narrowness of the streets, the elevation of the buildings and the lack of open space surrounding them were all said to contribute to the contamination of the air that people breathed on a daily basis.²⁰

If Verhaeren and Leduc's comments illustrate formal distinctions in the way such discourse was expressed in Brussels and Montreal, these interpretations of the changing spatial character of the city, framed in terms of industry's disagreeable and dangerous consequences, were constructed in strikingly similar ways. Bodily experiences with industry were, in both cases, at the heart of the matter, and it is through this physical interaction that this space emerges as a critical framework from which the modern world was analysed. Indeed, one commentator's reliance on science and the other's recourse to art reflects a duality of modernity, the interplay of ideas deemed rational and emotional. But the dramatic conclusions of both evoke the layers of interiority at play in the construction of discourses about the urban environment.

c) Citizens speak up

In addition to the published words of scientists and poets, archival sources of the period offer a glimpse into the way these connections were at the heart of widely-held attitudes. The Montreal municipal administration, especially the health and hygiene, and

²⁰ Province de Québec, *Rapport de la Commission Royale de la Tuberculose* (Province de Québec, 1910), 80-82.

the fire and light committees, frequently received letters and petitions from ordinary citizens protesting against the nefarious effects of industry in their neighbourhoods. These complaints were filed in an ad hoc and spontaneous manner.²¹ In Brussels, however, they were formulated through a more established and formal method of consultation, a procedure based on national laws called *commodo et incommodo* enquiries. Under these rules, in existence since the early nineteenth century,²² communal and provincial authorization was required for anyone wishing to operate an industry deemed dangerous, unpleasant (*incommode*) or insalubrious. Notices were posted in the area surrounding the proposed site, residents and landowners were invited to voice their opposition or support, and a detailed verification was conducted by expert bureaucrats.²³

The existence of such an elaborate process for managing the implementation of industries in urban areas is in itself revealing, and testifies to public authorities' will to systematise and oversee this process. As historians have demonstrated, the comfort and well-being of urban dwellers was often of secondary importance in the face of potential for economic growth, and even as they surveyed the impact of industries and sought to minimise nuisances, local authorities tended to favour the requests of industrialists in the face of opposition from their neighbours or from hygienists.²⁴ Though they may not

²¹ While no formal structure existed for controlling the types of industries that could be established in specific locations, as in Brussels, municipal officials were sensitive to this lacuna. In his 1883 annual report, the city's boiler inspector called for such a system: "Il y a plus de vapeur et de gaz dangereux [sic] que de fumée ordinaire dans le nombre toujours croissant d'industries de tout genre établies en cette cité et auxquelles j'attire tout spécialement votre attention. On ne devrait à l'avenir donner permission d'ériger des machines et des chaudières à vapeur qu'après un examen minutieux concernant le genre d'industrie qu'on veut établir. Ce serait le seul moyen de prévenir ou de mitiger les nuisances dont on se plaint généralement." E.O. Champagne, "Rapport annuel de l'inspecteur des chaudières de la Cité de Montréal pour l'année 1883," 15.

²² These laws were a holdover of the Napoleonic regime which had begun such practices in the period 1810-1815, and the enquiries were conducted in Belgium in much the same way as in France. Christophe Verbruggen, "Nineteenth-century Reactions to Industrial Pollution in Ghent, the Manchester of the Continent. The Case of the Chemical Industry" in Bernhardt and Massard-Guilbaud, eds., *Le démon moderne*, 378. For a detailed examination of the evolution of these laws in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, "La régulation des nuisances industrielles urbaines (1800-1940)," *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire* 64 (1999).

²³ Christine Mahieu, "Bruxelles et ses industries : commodes et incommodes," (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles/Secrétariat d'État à l'Aménagement du Territoire de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale, 1993), 4-5.

²⁴ Between 1815 and 1914, notes Estelle Baret-Bourgoin in the case of Grenoble, permits were granted in 65 to 95% of cases, according to the type of industry. Estelle Baret-Bourgoin, *La ville industrielle et ses poisons : les mutations des sensibilités aux nuisances et pollutions industrielles à Grenoble, 1810-1914*

have held very much sway, the letters people wrote often employed vivid tones and evocative language, through which they decried the degradation of the environment and affirmed a sense of attachment to the city.²⁵ The emotional quality of these missives can thus help us better understand people's interior responses to these transformations. Furthermore, the numerous allusions to the physical experience of this environment highlight the importance of the body and of the senses in urban dwellers' construction of their relationship with the environment.

While these investigations could well form the object of a study in itself,²⁶ it is worth mentioning the extent to which they reveal how intense and unpleasant sensorial experiences, particularly smells and sounds, were central to understandings of the urban environment in this time of extraordinary industrial expansion. Around factories and workshops, the air hung heavy with the smells of coal and gas, and vibrated to the rumbling tune of engines and motors. Many urban residents regretted the effect these sensory stimulations had on their quality of life, and wondered how local authorities could allow such degradation of their milieu. Their pleas often sought to de-legitimise industry's claim to urban space by pointing to existing activities deemed worthy of a peaceful environment, including education or religious worship. The Séminaire de Montréal, for instance, objected to a proposal from the Royal Electric Company and the

(Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2005), 353. For her part, Christine Mahieu analysed a sample of 195 cases in the Brussels area and found a total of only four refusals. Mahieu, "Bruxelles et ses industries," 33, 36. Studying these concession files for the highly industrialised Belgian city of Ghent in the second half of the nineteenth century, Christophe Verbruggen found that only 94 of the 13,109 requests received between 1847 and 1906 were refused, a mere 0.75%. Christophe Verbruggen, *De stank bederft onze eetwaren : de reacties op industriële milieuhinder in het 19de-eeuwse Gent* (Gent: Academia Press, 2002), 39.

²⁵ Massard-Guilbaud analyses the nature of these complaints in nineteenth-century Clermont-Ferrand. On the question of urban dwellers' attachment to the city, she notes that the criticisms of the urban environment frequently voiced by contemporary commentators were not echoed in these letters, and that it was precisely because they cherished their environment that residents complained against its degradation. "Cette ville, ils l'aimaient, on peut en être certain," she writes. Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, "Culture, technique, gestion de l'espace. Une histoire sociale de la pollution industrielle dans les villes françaises, 1789-1914," (Mémoire pour l'Habilitation à diriger les recherches soutenu à l'Université Lumière Lyon 2: 2003), 86. To be published in 2008 under the title *Histoire de la pollution industrielle en France, 1789-1914*, Presses de l'EHESS. Cited with author's permission.

²⁶ Because every potentially noisome establishment was subject to investigation, the sheer volume of files precluded a complete examination in the context of the present study. Approximately 100 files, conserved at the Archives Générales du Royaume and the AVB, documenting cases in various areas of Bruxelles-Ville, and in the industrial communes of Molenbeek-Saint-Jean and Saint-Gilles were examined in order to glean trends in the way these complaints were voiced, notably in the language used to formulate them, and in the sensorial perceptions they recounted.

Box Factory to rebuild a recently burned building in Dowd Street on the grounds that the neighbouring Saint-Patrice school would be inconvenienced. One of the primary arguments put forth was that the school was attended by over 500 girls of the parish, “et que ces enfants sont incommodées et souffrent dans leurs classes, par la fumée épaisse sortant de ces fabriques.”²⁷ One Molenbeek widow protested against the expansion of a nearby boiler industry on the grounds that “toutes les personnes habitant ma maison se trouvent dans l'impossibilité de dormir; elles ne peuvent se coucher que fort avant dans la soirée ou bien elles sont réveillées par des coups de tam-tam assourdissant à 5 ou 6 heures du matin toute une semaine durant et souvent même le dimanche.”²⁸

Letters like these show how citizens of both Montreal and Brussels had similar preoccupations, seeing the growing sensorial nuisances of industry as threats to their health, their finances and, in most cases, to both. In a time when miasma theories were gradually being replaced by knowledge of microbiology, and residual fears that smells bore disease combined with a growing awareness of the deleterious nature of industrial exhaust,²⁹ residents frequently expressed concern that the “odeurs nauséabondes, malsaines et insupportables” emanating from manufacturing establishments constituted a “menace pour la santé publique.”³⁰ But it was also the smell of financial loss wafting through these industrial fumes that moved citizens to pick up their pens. Noted one Brussels landlord, whose property was located near the canal, a planned rag and bone depot would undoubtedly constitute “une dépréciation pour ma maison, qui peut me faire perdre mes locataires actuels.” The boulevards in the vicinity of the canal, suggested another, should be embellished for the benefit of strollers rather than subjected to the filth of such an establishment.³¹ If, in this age of economic liberalism, authorities tended to favour industrial expansion, residents likewise expected that their private interests would be protected. A “smoke nuisance which causes us serious

²⁷ AM, Commission des incendies et de l'éclairage (hereafter CIE), VM 40, S2, D46, 31 July 1885.

²⁸ Archives de l'état à Bruxelles (Anderlecht), (hereafter AEB), série D #337.24, 1888.

²⁹ As noted in Chapter 2, this was a period in which miasma theories were still widely believed, despite the advent of bacteriology. Notes Massard-Guilbaud, odours were the “ennemi public numéro 1” and it was only by the end of the century that people began to be concerned about invisible, imperceptible threats. Massard-Guilbaud, “Culture, technique, gestion de l'espace,” 60-63.

³⁰ AM, Commission d'hygiène et de statistiques (hereafter CHS), VM 21, S2, 2 April 1906.

³¹ AEB, série D #235.6, 1890.

damage although we are compelled to pay City Assessments just as though we were treated like other citizens of the city," was considered unacceptable.³²

While we might expect to find considerable numbers of such complaints in industrial neighbourhoods where people were daily exposed to bothersome noises and smells, it was instead when an industrial establishment attempted to open its doors in wealthier residential neighbourhoods that the grumbling was most vociferous; residents of such districts being keen to preserve the tranquility of their living spaces as the forces of industrialisation approached a little too closely for comfort. Various factors can explain this, not least that workers were undoubtedly more accustomed to the sensory environment of industry, and therefore less inclined to protest than someone employed in an office and residing in a quiet district. Historian Christophe Verbruggen adds that labourers had "other priorities in life: surviving,"³³ and Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud notes that, when they participated in the investigations, it was often to speak in favour of industrialists, whose going concerns they depended upon for employment. The educated elite, she also points out, were better equipped to write down their complaints: "la spontanéité de l'expression est inversement proportionnelle au niveau d'instruction et à la capacité de manier la rhétorique."³⁴

In both Montreal and Brussels, residents of wealthier areas drew on these sensorial considerations to insist that industry had no place in their neighbourhoods. One Montreal petition bearing 88 signatures, for instance, contested the opening of a sausage factory in the grounds that "cet endroit en question qui est le plus bel et le plus recherché de toute la rue Craig est environnée de résidences privées, maisons d'affaires, communauté religieuses, couvents, écoles, églises, presbytère, etc., etc."³⁵ In Brussels' Quartier Léopold, a residential district developed in the middle of the nineteenth century to house the city's wealthiest residents, *commodo/incommodo* inquiries often yielded much more virulent protests than in places like Molenbeek. On 17 March 1901, for

³² AM, CIE, VM 40, S2, D40, ca 1880.

³³ Christophe Verbruggen, "Nineteenth-century Reactions to Industrial Pollution in Ghent, the Manchester of the Continent. The Case of the Chemical Industry" in Bernhardt and Massard-Guilbaud, eds., *Le démon moderne*, 390.

³⁴ Massard-Guilbaud, "Culture, technique, gestion de l'espace," 54, 82-84. As Massard-Guilbaud notes, the late-twentieth-century expression denoting people's opposition to the proximity of polluting establishments to residential areas, "not in my backyard," or NIMBY, aptly characterises the attitude of the late nineteenth century.

³⁵ AM, CHS, VM 21, S2, 1905.

example, notification was posted that a foundry was to be opened in Toulouse Street, near the Luxembourg train station.³⁶ “Permettre semblable chose! mais, ce serait aller à l’encontre de toutes les mesures efficaces qu’on a prises et que l’on prend encore tous les jours dans l’intérêt de l’hygiène publique,” responded one resident, before enjoining the industrialists to take their “miasmes mortels dans quelque contrée désolée et déserte.”

These initial reactions demonstrated an ingrained fear that the arrival of a foundry would transform the quality of life in the district, but the investigators judged that the complaints formulated were “manifestement exagérées.” However, when, six months later, the entrepreneurs requested permission to expand their business, a new pile of letters and petitions flowed in. In them, it is evident that the terms of the discussion changed considerably after the business had opened its doors. Having endured the effect of the foundry in their midst, the neighbouring residents now had had direct physical experiences with the atmosphere of industrialisation. Their senses had been irritated and this was shoring up their conviction that the presence of this foundry contradicted their vision of the space they occupied on a residential basis. The letters now explicitly mentioned “le bruit, l’odeur et la fumée malsains,” the “ronflement assourdissant,” and the “vacarme insupportable” coming from the foundry. One thirty-signature petition in the file has a third of the names crossed off with the note “hors du rayon” beside them, evidence that its author had sought support from other residents who might have feared they would be next to suffer. Between the initial reservations, grounded in a desire to preserve a certain quality of life, and this second set of letters – some written by the same individuals, others writing for the first time – the protests intensified considerably, demonstrating the direct role of bodily experiences in constructing the relationship to the environment in this evolving context.

Ironically, this foundry manufactured bathtubs, faucets, sinks and water-closets, among other modern hygienic products that residents of this neighbourhood undoubtedly used on a daily basis, in the name of evolving norms of personal cleanliness and hygiene. The cases of this copper foundry, and of a meat-processing plant in Montreal, were representative of the deep-seated concerns over the changing nature of urban space,

³⁶ AEB, série O #149, 1901.

particularly among those belonging to the wealthier classes. All around, the air was thick with the physical consequences of the industrial economy that made their confidence in growth and progress possible. But it was as this air drifted into their nostrils, and as noises vibrated against their eardrums, that the significance of this new environment took on its full implications. Even parks, constructed in a bid to temper urban development by restoring to the landscape elements of nature that symbolised tradition and civilisation,³⁷ seemed threatened, as bemoaned a Montreal resident who protested against the erection of a sawmill near Richmond Square, “highly appreciated by a large number of citizens who seek the quiet shade, and refreshing coolness afforded by its trees and fountains.”³⁸

Indeed, municipal authorities were forced to mediate between economic priorities and a desire for cleaner, healthier cities. In Brussels, where major sanitization and urban renewal projects were under way for the better part of the nineteenth century, municipal authorities attempted to reconcile these priorities by allowing proposed industries to open, but under very strict conditions destined to limit the impact on the neighbouring habitat.³⁹ In cases where permissions were denied, the authorities justified their decision by pointing to the innumerable “sacrifices” the city had made to offer a healthier environment. Surely this would not be negated in the name of greater profits:

Considérant qu'on ne peut raisonnablement tolérer l'installation de foyers permanents d'infection miasmatique et putride aussi dangereux que les dépôts d'os, au milieu d'une population considérable, alors que la Ville de Bruxelles a fait tant de sacrifices dans l'intérêt de la salubrité publique; qu'elle a établi à grands frais une distribution d'eau, assaini le cours de la Senne, transformé les quartiers populeux et dispensé l'air pur et la lumière dans la plus grande mesure, et que, si l'intérêt privé des habitants est digne de considération, il doit néanmoins fléchir devant l'intérêt de la santé publique.⁴⁰

³⁷ Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville : espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au 19e et 20e siècles* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006), 21-22. See also Claire Billen, “Du projet urbanistique idéal aux réalités de terrain. Le cas exemplaire du parc de Saint-Gilles-Forest dans l'agglomération bruxelloise,” in Serge Jaumain and Paul-André Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville. Bruxelles et Montréal au XIXe et XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2006), 217-234.

³⁸ AM, CIE, VM 40, S2, D54, April 1895.

³⁹ Mahieu, “Bruxelles et ses industries,” 35-36.

⁴⁰ AEB, série D #235.1, ca 1880.

The refusal is a severe, almost paternalistic reprimand, repeated in several rejected cases, implying that city officials used this bureaucratic process as an opportunity to reinforce their conception of urbanism as well as to justify heavy investments, and demonstrates the constant tensions between the ambitions of private enterprise and the responsibilities of public bodies in both the physical and ideological construction of urban space.

In other cases, municipal officials simply discredited such protests on the grounds that neighbours were overstating their sensibilities. Sent out to look into grievances expressed about a Montreal tannery, sanitary inspectors found no reason to acquiesce to the petitioners' demands that the firm be forced to limit the odours it emitted. Having visited the entire premises, the inspectors noted that the smell was "pas agréable, mais pas aussi nuisible" as in other leatherworks.⁴¹ This judgement is, of course, open to interpretation. On a basic level, it indicates that, even two decades after bacteriological science had demonstrated the invisibility and imperceptibility of pathologies, public authorities continued to rely on individual sensory experiences based on ad hoc observations in assessing the impact of industrial pollution. Did the inspectors happen to come by on a day where production was slow? Were the owners of the tannery aware that an inspection was in the works, prompting them to clean up beforehand? Were city officials minimising residents' complaints in order to protect business interests, or were the tannery's neighbours exaggerating their claims?⁴² In any case, the heuristic value of these comments lies in the emphasis placed on physical experiences in the construction of spatial meaning. For citizens and bureaucrats alike, frequent references to sensorial stimuli demonstrate the extent to which the body was

⁴¹ AM, CHS, VM 21, S2, 28 June 1906.

⁴² Indeed, bogus complaints against industries were not unheard of, and the city's building inspector even denounced them in his annual reports, suggesting the importance of reading such testimonials with a grain of salt. See for example, *Rapport annuel de l'inspecteur des bâtiments de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1884*, 4. The Brussels factory inspector Pol De Bruycker noted that, "certains quartiers ne conviennent guère à l'exercice de l'industrie et les habitants s'y montrent parfois d'une susceptibilité excessive. Ils réclament contre les exploitations les plus insignifiantes, considèrent les moindres inconvénients comme excédant la mesure des charges ordinaires de voisinage et font valoir des considérations dont l'administration ne doit pas se préoccuper, telles que la dépréciation des propriétés ou du quartier, un préjudice moral, etc. Des enquêtes de commodo et incommodo pour de petits ateliers ou dépôts classés ont fait naître des oppositions vives et nombreuses, comme il ne s'en produit pas pour des fabriques et usines, présentant des inconvénients autrement graves. Il est vrai que dans les centres industriels existent des tolérances sans lesquelles l'industrie ne pourrait subsister." *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 11^e année (1905)*, 27-28.

fundamental to people's perception of the city, to the various and often contradictory meanings they attributed to the spatial transformations underway all around them.

II. STEPPING IN

a) *To and from*

Not only did the increasing hold of industrialisation change the landscapes people contemplated and the very air they breathed, it also brought a new rhythm to daily life. Crowds of workers walking from home to work and back at fixed hours of the day filled the streets, contributing to the atmosphere of movement that characterised these cities. In his examination of a Montreal working-class district, the sociologist Herbert Ames tested the hypothesis that a high proportion of individuals employed in the area's industrial establishments came from other neighbourhoods. "The main avenues leading north, east, and south were watched for several evenings at about six o'clock," he explains. On each of the major thoroughfares observed, the number of people going each way were counted and it was found that for every person who entered Griffintown at that time of day, three to four people left, in a "constant stream pour[ing] outward." Ames's scientific objective was to quantify the movement of commuters to Montreal's main industrial district in order to reflect upon strategies to facilitate workers' accessibility to their place of employment. But even through this prosaic language, as we picture his research assistants posted at busy intersections frantically counting the passers-by, we can imagine the sight of these crowds, the mass of people moving in the same direction, their feet hitting the pavement, their voices buzzing together.

Others described this movement of people with more imagery, and, through their observations, constructed this mundane, daily event as a key signifier of the bodily movement that fed the atmosphere of modernity. Typically, representations of these crowds were tinged with a tone of sadness at the fate of the workers and the conditions in which they were employed. One Montreal writer focused especially on the troubling image of children going to work in factories: "Les avez-vous vus, par les matinées brumeuses et froides de l'hiver, une heure avant le lever du soleil, ces troupes d'enfants,

garçons et fillettes, qui s'en vont, pâles et sérieux, commencer leur tâche accoutumée?"⁴³ Cold and downcast, the young workers are robbed of their childhood. Rather than running and playing, they trod toward their punishing tasks, offering a pitiful spectacle to those who watch them go by.

In Brussels, the author Louis Dumont-Wilden emphasised the sensorial qualities of "le retour de l'usine." "Voici que la cloche qui met fin au travail quotidien sonne dans le crépuscule son glas monotone. Et de toutes les ruelles qui débouchent dans la grande artère, débordent des bandes d'ouvriers." The factory bells that marked the soundscape are death knells that send workers flowing out into the streets, where, like the children in Montreal, they face the cold fog, without even noticing the play of electric streetlights, another modern invention, within it. "À travers le brouillard et dans l'obscurité, les réverbères clignotent et se reflètent – illumination magique – dans les flaques de pluie qui stagnent, mais nul ne songe au charme du paysage urbain ou même au charme du logis où l'on retrouve les siens." In this critique of industry, the urban context is both magical and deadly. If its scenery can charm the eyes of the casual observer, its factories condemn workers' bodies, blinding them to the fleeting beauties of their environment, sending them "tous du même pas machinal et cadencé vers leur sommeil, pour recommencer demain leur vie de misère."⁴⁴

These descriptions of workers' commute focus explicitly on the atmosphere of the streets around the factories. An atmosphere that is cold, foggy and dark, despite the lighting referred to in Brussels. An atmosphere that is made even heavier by the regular and dejected movement of workers' bodies, young and old, exhausted by gruelling work and lack of rest. The groups of labourers filling the streets before and after work were the visible, embodied manifestations of what went on behind the closed doors of the industrial establishments, these "caverns of anaemia and exhaustion," to cite the author Franz Mahutte. "Elles lèvent, comme d'aveugles phares de misère," he continues with explicit sensorial references, "les cheminées recuites d'où s'abattent les corrodantes fumées. De l'intérieur sort des bruits sourds, de ronflements de machines, de frottement de courroie rythmant la pulsation du labour." But his are the words, like so many others

⁴³ N. Legendre, "Les enfants dans les usines," in *Journal d'hygiène populaire* 1, no. 21, (15 March 1885), 151.

⁴⁴ Louis Dumont-Wilden, *Coins de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1905), 30-31.

to whom we have listened thus far, of an observer standing outside, feeling the smoke and noise pouring out, able only to speculate on what is happening inside: “on devine que des centaines d’êtres triment et crèvent là-dedans.”⁴⁵ Having looked at them from the exterior, let us now step inside these temples of industrial production and listen to what those who experienced them first-hand had to say about the atmosphere and spatial meanings these places generated.

b) *Workers’ voices*

To begin, who better to consult about the physical and mental atmosphere of urban factories and workshops than the workers employed in the industrial establishments of Brussels and Montreal? Historical records offering first-hand working-class perspectives on the city and the body at the turn of the twentieth century in these two cities are sparse. Factory life, however, is one issue about which we can glean at least a modest amount of information on the thoughts of industrial labourers. To be sure, these commentaries are those of a minute handful among the thousands who laboured in these industries. To the extent that workers might have shared class-based spatial stories, are these few voices representative of them? On the question of the physical experiences of factory work and of the sensorial nuisances and corporeal risks that workers confronted regularly, the accounts we have, though limited to a few sources, are rather consistent, both within Montreal and Brussels and in comparison to one another. These sources show the workers’ sensibilities to their working environment as well as their principal demands for improving it. They also show how the various pressures placed on workers’ bodies by the intensification of industrial activity during this period were central to their broader attitudes about the atmosphere and meaning of industrial spaces.

Undoubtedly the most remarkable account we have of working-class life during this period comes from the pen of the author Neel Doff. Born into a destitute working-class family in Holland, her youth was one of hardship and misery as she followed her parents in their attempts to find work and survive in various places between Amsterdam

⁴⁵ Franz Mahutte, *Bruxelles vivant* (Bruxelles: Bureaux de l’anthologie contemporaine des écrivains français et belges, 1891), 305.

and Brussels. The first in a trilogy of autobiographical novels, *Jours de famine et de détresse* recounts these experiences through the eyes of the young protagonist, Keetje Oldema. At the age of seventeen, her family in dire straits, her father unable to find steady work in Brussels as a result of his inability to speak French, Keetje accompanies a woman from her neighbourhood to a local hat factory where she is immediately hired. As she describes her first impressions upon entering the workshop, she emphasises the foggy atmosphere of the room and the frenetic physical efforts of the women she sees in front of her:

On me conduisit dans un grand atelier rempli de vapeur, où des femmes, presque toutes jeunes, besognaient, les manches retroussées, devant de longs bacs remplis d'eau chaude, additionnée de vitriol, me dit-on. Elles s'arrêtèrent un instant pour me dévisager; puis les têtes se penchèrent, les bras s'abattirent, et le travail reprit, fiévreux. Je trouvais très jolie, en entrant dans la salle, la buée argentée, où ces jeunes bras nus et ces chevelures de toutes nuances se démenaient dans une grande activité; mais quand il me fallut respirer les émanations qui s'en dégageaient, cette impression presque inconsciente de beauté se dissipa bientôt.

This passage shows the centrality of Keetje's sensory experiences in this initial encounter with the workshop. Her sense of sight is engaged first: she marvels at the silver cloud of vapour that envelops the room, and the corporeal nature of the spectacle is heightened by the entanglement of naked arms and shocks of hair. But only as her other senses intervene, as she smells and breathes in the vitriolic emanations, does the enchanting impression of beauty subside into an unpleasant reality.

After this initial confrontation with the physical atmosphere of the workshop, Keetje experiences the tense psychological atmosphere. The woman charged with training her is curt and unpleasant because the time spent with the young apprentice slows her own pace of production, for which she is paid by the piece. Keetje is put to work right away, and as she goes from observing the activity in the workshop to participating in it, her physical experiences mediate the process by which she familiarises herself with her environment. Her work consisted of repeatedly dipping long woollen bonnets into the chemical solution, and then rolling them up and rubbing them on a nearby surface until they had shrunk enough that they could be moulded into felt hats. "On suait abominablement à cette besogne," explains Keetje, "et, par cet hiver

glacé, toutes presque toussaient. L'eau était très chaude, l'acide corrosif : mes ongles se ramollirent en quelques heures, et se cassèrent, en laissant dépasser un gros bourrelet de chair au bout de chaque doigt." By lunchtime, her hands were so swollen and in so much pain that she could not hold her sandwich.

The sweat, the coughing and the damaged hands are thus the primary referents according to which the young worker engages with this new spatial environment of economic production. But, to make the connection between the physical experiences and mental understandings of space even more elaborate, Doff does more than simply associate the work Keetje carries out with the bodily suffering she experiences. The author also exposes the animosity that reigns amongst the workers and their difficult relationship with those above them in the hierarchy. Keetje is mistreated by her colleagues and is ridiculed for her physical appearance by the shop's manager. "On parle au bureau d'une nouvelle, qui doit être un oiseau rare," he exclaims, entering the production floor one morning, and demanding to see Keetje. When the other employees point her out to their superior, he exclaims, "Ça? Ah non!" and turns around, slapping his thighs with laughter, chortling, "Ah! la la! Ils en ont du goût, ces messieurs! mais c'est une sauterelle : regardez donc ces bras!!" As she takes the insult, the young girl is keenly aware of her body, noting that her thin arms and long hands had frequently been the object of mockery from others. "Je pleurais presque de honte," she continues, "surtout que la joie de toutes ces femmes, vieilles et jeunes, était réelle."⁴⁶

From the wondrous initial visual impression of the factory, to the stomach-wrenching smell of the acid, to the physical pain of the work conducted and the emotional pain from the jibes she receives, Keetje's senses and body formulate her understanding of the industrial working environment as a space of suffering, tension, bitterness, and humiliation. Doff's novel has the merit of fitting these aspects of the story neatly together in dramatic literary form. If we look closely at the more formal, non-literary sources in which workers collectively describe their experiences with industrial work, we can discern a very similar dynamic, in which physical experiences

⁴⁶ Neel Doff, *Jours de famine et de détresse* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1911), 213-219. For a critical perspective on Doff's novels, one that situates the author, her books, their story line and characters in their historical contexts, see Madeleine Frédéric's "Lecture" in Neel Doff, *Keetje* (Bruxelles: Éditions Labor, 1987), 251-285.

are central to understandings of the factory space. For both Brussels and Montreal we have first-person accounts of these experiences from workers who testified before vast nation-wide investigations into the nature of industrial work in Belgium and Canada.

Held at virtually the same time – only a few months separated their respective inaugurations in 1886 – these investigations offer a wide-ranging view of attitudes to industrial work on the part of both employers and workers. The *Commission du travail*, which took both written and oral testimonies in several Belgian localities, was set up by the national government as a response to the working-class riots in Walloon industrial centres earlier that year. For its part, the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital held 11 days of public hearings in the principal manufacturing centres of Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, at a time when the frenetic rate of production and growth brought tensions between industrialists and their employees to a zenith. Though more forceful legislation would not be passed until later in the twentieth century, these commissions were instated at a time when the first timid steps toward the legislation of work were being taken, concerning such matters as safety, health and hygiene, and child labour.⁴⁷

In both countries, governments feared the social unrest bubbling beneath this ever-increasing industrial productivity, and these similar attempts to understand the nature of the relationship between employers and the labour force are indicative of the transnational dynamic at play in the period. To be sure, these investigations were different in their methodology and results, and are not comparable on an empirical basis. For instance, the number of testimonials on Montreal is much higher than those concerning Brussels.⁴⁸ Moreover, historians have pointed to structural biases in these investigations. Were the workers' voices representative, especially in Belgium where people refused to testify for fear of reprisals, and where the Commission lacked the

⁴⁷ On the context in which the commissions were set up, see Serge Jaumain, *Industrialisation et sociétés, 1830-1970 : la Belgique, CAPES-agrégation* (Paris: Ellipses-Marketing, 1998), 39-42. Fernand Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs : une enquête sur les rapports entre le capital et le travail au Québec à la fin du 19e siècle* (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1978). For a comparison of the Belgian and Canadian commissions and their value as historical sources, see Eliane Gubin, "Les enquêtes sur le travail en Belgique et au Canada," in Ginette Kurgan-van Hentenryk et al., *La question sociale en Belgique et au Canada, XIXe-XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1988), 93-107.

⁴⁸ Nearly half the 649 witnesses in Quebec were from Montreal. Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs*, 83. For Brussels, we have the thoughts of only a handful of individuals. Kurgan-van Hentenryk et al., *La question sociale en Belgique et au Canada*, 98-99.

power to subpoena witnesses? While testimonials were presented by individuals representing a diversity of class backgrounds and both linguistic groups present in the two cities, the voices heard were primarily those of men.⁴⁹ Finally, although a concern for political balance on these commissions seems to have informed both governments, these exercises were largely associated with strong conservative tendencies and, as such, were widely discredited by the left in both countries.⁵⁰ Despite these differences and lacunae, however, these parallel investigations give an indication of the ways in which bodily experiences shaped spatial stories in these cities' industrial establishments.

Immediately evident in the workers' comments is the climate of mistrust and hostility that reigned between them and their employers. While owners and managers described the rapport as cordial and respectful, workers responded that any politeness was superficial. "L'ouvrier est forcé de faire belle figure, car les chefs ont tout le pouvoir," pointed out a Molenbeek mechanic, "tel ou tel ouvrier leur déplaît-il? Sans raison et sans pitié pour sa famille, ils le mettent à la porte, sous prétexte d'incapacité, après dix ou quinze années de travail."⁵¹ Montreal workers echoed these sentiments, and numerous accounts of beatings and physical intimidation gave corporeal form to this strained atmosphere.⁵² "There is no bond of sympathy existing between the capitalist of the large mill and his employés, [sic]" notes one Royal Commission report, comparing

⁴⁹ Eliane Gubin, "Les enquêtes sur le travail en Belgique et au Canada," 102, Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "102 Muffled Voices: Canada's Industrial Women in the 1880s," *Acadiensis* 3, no. 1 (1977).

⁵⁰ In Canada, this desire for balance resulted in the creation of two factions among the commissioners, one considered pro-labour, the other pro-capital, but all members were associated with the ruling Conservative Party. Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs*, 63. See also Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working people* (Ottawa: Deneau & Greenberg, 1981), 49. Though Puissant notes that the Belgian commission was "incontestablement pluraliste," Gubin stresses that, while a Liberal-Conservative balance was evident on the surface, most Liberals were associated with the right wing of the party. Only one Socialist, Hector Denis, sat on the commission, though Edmond Picard had been named but resigned shortly thereafter. See Jean Puissant, "Bruxelles et les événements de 1886," in Marinette Bruwier, ed., *1886, la Wallonie née de la grève ?* (Liège: Archives du futur, 1990), 131, Kurgan-van Hentenryk et al., *La question sociale en Belgique et au Canada*, 97, Jaumain, *Industrialisation et sociétés*, 39.

⁵¹ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Société belge de librairie, 1887), 389.

⁵² In Montreal, the cigar maker J.M. Fortier was accused of such brutality, in graphic detail, by several witnesses who worked or had worked for him. When he himself spoke to the commission, he made no effort to deny the allegations, preferring to justify his actions on the grounds that, by beating his employees, he was giving them valuable life lessons. See *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 5 vols., vol. 1 Québec : 1ère partie (Ottawa: A. Senécal, 1889), 87-88. This event is discussed in Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs*, 209 and, Mann Trofimenkoff, "102 Muffled Voices," 67-68.

the constables some factories hired to enforce discipline to an “Oriental despot.”⁵³ The most frequently cited sources of tension between management and labourers concerned salary and working hours. Faced with pressing financial obligations, concerns over the odours and sounds of the factories seemed less urgent to workers than to the residents of luxurious neighbourhoods. When asked if he found the smells of the foundry in which he worked unbearable, for instance, a Montreal moulder replied that he was generally too busy working to notice such details.⁵⁴ Yet, if we look closely at workers’ testimonies, we see that, much as in Keetje’s confrontation with the workshop environment, there was a strong connection between disagreeable physical experiences and these broader attitudes of mistrust and confrontation.

Indeed, while some factory “operatives,” as the commissioners referred to them, may have been too occupied to notice the foul smells surrounding them, others complained bitterly about the work environment. “Qu’on se figure un vaste hangar surmonté d’un toit vitré, où l’on cuit en été, où en gèle en hiver et où l’eau s’infiltré à travers une quantité de fissures,” one Brussels typographer described his workshop, exemplifying the sentiments of many workers in these two cities.⁵⁵ Another layer of embodied meaning can be read in the expression of repulsion at the smells emanating from the deficient sanitary installations at workers’ disposal. Owen Duffy of Montreal even mentioned that he was forced to stay home at least once a week because of the smell of the water-closets situated next to his workstation.⁵⁶ Many workers defined their workspace in terms of physical dangers, decrying the lack of security measures relative to machinery, materials and chemicals, as well as the risk of fires. Also at issue was the nature of the work they conducted and its effect on their bodies. They breathed chemical emanations in small, unventilated workshops, they climbed unprotected scaffolds, and they lost limbs to the machines they used. “J’ai appris d’abord mon métier dans une mansarde, puis dans une cave, qui, cependant, appartenait à un patron

⁵³ *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 87-88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁵⁵ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 124.

⁵⁶ *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 516.

fort riche,” noted a shoemaker from Brussels, adding, “j’y ai perdu en grande partie la vue.”⁵⁷

In one gruesome tale, a Montreal carpenter reported having his entire arm ripped away by a machine on which he was changing the distribution belt, a task he was ordered to perform despite the fact that he was not qualified for it. Did the company he worked for pay any compensation or medical fee, he was asked. “Pas du tout,” he answered, “même qu’ils m’ont reproché le morceau de coton où j’ai reposé après l’accident et qui était tâché de mon sang.”⁵⁸ Many employers denied responsibility for such matters, insisting that their establishments were irreproachable in terms of hygiene and security. Confronted with the testimonials put forth by the workers, the employers placed the responsibility squarely on their shoulders, attributing accidents or deteriorating health to the workers’ lack of attention or propensity to drink on the job. A Brussels ice maker claimed that, “le seul danger réel réside dans la tendance de certains ouvriers qui, au lieu de travailler constamment dans les glacières, se refroidiraient, soit en cuvant leurs trop nombreuses rasades par un petit somme clandestin dans l’une des galeries, soit en essayant de tuer le temps en s’assoyant sur la glace au lieu de travailler,”⁵⁹ tapping into the recurring theme of workers’ supposed propensity for alcoholism, seen in this period as a cause of perceived social degeneration.⁶⁰

c) *Factory inspections*

Another point of comparison in the two states’ responses to the pressures of rapid industrialisation lies in the establishment, during this period, of routine inspections in manufacturing establishments. In Quebec, these were mandated by the 1885

⁵⁷ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d’enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Bruxelles: A. Lesigne, 1887), 7.

⁵⁸ *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 274-275.

⁵⁹ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 121-122. Allusions to workers’ supposed excessive consumption of alcohol were frequent in the depositions. Asked whether his employees practiced a religion, a hat maker retorted simply, “Oui, le culte du schnik.” “Schnick” was a slang word used in nineteenth-century Brussels to designate alcohol. Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 1010.

⁶⁰ Georges Vigarello, *Histoire des pratiques de santé : le sain et le malsain depuis le Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 221.

Manufactory Act,⁶¹ while in Belgium this stemmed from the creation of a ministry for work and industry in 1895. The inspectors' reports for the Montreal and Brussels areas confirm the dangerous and insalubrious conditions denounced by labourers. Year after year, these first-hand witnesses of industrialisation condemned the excessive smoke, noise and dust to which workers were exposed, the lack of adequate ventilation forcing them to breathe perpetually vitiated air, and the absence of appropriate sanitary installations. These observations were rooted in emerging preoccupations with industrial hygiene, during a period in which the dangers of economic space were increasingly seen as superseding the threats associated with the city in general.⁶² From the mid-nineteenth century to World War I, notes Corbin, hygienists became increasingly interested in the working environment, in its ventilation, lighting and heating, conceptualising the factory in relation to its impact on the bodies of those inside.⁶³

To be sure, these inspectors frequently acclaimed what they perceived as major and constant improvements in matters pertaining to safety and hygiene from one year to the next, and expressed their faith in the capacity of modern technology to ensure the corporeal well-being of all who toiled in industry. "Le besoin de bien-être, de luxe même, qui s'est développée dans la société contemporaine, n'est pas sans se manifester dans le domaine industriel," proclaimed Émile Van de Weyer, factory inspector in Brussels.⁶⁴ Noting that steam boilers had once been manufactured by hand in sheds "constantly filled with unbearable smoke, [...] the workman chilled in winter and

⁶¹ Though the Act was passed in 1885, inspectors were only appointed three years later. Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, and Jean-Claude Robert, *Histoire du Québec contemporain*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Montréal: Boréal, 1989), 243. This tardiness was, in fact, criticised in the proceedings of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Capital and Labour discussed above. Harvey, *Révolution industrielle et travailleurs*, 216.

⁶² Vigarello, *Histoire des pratiques de santé*, 197.

⁶³ Alain Corbin, "Douleurs, souffrances et misère du corps," in Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 254.

⁶⁴ Phrases like "Des progrès notables ont été réalisés dans cette voie et la marche satisfaisante de l'inspection, déjà signalée dans les précédant rapports, n'a fait que s'accroître," were repeated year in and year out. Émile Van de Weyer in *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 6^e année (1900)*, 3 and *8^e année (1902)*, 6. In some cases, the inspectors even called for the government to be patient with the factory owners, arguing that the rate at which industry was expanding did not leave them time to upgrade their installations. Having started off in small buildings formerly used for housing, many found that the infrastructures that had sufficed for a few individuals could not keep up to the growing labour force, and it was important to ensure that the best hygienic principles be kept in mind as new installations were constructed for these going concerns. See, for instance: "Rapport de Louis Guyon," *Documents de la Session* 27, no. 1 (1893), 259.

sweltering in summer,” the Montreal inspector Louis Guyon rejoiced that the invention of the riveting machine, compressed air and electric lighting had improved not just the productivity of this industry, but also the material conditions and “comfort” in which workers operated.⁶⁵

But beneath this “cheerful and hopeful feeling”⁶⁶ the inspectors’ reports also betrayed a sense of uneasiness with the corporeal realities they witnessed on their visits to manufacturing establishments. If they frequently resorted to bureaucratically dry and repetitive language, there also transpired instances of more vivid indignation. When the inspectors denounced the “glaring neglect” in certain establishments, described them as “ugly, dingy, dirty,” and accused their owners of being “without heart or intellect,” they told their own spatial stories premised on sensorial encounters. In some cases, their concerns had to do with the inadequate safety measures in certain factories. If the generalised spread of “machinisme moderne” facilitated workers’ tasks, it also exposed them to greater physical risk.⁶⁷ While these risks were sometimes attributed to “inattention to duty and giddiness on the part of the operators,”⁶⁸ the inspectors nonetheless recognised a broader problem with bodily safety. Elevator shafts were sometimes left wide open, fire measures were often inexistent, and hydraulic motors, turbines and other machinery were frequently positioned in out-of-reach, obscure, humid and slippery corners, making maintenance and repair work awkward and dangerous. Indeed, the Brussels inspector Pol De Bruycker gave a distinctly corporeal dimension to his annual reports, recounting in gruesome detail the violent burnings, mutilations and deaths, sometimes of young children, he had investigated.⁶⁹

Relatively simple solutions could always be found to problems such as these, argued Guyon: “telle machine dangereuse peut être pourvue d’organes protecteurs, tel ascenseur peut être clôturé, assurant sans grand frais, la vie ou les membres contre la possibilité d’un accident.” Indeed, the real problem was not so outwardly visible, but it spoke directly to people’s physical relationship to the environment. “Dans l’air viciée d’une fabrique, où le travailleur est obligé de passer la moitié de sa vie, il existe un

⁶⁵ “Rapport de Louis Guyon,” *Documents de la Session* #7 39, no. 1 (1906), 181.

⁶⁶ “Report of James Mitchell” *Sessional Papers* #7 35, no. 1 (1902), 147.

⁶⁷ Pol de Bruycker in *Rapports annuels de l’inspection du travail 15^e année (1909)*, 28-29.

⁶⁸ “Report of James Mitchell,” *Sessional Papers* #7 39, no. 1 (1906), 188

⁶⁹ For the period, see De Bruycker’s reports spanning the years 1905 to 1913.

danger bien plus grand, parce qu'il est continu," noted the inspector, for whom the true menace lay in the air entering workers lungs, harming their bodies, ruining their youth.⁷⁰ From this perspective, the culprits of industrialisation were the acids used in the manufacture of matches, paper or even explosives, the various types of dust ingested on a daily basis – not detectable by sight, and yet so highly pernicious to workers' bodies.

The inspectors also regularly decried the overall hygienic conditions of certain establishments, particularly in older workshops that operated from converted basements and dwellings, where "les voûtes ou les plafonds de ces souterrains sont bas, les fenêtres sont petites ou se réduisent à de simples soupiraux, l'éclairage y est artificiel, l'évacuation de l'air vicié et éventuellement des gaz ou vapeurs s'y effectue trop lentement."⁷¹ In some cases, the filth and disorder that prevailed in many workshops appeared even more harmful to workers' health than the actual tasks they performed or substances they handled. Accumulations of trash, unclean lavatories, puddles of gear grease on the floor and closed windows preventing air circulation all contributed to what the doctor described as a dangerous accumulation of germs. Even attempts to sweep factory floors worsened the situation. "Le balayage soulève les germes, les poussières malsaines, et les porte aux organes respiratoires. Fait aux heures du travail, il constitue une véritable hérésie contre la science sanitaire," professed the Montreal doctor C.I. Samson, emphasising his faith in the hygienic principles of his times.⁷²

This poor sanitation, they added, did not correspond with modern management techniques that sought to maximise the worker's physical output for greater productivity and efficiency. New installations were "clean, warm, well lighted and ventilated," noted the Montreal inspector James Mitchell, because "dirty surroundings, excessive heat or cold, poor light and bad air induce physical discomforts, which tend to the production of an inferior quality of work, as well as a decreased quantity."⁷³ While noting that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, basement workshops had almost disappeared from the district for which she was responsible, Louisa King observed that "this is due less to

⁷⁰ "Rapport de Louis Guyon," *Documents de la Session*, 27 no. 1 (1893) 226.

⁷¹ Van Overstraeten in *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 1^{er} année (1895)*, 71.

⁷² "Rapport du Dr C.I. Samson," *Documents de la Session*, 27 no. 1 (1893), 252.

⁷³ "Report of James Mitchell" *Sessional Papers #7 36*, no. 1 (1903), 203. The Brussels inspector Émile Van de Weyer observed that "l'amélioration des conditions hygiéniques influe favorablement sur le rendement du travail de l'ouvrier." *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 8^e année (1902)*, 7.

a humane feeling on the part of the employers than to the fact that artificial light injured the sight of the work-people, thereby causing the work and consequently the employers' profit to suffer."⁷⁴

Was it up to the workers to keep their work areas clean, or were the employers responsible for providing them with adequate facilities? The inspectors did not always agree on the answer to this question, but they always discussed it in terms of the interaction between bodies and space. What is particularly revealing, however, is the tone on which hygienic problems were reported, a tone that betrayed the inspectors' own disgust at what they saw, showing how they transposed these experiences with space into the ideas that they formulated about it. Take, for instance, Samson's recounting of the sanitary installations he witnessed in certain factories, a theme frequently comment upon by the inspectors. Leaving no doubt as to the "répugnance qu'inspirent ces cabinets," he described how "faute de siège, le visiteur grimpe sur le rebord, s'accroupit et le parquet reçoit presque inévitablement [sic] une certaine quantité d'urine qui pénètre jusqu'à l'entrevous ou qui est censée être absorbée par une couche de tan concassé qu'on renouvelle de temps à autres."⁷⁵ Acknowledging the nature of the conditions they faced, Samson is also critical of workers for not improving work-place hygiene. This detailed description of toilets attests to this, and reveals how his own understanding of industrial space, and of the workers who occupied it, was conditioned by his personal sensibilities.

III. REPRESENTING THE WORKER'S BODY

Industrial work was, above all, physical work, and the tenets of industrial hygiene concerned not just the spaces of production, but also the bodies of those who produced. Having considered the atmosphere around and inside factories in terms of the physical experiences they generated, the final part of this chapter will move the focus from the factory environment to representations of the body itself. Recurring images of

⁷⁴ "Report of Louisa King" *Sessional Papers* #7 35, no. 1 (1902), 171.

⁷⁵ "Rapport du Dr C.I. Samson" *Documents de la Session* 27, no. 1 (1893), 253-254. In Brussels, De Bruycker noted that he frequently received complaints from workers themselves about the state of factory washrooms. While these were sometimes exaggerated, he agreed that "à côté d'installations répondant aux exigences du progrès moderne, on en trouve d'autres qui laissent trop à désirer." *Rapports annuels de l'inspection du travail 12^e année (1906)*, 23.

the strong, powerful and muscular bodies of valiant workers or, more frequently, of the suffering and deteriorated bodies of overworked labourers, reveal the terms in which doctors, hygienists, inspectors, reformers and authors conceptualised the effects of industrialisation. As Corbin reminds us, these contrasting images of workers' bodies produced by elites must be treated with caution, as they are the product of observations based on specific convictions and expectations through which workers' behaviour, and their place in society were defined. "Parler ici du corps du travailleur, c'est déjà s'inscrire dans une certaine manière de lire le social," he notes.⁷⁶ But these representations also allow us to discern the processes that shaped these constructions, and to account for the relative fear or admiration they inspired.

a) *An industrial metaphor*

During this period, the worker's body was often put forth as a metaphor for industrialisation itself. It was frequently represented as a machine, a tool for production. And like the machines that required large shipments of coal and vast hydraulic resources to operate, so too did the working body need fuel. Like the machines whose output sullied the air of the city, so too did the working body pollute its own environment. Like the machines that required upkeep and maintenance, so too was the working body susceptible to overheating and malfunctioning. As historian Anson Rabinbach argues, this metaphor enthused scientists and social reformers of the late nineteenth century, who saw in this equation of the body and machine a "new scientific and cultural framework" that would lead to greater productivity. Harnessing this energy, exploiting this "human motor" more efficiently, also held the promise of objective and neutral solutions to labour-related economic and political conflicts. A new "science of work," led researchers to believe they could "resolve the 'worker question' through science" by investigating, studying, measuring and photographing the body's movements, its rhythms and labour capacities. Maximising the efficiency of the working body, went the reasoning, would nullify the perceived advantage in productivity of overly long shifts, and convince workers of the validity of employers' claims by replacing moral

⁷⁶ Alain Corbin, "Douleurs, souffrances et misère du corps" in Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 251.

exhortations to work with “experiment and reasoned argument.”⁷⁷ Like the city itself, the worker’s body in this period was conceptualised in rationalised terms, as an object that could be shaped and moulded according to imperatives of progress and prosperity.⁷⁸

This perspective appears quite clearly in scientific investigations on the nature of work. In 1910, the Solvay Institute of Brussels published a detailed study of the food consumption of 1065 Belgian workers, examining and representing their bodies in rigorously empirical terms. The authors developed their ideas about the body in tandem with ideas about the industrial establishments that transformed the landscape. Whether sleeping or labouring, argued Auguste Slosse, the body was always at work in some way, and his description of the body’s pulsations and secretions are reminiscent of contemporary descriptions of industrial machines with their motors running and fan belts spinning, producing energy and generating waste: “Le cœur bat et lance à chaque pulsation un poids connu de sang dans les artères, les glandes digestives secrètent leurs sucs et continuent l’élaboration commencée des aliments; [...] la respiration apporte au sang l’oxygène vivifiant et le débarrasse de l’acide carbonique résidu des oxydations internes.” Like the intensification of industry that fuelled modern life, intensifying the speed of change, the movement of people and ideas, the human body also quickened its activity with industrialisation: “l’activité fonctionnelle de l’organisme augmente; la respiration devient plus active, le pouls s’accélère; l’intensité des actes chimiques grandit.” And, just like the machines that moved industry forward, the “machine humaine” needs energy for its “combustions internes.”⁷⁹ The measure of the appropriate types and quantities of food required to maximize the human body’s productive potential drew heavily on contemporary references to industrialisation.

Pushing this metaphor to its limits, a Brussels industrial journal published a table comparing the relative horsepower costs of a variety of “agents de force motrice.” It

⁷⁷ Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1-8, 208-209.

⁷⁸ As historian Georges Vigarello explains, “la machine corporelle n’est plus simple mécanique, comme au XVIIe siècle, avec ses mouvements aspirants ou refoulants; elle n’est plus simple lacs de fibres, comme au XVIIIe siècle, avec ses filaments enchevêtrés responsables des forces et des résistances, ou même simple focalisations de tensions musculaires, comme au début du XIXe siècle. Elle est machine productrice d’énergie, moteur créateur de rendement : un équivalent des engins à vapeur animant les fabriques de l’industrie du milieu du XIXe siècle.” Vigarello, *Histoire des pratiques de santé*, 230.

⁷⁹ A. Slosse and E. Waxweiler, *Enquête sur l’alimentation de 1065 ouvriers belges, Recherches sur le travail humain dans l’industrie* (Bruxelles: Misch et Thron, 1910), 26.

was calculated that for one man, “fournissant un effort moyen de 7 kilos sur une manivelle de 0.35 mètres de rayon, travaillant 8 heures consécutives à la vitesse de 30 tours à la minute pour gagner 3 fr. 50, le prix de cheval vapeur sera de 4 fr. 25.” Compared to a horse or an ox at around 1 frank per horsepower, or especially to a steam engine, fixed motor, windmill, hydraulic wheel or turbine at a few cents each, man was a costly machine indeed, but, in the eyes of some industrialists, a machine nonetheless, whose cost and efficiency could be measure by cold, rational and scientific calculations.⁸⁰ Little wonder that, at the *Commission du travail* hearings in Brussels, one worker declared that “l’ouvrier qui rentre dans une grande usine, n’est dorénavant plus un homme: c’est un numéro chargé de rapporter autant de dividende par an et à force d’être en contact avec une machine, il devient lui-même une machine, mais une machine qui se détraque vite.”⁸¹

Much as the machines used in factories polluted cities with the smoke, dust, smells and sounds they emitted, the body at work also vitiated the air around it, further poisoning the atmosphere. In *Le livre du travailleur*, a guide for workers about health and safety in the factory, the hygienist Lucy Schmidt noted that, even at rest, through breathing alone, the body’s emanations were harmful. Add the effects of smoking, of poor dental and corporal hygiene, of artificial lightning, of coal heating, of the various dust particles in factories, and workers, according to the author, found themselves carrying out their physically strenuous activities in a toxic cloud formed in large part by their own bodies and bodily practices. In this economic context dictated by an impulse for sustained industrial production, these ambient threats to the body were heightened by the body’s own inability to keep up with modernity’s rapid pace. Indeed, Schmidt and many other hygienists pointed to overwork, or *surmenage*, an excess of intense physical effort, as a major problem facing not just individual workers, but entire industries that

⁸⁰ “Vapeur et muscle,” *L’écho minier et industriel* 3, (December 1911), 322. As Rabinbach argues, measuring and calculating bodily expenditure in rational ways was a fundamental objective of the modern science of work’s objective to do away with poorly organised and inefficient work. “Breaking sharply with earlier doctrines of moral and political economy, the new science focussed on the body of the worker. Predicated on the metaphor of the human motor and buoyed by a utopian image of the body without fatigue, the search for the precise laws of muscles, nerves, and the efficient expenditure of energy centred on the physiology of labour,” he notes. Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 10.

⁸¹ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d’enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 45.

relied on their capacity to maintain a rhythm of production.⁸² The human machine, like the mechanical one, was prone to breaking down when overtaxed, and by the turn of the century, notes Rabinbach, fatigue had replaced idleness as the main challenge to productivity in the minds of the bourgeoisie. Like other forms of energy, human energy was seen as a valuable resource, one that had to be managed and conserved to avoid waste and inefficiency. This framework intensified hygienists' reliance on vivid descriptions of the body and the effects of the factory upon it.



Figure 13 The worker's body. Illustration by the Belgian artist Constantin Meunier,⁸³

⁸² Lucy Schmidt, *Le livre du travailleur : hygiène industrielle* (Frameries: Dufrane-Friart, 1913), 7-9, 15-16.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

As a result, industrial work was typically represented in terms of the painful muscle spasms, the accident-inducing fatigue or the life-threatening infectious diseases to which workers were exposed. Those who defended workers' interests before production-driven industrialists used modern scientific discourse and drew on bodily representations to point out that there were physical limits to the amount of time a person could work, such that regular days of rest and reasonable hours were also in the employer's best interest.⁸⁴ As the doctor, socialist activist and former worker César de Paepe testified at the *Commission du travail* hearings in Brussels, the nature of any type of work could be summed up in the most basic scientific terms: all work, whether physical or cerebral, "est un mouvement une dépense de force; c'est à dire une dépense de calories et d'électricité, lesquels sont produits par l'oxydation des aliments." Here again, the machine-body equation is invoked. But in this definition, in his focus on movement, electricity, consumption of energy, Paepe, substitutes the individual body for the very atmosphere of modernity defining the period. He continues by describing the workings of lactic acid, again representing industrial activity in terms of fatigue, "qui bientôt devient douleur, et donne lieu aux contractures involontaires, aux crampes, et à l'épuisement nervo-musculaire." A further threat to the body inherent in industrial work was the necessity for the body to remain in the same position for long periods of time. In many occupations, notes the doctor, "le corps est constamment ployé en avant, replié sur lui-même, ce qui gêne l'estomac, le foie, les organes respiratoires surtout," all of

⁸⁴ Though Corbin cautions against the "dolorisme excessif" colouring such representations, Rabinbach demonstrates how the ideal of a "body without fatigue" was shared by proponents of the science of work and workers alike. Alain Corbin, "Douleurs, souffrances et misère du corps," 251, Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 1-8, 208-209. The reduction of work hours was the object of sociological and economic research during this period in Belgium, and both liberal and socialist specialists agreed that such changes would result in gains for workers and employers alike. The Liège-area chemical manufacturer, L.-G. Fromont, observed the effects of reducing his employees' work day from 10 to 8 hours over a twelve-year period. In his study, published by the liberal Solvay Institute, he pointed to a distinct increase in productivity and improvements to workers' health. Fromont also denoted changes in moral terms, pointing to a decrease in alcohol consumption by workers, and a greater spirit of order and discipline among them. L.-G. Fromont, *Une expérience industrielle de réduction de la journée de travail*, *Instituts Solvay. Travaux de l'Institut de sociologie. Actualités sociales, n° 10* (Bruxelles: Misch & Thron, 1906). For his part, the professor and socialist politician Émile Vinck published an essay on the question of the eight-hour day in an international context, insisting that shortened hours led to increased productivity, as well as to corporeal and spiritual improvements for workers. Émile Vinck, *La réduction des heures de travail et la journée de huit heures* (Bruxelles: H. Lamertin, 1904).

which favoured the onset of various troubles and ailments specific to the various trades.⁸⁵

Research in the period brought to light a host of unsuspected physical afflictions associated with the intensification of industrial work. Schmidt discusses how workers exposed to the sensory stimuli of the factory risked having their senses dulled, or even destroyed. Insufficient lighting, for example, forced people to bring their eyes too close to their work, resulting in myopia and blindness, while overly bright lights fatigued and weakened the eyes. Flickering light, from gas lamps or candles, caused painful stress on the retina, while light that released too much heat caused the eyes to dry up, leading to irritation, redness and headaches, making work impossible. Alternatively, workers who manufactured boilers, machines and other metal products in foundries were often prone to deafness. “En effet,” she explains, “les nerfs de l’ouïe reçoivent, de la part des liquides de l’oreille interne qui conduisent le son, des chocs répétés, trop vibrants, qui ne tardent pas à fatiguer les nerfs et bientôt à en émousser la sensibilité.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d’enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 64-65. During this period, industrial work was considered by hygienists to be highly problematic in terms of physical deformations it caused, and was seen as the embodiment of a degenerating society, giving rise to an alarmist discourse, and to a specific hygienic pedagogy of posture within schools. See Georges Vigarello, *Le corps redressé : histoire d’un pouvoir pédagogique* (Paris: J.P. Delarge, 1978), 186-191.

⁸⁶ Schmidt, *Le livre du travailleur*, 19-20.



Figure 14 “Ouvrier peintre.” Photograph of a worker suffering from years of exposure to lead published in the Belgian socialist journal *Abonnement Germinal*.⁸⁷

Finally, a direct bodily consequence of this *surmenage* was the risk of contracting diseases, caused either by the deleterious gases and dust produced by the manufacturing process or by the poor hygienic practices that favoured the transmission of various infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, typhus, cholera, or smallpox. The Province of Quebec’s 1910 study on tuberculosis blamed the “atmosphère poussiéreuse et enfumée” and the “travail épuisant” in factories for the high mortality rates resulting from the spread of this disease, which, noted Schmidt, was also depriving Belgium of its “forces vives.”⁸⁸ Moreover, according to Delphis Brochu’s analysis of medical hygiene in manufacturing establishments, Montreal was fertile territory for pulmonary disease in particular. The city’s factories and workshops, he stressed, were “des milieux où l’ouvrier vit dans la respiration habituelle d’un air vicié par toutes sortes de vapeurs

⁸⁷ F. Frère, “Les maladies professionnelles,” *Abonnement Germinal* 8 (1912), 10.

⁸⁸ Province de Québec, *Rapport de la Commission Royale de la Tuberculose*, 14. Schmidt, *Le livre du travailleur*, 21.

délétères, chargé de poussières les plus nuisibles, et soumis alternativement à toutes les variations du chaud, du froid ou de l'humidité," all factors that the medical community recognised as direct causes of respiratory and other lung-related ailments.⁸⁹

Publishing an overview of work-related diseases in the socialist journal, *Abonnement Germinal*, the doctor F. Frère used particularly graphic bodily references to give additional impact to his appeals for improved conditions. Detailed descriptions of the transformations of workers' bodies as they contracted these diseases, explicit references to the coughing, choking, indigestion, vomiting, cramping and paralysis that caused such "souffrances atroces" and "épouvantables" used the tormented body of the worker as a means to make a broader political statement about the nature of industrialisation. Take the worker suffering from saturnism, or lead poisoning: his appearance is pale, "il est blafard, terne, parfois d'un ton grisâtre. Les sillons et les rides paraissent comme passées à la mine de plomb, alors que le reste de la peau est terreux, grisâtre, d'aspect sale. La décoloration des muqueuses vient surajouter sa note à la teinte plombée du visage," all of which is accompanied by a constant feeling of weariness, fatigue and breathlessness, repeated palpitations, and indigestion. Further visual emphasis is provided by accompanying photographs of crippled workers whose careers and life expectancy have been cut short by this debilitating disease.⁹⁰ The body, in these vivid representations, was effectively relied upon to establish a meaningful connection between the realities of industrialisation and broader critiques of industrial society.

b) *Women workers*

Inspectors and hygienists expressed a particular concern for the bodies of working women, whose presence and visibility increased considerably through the nineteenth century.⁹¹ As in Doff's account and in the Royal Commission testimonies,

⁸⁹ Delphis Brochu, *Mémoire sur la nécessité d'une inspection hygiénique médicale des ateliers et des manufactures* (Québec: Imprimerie de J. Dussault, 1889), 5-6.

⁹⁰ F. Frère, "Les maladies professionnelles," 5-13.

⁹¹ By 1911, women represented 22% of the workforce in Montreal, 40% of them employed in the industrial sector. Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart, "Ouvrières et travailleuses montréalaises, 1900-1940," in Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard, eds., *Travailleuses et féministes. Les femmes dans la société québécoise* (Montréal: Boréal, 1983), 100-101. In Brussels, figures for 1910 show women made up 43% of the active population, one third of whom worked in industries. Eliane Gubin, "La grande ville, un lieu

women were often subjected to violence and mistreatment within the walls of industrial establishments, and in both cities pleas were often made for particular attention to this issue.⁹² In a long list of demands presented to the *Commission du travail*, a delegate of the Ligue ouvrière de Molenbeek called for serious inquiry into factories and workshops that employed women and children “afin de connaître comment sont traités ces êtres là, et les précautions qui sont prises pour les préserver des dangers des machines avec lesquelles ils sont journellement en contact.”⁹³ Though the recommendation was not taken up in Belgium, such investigations were carried out in Quebec as of 1896, when female inspectors were hired to report on industrial establishments that employed women. After this date, the tone of the reports changes noticeably as gender-related issues concerning industrial work become far more prominent. “The textile and other industries where children, girls and women are employed have our especial care as there is much greater cause for vigilance and close supervision there than in places where only men are employed,” ensured factory inspector James Mitchell, leaving no doubt as to his thoughts on women’s particular vulnerability.⁹⁴

In these reports, as well as in other sources from both cities, the uneasiness was centred on the proximity in which women and men worked. The notion that members of the two sexes should physically exert themselves while positioned side by side struck

féminin. L'exemple de Bruxelles avant 1914,” in Eliane Gubin and Jean-Pierre Nandrin, *La ville et les femmes en Belgique : histoire et sociologie* (Bruxelles: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1993), 88-89. The same sources show that approximately one third of women workers were employed as domestic workers in this period. For more on domestic workers in both Belgium and Quebec, see Eliane Gubin and Valérie Piette, eds., *Domesticité*, vol. 15-16 of *Sextant* (Bruxelles: Groupe interdisciplinaire d'Etudes sur les Femmes, 2002).

⁹² Historians have chronicled the abuses and exploitation to which working women were subjected in this period: long hours, derisive pay, sweating system and dangerous conditions, among others. On Montreal, see especially Micheline Dumont et al., *L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles*, 2nd ed. (Montréal: Le Jour, 1992), Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender and Daily Survival in Industrialising Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), Lavigne and Pinard, eds., *Travailleuses et féministes*, Julie Podmore, “St. Lawrence Boulevard as Third City. Place, Gender, and Difference along Montreal's 'Main'” (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1999). On Brussels, see Delfosse, “L'État et les femmes en Belgique (fin XIXe - début XXe siècle),” *Res Publica* 28, no. 1 (1986). See also volume 4 of *Sextant* on work (1995), and volume 7 of *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie*, a special issue on female labour (1989). Despite these conditions, Gubin sees the increasing participation of Brussels women in industrial work as a source of emancipation in this period, affording them a more public and visible forum of affirmation than did domestic work. Eliane Gubin, “La grande ville, un lieu féminin. L'exemple de Bruxelles avant 1914,” 94.

⁹³ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d'enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 17.

⁹⁴ “Report of James Mitchell” *Sessional Papers* #7 35, no. 1 (1902), 147.

many observers as indecent, and their comments are coloured by moral undertones that determined their sense of appropriate interaction between men and women.⁹⁵ In this vein, the lack of separate sanitary facilities for each sex in many factories was considered particularly problematic and was systematically pointed out.⁹⁶ Indeed, ten years after women began inspecting Montreal's industrial establishments, Louise Provencher noted that progress was being made to ensure women's well-being in the workshops, but wondered "does not the moral side of her nature also need to be watched and safeguarded?" For the "inspectresses," as they were called, the conversations that "working girls" could be heard having in the workshops, even the "illustrated catalogues and advertisements of at least doubtful taste" to which their eyes were daily exposed, were enough to make her blush.⁹⁷ While many workshops placed their male and female employees in separate rooms, Provencher recommended that this practice be made mandatory, that women workers be supervised only by other women and that all conversation be banned during working hours. Furthermore, she repeatedly suggested that the very rhythm of the work day be modified to better accommodate women workers, advocating separate beginning and end times for shifts, allowing women to arrive later in order to avoid walking to work among the crowds of men that descended into the dark streets in the early morning hours.⁹⁸

While Provencher and other inspectors expressed reservations about the propriety of women's factory work and fought to establish what they considered appropriate conditions, others were opposed to the very idea, and conservative commentators in both Belgium and Quebec tapped into the prevailing ideology that women's social role was in the home, emphasizing in spatial and bodily terms their vision

⁹⁵ Indeed, as Susan Mann points out in reference to the Canadian labour commission, the middle class commissioners were much less interested in women as workers, than in the more salacious issue of working-class women's morality, or rather on the perceived immorality of women workers, reinforced, in their minds, by the coarse language to which women were exposed in the factory. The commissioners, notes Mann, "searched diligently for what they most expected from working-class women – scandal." Mann Trofimenkoff, "102 Muffled Voices." Gubin has made a similar point concerning Belgian women. "Les sources témoignent d'une attention soutenue des observateurs chaque fois que les activités féminines entrent en crise ou en conflit avec les valeurs morales," she argues. "C'est ainsi qu'il est plus facile de faire l'histoire des prostituées que celle des couturières ou des repasseuses." Eliane Gubin, "La grande ville, un lieu féminin. L'exemple de Bruxelles avant 1914," 83.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Inspector Louisa King's first report, in *Sessional Papers* #7 31, no. 1 (1896), 65.

⁹⁷ "Report of L.D. Provencher" *Sessional Papers* #7 39, no. 1 (1907), 192.

⁹⁸ "Report of L.D. Provencher" *Sessional Papers* #7 32, no. 1 (1898), 83, and "Report of L.D. Provencher" *Sessional Papers* #7 33, no. 1 (1900), 68.

of the factory as inappropriate for women. “Quoi! Une femme dans l’atelier?” exclaimed the Belgian priest and educator Victor Van Tricht. Then, responding to his own disbelief, “Oui! Nous vivons en des temps qui nous ont fait voir ce lamentable spectacle!” According to his understanding of femininity, women’s presence in industry exposed them to both a physical and social environment that debased them and robbed them of their very nature:

Elle s’en ira donc aussi, loin de son mari, loin de son enfant; elle, une femme, franchira le seuil tumultueux de l’atelier et des filatures. Suffoquée d’abord par cette atmosphère où volent des lazzis qui la font rougir, tremblante d’effroi au milieu de ces ouvriers dont les regards et les sourires la brûlent comme un fer chaud, ah! elle souffre dans son âme et dans son honneur!

Mais laissez faire le temps, laissez s’évanouir les premières rougeurs de sa pudeur insultée, laissez se calmer les premiers sursaut de sa chasteté menacé, elle se fera à ce monde et à cette atmosphère. Aux propos des hommes, elle aura des réponses qui feront rire; elle aura, pour opposer à leurs regards et à leurs entreprises, ce dévergondage insolent des yeux, du geste et de l’allure devant lequel nous nous sentons glacés d’horreur.

In his characteristically evocative style, Tricht lambastes modern industry. The physicality of the factory space, the tumult, the suffocating air, the burning iron, represent his interior fears about the unhealthy moral atmosphere that corrupts women through the transformation of gendered interaction, down to insolent eyes and disrespectful gestures. Can such a woman still be a mother, he wonders.⁹⁹

Though their perspectives on the merit of female labour varied, commentators frequently defined these moral considerations in terms of corporeal preoccupations, ranging, as in the examples above, from immediate issues of personal risk and security to more socially-grounded questions of appropriate bodily deportment. Hygienists, for their part, brought the issue to the body itself much more directly. For instance, women were considered to be at greater risk of suffering from the effects of *surmenage* because they were seen as physically weaker than men.¹⁰⁰ The Montreal-area hygienist F.A. Baillaigé, who focused on both the moral and the more strictly bodily factors, argued that legislation should preclude women from working in industries presenting more

⁹⁹ Victor Van Tricht, *L’enfant du pauvre. Causerie*, 5th ed. (Namur: P. Godenne, 1895), 39-40.

¹⁰⁰ Province de Québec, *Rapport de la Commission Royale de la Tuberculose*, 56.

serious health hazards. Citing the case of Belgium as an example not to follow, Baillaigé referred to women's factory work as a "crime antisocial." "Je demanderai encore si une jeune fille courbée tout le jour, durant des mois sur une machine à coudre n'y contractera pas quelqu'infirmité," he demanded, using this vivid bodily imagery for added emphasis.¹⁰¹ As for César de Paepe, he was clearly uncomfortable with the fact that "les femmes envahissent peu à peu beaucoup d'industries bruxelloises où on ne les trouvait guère autrefois." Cautious to avoid any overt moral judgement, Paepe relied on an alarmist description of the consequences of industrial work on women's bodies, consequences behind which also hid much broader menaces to society. The "sexe faible," he argued, was best kept away from industrial establishments, too harsh for "l'organisme féminin, car, non seulement les enfants se ressentent directement des maladies de leurs mères [sic], mais encore, ces travaux pénibles, ou au-dessus des forces de la femme, occasionnent chez elles des déviations de la colonne vertébrale et des rétrécissements du bassin, [...] et ils frappent ainsi les générations futures avant qu'elles ne soient nées."¹⁰² From individual back problems to the jeopardised health of an entire generation, it was but a small step.

As these discourses demonstrate, questions about women's bodies had a distinct place in broader corporeal representations of industrialised society. Evolving ideas about women and their place in the workforce were thus part of this debate, and there was certainly no unanimity among women themselves. While the middle-class female factory inspectors attempted to mediate between predominant social and cultural norms and the determination of working-class women to join the industrial workforce, other women positioned themselves more strongly in favour of, or in opposition to female labour. Relying on her research in industrial hygiene, Lucy Schmidt objected in no uncertain terms to the presence of women in industrial establishments. "La femme," she argued, along the same lines as Paepe, "perd, dans l'industrie sa force et sa santé; et ainsi, elle ne se lèse pas seulement elle-même, en tant que créature humaine : l'âme même de la race, le germe de la vie ouvrière est atteint par le travail des femmes dans les

¹⁰¹ F. A. Baillaigé, *La nature, la race, la santé dans leurs rapports avec la productivité du travail; applications à la province de Québec* (Joliette: chez l'auteur, 1890), 59-63.

¹⁰² Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d'enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 63.

industries qui leur demande un rude effort ou leur font séjourner dans des atmosphères insalubres.”

For Schmidt, the judgement was unequivocal: women who exposed themselves to the poisons of industry risked degeneration and death, if not a miserable existence, “pire que la mort elle-même!”¹⁰³ While Schmidt’s point of view was premised more on corporeal concerns than on political or moral convictions, feminists of the period refuted the argument that the physical risk of industrial work was greater for women than for men, seeing this as little more than a perpetuation of existing inequalities. The Montreal Local Council of Women and its president, Julia Drummond, for instance, had lobbied actively for the appointment of women inspectors before 1896, denouncing the fact that women were placed in the same category as children when it came to regulating the length of work days. Men and women, they argued, were to be seen as equals in the industrial workforce, and the benefits of legislation enforcing shorter hours and adequate conditions “should be secured for all.” Given that women were actively seeking equal educational and professional opportunities and fighting for equal pay for equal work, it seemed inappropriate to them to request special privileges for industrial work in particular, privileges that in any case served to justify existing salary disparities.¹⁰⁴

c) *Imagining the worker*

The imprint of industry on the urban fabric in these cities was such that reflections on the corporeal nature of this process was by no means limited to its direct participants, or to scientifically educated experts in the field. These questions also preoccupied those who commented on the city in more impressionistic, literary terms.

¹⁰³ Schmidt, *Le livre du travailleur*, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Local Council of Women of Montreal, *Montreal Local Council of Women: 21st anniversary, 1893-1915* (Montreal: Witness, 1915), 16. See also Micheline Dumont and Louise Toupin, eds., *La pensée féministe au Québec. Anthologie, 1900-1985* (Montréal: Remue-ménage, 2003), 82-84. The same reasoning was voiced at the 1912 Congrès féministe international de Bruxelles, where in a session on women’s work, it was noted that legislation was needed for all workers, and that limiting government intervention to women weakened their cause, excluding them from certain jobs and responsibilities, confining them to the bottom of the pay scale. See Rutgers-Hoitsema, “La législation et le travail de la femme” in Marie Popelin, ed., *Actes du Congrès féministe international de Bruxelles, 1912. 1892-1912* (Bruxelles: Charles Bulens, 1912), 55-61. Belgian legislation on women’s work, and feminist responses to it, are discussed in Jean-Pierre Nandrin, “De la protection à une égalité formelle. Perspectives historiennes sur les législations du travail de nuit des femmes en Belgique,” *Sextant* 4 (1995), Marie-Thérèse Coenen, “L’interdiction du travail de nuit de la travailleuse,” *Chronique féministe* 52 (1994).

Through these representations emerge tensions between images of the bruised and battled labourer, whose suffering is the embodiment of antimodern critiques of industrial development, and of the powerful, muscular worker, whose strength and courage gave corporeal form to a cherished optimism in industrial expansion, prosperity and social advancement.

“Je ne me lasse pas de contempler les pauvres qui travaillent depuis deux jours sous ma fenêtre,” comments Laurent, the protagonist of Georges Eekhoud’s 1904 novel, *L’autre vue*. Though he is the son of a wealthy bourgeois family, the young man refuses the social distinctions to which he is expected to adhere, and as the novel progresses, he actively, if rather condescendingly, observes and seeks out the company of workers.¹⁰⁵ As he contemplates the small group of construction workers, he especially notices the sounds of their labour and the fluid movement of their bodies. “J’aime la musique de leur ‘demoiselles,’ le timbre m’en est cher,” he continues in reference to the sounds made by tools of their trade. And as he watches their postures and movements, “accroupis ou debout, au travail ou au repos, toujours ils me séduisent par leur dégaine plastique et ingénue.” Laurent’s admiration extends even to their facial features, which he describes in detail, noting, “Le bleu de leurs yeux d’enfants, le corail de leurs lèvres succulentes rehausse si délicieusement leurs visages hâlés!”¹⁰⁶ In this scene, we see how this otherwise unremarkable occurrence takes on a special emotional significance for the author, whose representation of work relies on the bodies of the workers, while the sensorial – in this case almost sensuous – language with which he portrays them speaks to the intimate and interior nature of his contemplation.

A promotional pamphlet on Montreal, released to commemorate Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, and in so doing celebrate Montreal’s metropolitan expansion and its place in the British Empire, used similar language in reference to the city’s industrial capacity. In contrast to Eekhoud’s more private admiration, the tone here is celebratory

¹⁰⁵ In his dictionary entry on this novel, literary scholar Paul Aron writes, “le roman se montre favorable à la classe ouvrière. Il décrit, sans condescendance, des prolétaires et des sous-prolétaires.” But if Laurent is indeed an “amoureux de la classe laborieuse,” his tone is sometimes highly paternalistic and patronizing. See Aron’s entry in Vic Nachtergaele and Raymond Trousson, eds., *Lettres françaises de Belgique. Dictionnaire des oeuvres*, 4 vols., vol. 1 *Le Roman* (Paris: Duculot, 1988), 40-41. For an analysis of how Belgian authors responded to the tumults of the period, see Paul Aron, “Des années folles à la drôle de guerre,” in Christian Berg and Pierre Halen, eds., *Littératures belges de langue française (1830-2000) : histoire & perspectives* (Bruxelles: Le Cri, 2000), 113-173.

¹⁰⁶ Georges Eekhoud, *L’autre vue* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1904), 15-16.

and triumphant, almost exuberant. Though Montreal's recent history is portrayed as one of "commercial and financial matters," of "peaceful if unromantic development which builds a state of mighty ends," the author nevertheless wants to add a warmer, more human twist to the story. "Nay, commerce is not unromantic," he insists, using the atmosphere of the factory and the bodies of workers inside to support his assertion that it is only "constant life within [industry's] bounds" that has "but dulled the mind to it."

The dilettante who peers in at the rolling mills' doors, where titans, half-nude, swing the white hot bars from infernal fires, and others shape them like children playing with putty; who passes through the sugar refineries, where, percolating through enormous filters, or boiling to grain in huge vacuum kettles, the sweet produce of the cane is prepared for market; who visits the electric engines of the Street Railway or the Royal Electric, where at headlong speed the spinning wheels furnish the energy which moves half the town by day and lights it by night; who penetrates to the mysterious precincts of the gas works, where, in their round houses the vast receivers rise and fall like balloons: such a man will see the romance not seen by others.¹⁰⁷

The contrast with the description of industrial work in the Commission testimonials is remarkable. Here the workers are like a breed of supermen who handle their tools as a child plays with toys, their brute strength emphasised by their near nakedness. They do not suffer from their work, but strive on the hellish atmosphere and fiery heat. The imagery is vivid, highlighting the physical experience of the spectacle of industrialisation in a glorification of the economic elite's achievements and of their pride in their city.

But against these celebratory spatial stories of titans and massive engines, others saw the state of factories and workers' bodies in a worrisome light. Here the workshop atmosphere is degenerative and harmful, while workers' bodies are weakened, damaged and suffering. In the well-known observation of urban mores, *Montreal by Gaslight*, this atmosphere is used to "expose" the city's "sin, shame and sorrow" in an attempt to "stir up citizens to seek a remedy for each particular evil." The "hideous noises" and smoke, the "weary toil" in the factories, workshops, mills and foundries debase workers, exposing them to the worst "social, mental, moral and physical" conditions, writes the author, making explicit references to the Royal Commission and taking readers on a tour

¹⁰⁷ *The Metropolitan Jubilee Souvenir* (Montreal: W. Wallach, 1897), 7.

of the city's cotton mills, boot and shoe establishments, and its henceforth notorious cigar factories. The author brings us in, "up two flights of narrow stairs," onto a workfloor drowned in "the sound of machinery and the hum of voices." Continuing, the author wants to make readers feel the atmosphere for themselves: "Here, in stifling air foul with odours of tobacco, machine-oil, perspiration, and a thousand other evil-smelling substances, are seated the slaves of the leaf." Men, women, and children – no one is spared the long hours for meagre pay. "There are no toilet appliances, no fire escapes, no facilities for ventilation: there is nothing but work and a brutal foreman to enforce it."¹⁰⁸

This approach was used with much effect by Victor Van Tricht, who, in his published series of *causeries*, frequently denounced the complacency and indifference of the bourgeoisie in the face of the social and economic injustices faced by the working class. In a stirring reflection entitled *À l'usine*, Tricht discusses the factory atmosphere and the worker's body by playing on modernity's perpetual tension between the rational and the personal. He begins by noting that the most basic Chemistry text would teach readers about the fundamental procedures involved in the smelting of metal and steel, the different proportions of carbon retained, the various by-products created, and the variety of applicable methods. But all of this scientific rationality, he pleads, hides something more important, something invisible to the disinterested observer of what goes on in any foundry: "Les flots de l'oxygène de l'air, bouillonnant dans le fer liquide, lui brûlant son carbone, et se précipitant vers le ciel en nuages d'acide carbonique. Et l'acier coulant dans les lingotières son jet de feu pétillant d'étincelles." Most will choose to look no further, and see only this brilliant spectacle, denounces the Jesuit.

Ils ne verront pas l'ouvrier, la poitrine et les bras nus, laisser tomber goutte à goutte, sur le sol qui la boit et sur l'acier qui la brûle, sa sueur.

Il ne verront pas ces muscles tendus, ces nerfs fébriles, verser, à flots eux aussi, cette force et cette énergie humaines, sans lesquelles toute cette belle mécanique ne serait qu'une puissance aveugle, brisant et broyant tout, et se brisant et se broyant elle-même, comme un navire désemparé, sans boussole, brise, fend et émiette le rocher sur lequel il se perd, et avec un craquement sinistre, sombre.

[...]

¹⁰⁸ *Montreal by Gaslight* (Montreal?: s.n., 1889), 24-32.

Et dans ces hommes, noirs de charbon, dont la sueur coulante marbre la peau brûlée, ils ne verront pas le cœur... Cet ouvrier, qui dans les mâchoires d'une pince mord un lingot brûlant, vous croyez que c'est à l'acier qu'il pense? Non! c'est à sa femme qui dort là, au loin, dans sa petite maison blanche, à côté d'un berceau, et dans la fumée et dans la flamme c'est cette vision qui danse devant ces yeux : c'est elle qui donne la force à ses muscles, le courage à son cœur, le bonheur à sa vie. Car c'est pour eux qu'il travaille, c'est lui qui les fait vivre, et cela est bon à se dire tout bas, quand le travail est dur et que la chair se lasse.

Tout cela les yeux ne le voient point, mais l'âme!¹⁰⁹

As in the Jubilee piece above, the worker's body is exposed, his arms powerful and strong, his movements intense and rhythmic, the conditions in which he works extreme. But there end the similarities, and we could argue that Tricht would have considered the Montreal author as precisely the type of person he reproached for not bothering to look more carefully at what was happening in the foundry, who marvelled only at the dazzling surface, missing the tension in the workers' muscles, their agitated nerves. If the Montrealer saw in the worker's brawny movements a testament to the romantic side of industry, Tricht made the link between body and interiority much more explicit and intimate. Though the worker's heart is hidden, it is what pushes him forward. His love for his wife gives him strength, hope and motivation. The real meaning of his movements has nothing to do with the science and production visible to the eye; it is recognisable only by the soul.

Valorous heroes of a coming age, or downtrodden vassals of an oppressive regime. While these interpretations are diametrically opposed in their intentions, they tell us about the vivid and contrasting perspectives of middle-class observations of the worker's body. A bourgeois author with a taste for *encanaillement*, a crusading moral reformer, an influential business association, and a priest imbued with a spirit of social betterment all wrote in terms of specific expectations and assumptions about industrialisation and workers. Whichever side they were on, their visions of the body were fundamentally representative of the interior and emotional responses elicited by the rapid industrialisation of turn-of-the-century industrialising society. In contemplating the tensions between the vast, outward processes initiated by capitalist enterprise, and

¹⁰⁹ Victor Van Tricht, *À l'usine. Causerie* (Namur: P. Godenne, 1889), 8-11. Van Tricht is not referring specifically to a Brussels foundry. Nevertheless, I cite his work as he was intellectually active in Brussels and therefore contributed directly to the discourse about the effects of industrialisation in that city.

the subjective sentiments it evoked, these authors situated their discourse in the body and its movements in space; a body through which these processes were lived, a body simultaneously defined by them.

CONCLUSION

“When the Roman Empire was at its highest, all the industries of the country, in fact all the labour of the country, was performed by men who had been taken prisoners in battle and converted into slaves and whose lives and comfort were considered matters of little consequence,” said Thomas Duffy, Commissioner of Public Works, to the delegates of the 1899 Convention of the National Association of Factory Inspectors. “To-day, however, both in England and America,” he continued, “our workingmen are regarded as our strength and the very foundation of the nation’s greatness.”¹¹⁰ Celebrating the accomplishments of modern industrialisation and the social evolution that accompanied it, Duffy placed the physical conditions in which workers contributed to this growth at the centre of his pride. As this chapter has demonstrated, the growing intensity of industrial activity in turn-of-the-century Brussels and Montreal, and the distinct environment it produced, made the body and senses particularly relevant in urban dwellers’ relationship to the modern city, whether this was in terms of individuals’ own corporeal experiences with industrialisation, or through representations of the bodies of the workers whose labour was the force behind these transformations.

For those who, like Duffy, felt a great sense of confidence in modern developments, the factories and workshops that sprouted on the landscapes of Montreal and Brussels were visual symbols of prosperity, which, in their size, layout and aesthetic appeal created an atmosphere that bespoke order, productivity, sophistication and progress. The workers inside were seen as strong, muscular titans, who deftly wielded massive tools in rhythmic motions that symbolized the steady pace of forward movement. In contrast, for those whose homes were situated close-by, who laboured at the service of industrialists or whose professional activities brought them into close contact with the realities of these factories, the corporeal referents they used evoked

¹¹⁰ “Speech of the Honourable Thomas Duffy, Commissioner of Public Works,” *Sessional Papers* #7 33, no. 1 (1900), 44.

distinct fears about the direction in which modernity was taking them. As archival records in both cities demonstrate, many urban residents took exception to the smells, sounds, dust and smoke which the encroachment of industry brought to the places they lived; nuisances that incommoded their physical comfort and health, but also threatened them with financial loss as a result of the devaluation of their property.

As for the countless men and women whose livelihoods depended on industrial work, their relationship to industrial spaces was one of constant physical exertion within the confines of humid conditions, where muscle cramps, respiratory problems, accidents, disease and violence were commonplace. Their testimonies poignantly illustrate how this physical stress contributed to the climate of tension, mistrust and suspicion that characterized their rapport with their employers, and that reigned on many factory floors in these two cities. Finally, the doctors and hygienists whose work kept them abreast of the latest developments in the expanding field of modern medical research relied on the vivid imagery of overtaxed bodies to drive home the urgency of their message in favour of more balanced, safer and more hygienic working conditions. Industrialisation and urbanisation, the very foundations of Montreal and Brussels' claim to metropolitan status, were also understood to be the causes of the diseases, death and decay that plagued urban life.

In this regard, the encounters of Montrealers and Bruxellois with industrial spaces were quite comparable. Whereas geographical and historical differences explained variations in attitudes to the implantation of industry in the two cities, experiences with its concrete realities converged. To be sure, the scale of industrial buildings was larger in Montreal, and authorities oversaw industrial expansion in different ways, performing prior investigations in Brussels, relying on more summary and incidental observations in Montreal. But the transnational character of these developments transpired in the way workers, hygienists, bureaucrats, government-appointed commissioners and inspectors, and other bourgeois commentators and writers in each city responded to these developments. In both cities, the link between the global process of industrialisation and subjective attitudes about it centred on the body. From pride and confidence in the possibilities of this development, to worry and exasperation at its consequences, these interior emotions and preoccupations that shaped the daily

existence of urban dwellers relied on corporeal tropes for their full expression. So intimate did this connection become, that the body itself was ultimately represented as a metaphor for industrialisation, machines of great productivity, but subject to deterioration and overuse.

At the end of the day, these weary bodies needed rest. Modern science proved that the body depended on it, noted Jules Félix, a Belgian doctor and ardent supporter of the “trois huit” model of daily living. Insufficient sleep “prolonge les stations vicieuses du corps, amène la déformation des organes essentiels,” he deplored.¹¹¹ So, as we continue our explorations of the spaces that comprised these modern cities, let us follow these tired workers away from their workshops and back to their homes. In the following chapter, we will see that private living spaces were also highly contested terrains. Here too, physical and sensorial experiences, as well as conceptions of others’ bodies, played an active part in the construction of ideas, preoccupations and, in some cases, deep-seated fears about the physical and moral dangers of working-class homes.

¹¹¹ Jules Félix, “La journée des trois huit,” *Abonnement Germinal* 10, no.1 (1913), 10.

CHAPTER 5

HOME FOR A REST: BODY AND MORALITY IN THE WORKING-CLASS HOUSE

In the self-confident spirit of the turn of the twentieth century, commentators in both Montreal and Brussels frequently, and rather boastfully, sought to liken the streets of their cities to the great Parisian boulevards, seen as the epitome of modern urban development.¹ But if the relative breadth and dimension of new streets could reinforce this determined sense of affirmation, there also lurked in these cities another streetscape, considerably more troubling for many residents of all social backgrounds. Winding, narrow roads were cast as material evidence fact that modernity's grasp on the urban environment remained, for better or for worse, incomplete. As in other industrial centres, Montreal and Brussels attracted large concentrations of workers and their families, who, by the very nature of their employment, lacked the means to live up to the urban ideals engraved on luxurious boulevards. Instead, most were condemned to live in what can be considered urbanism's counterpart to the grandiose thoroughfares. These were the dark, narrow, and insalubrious alleys, courtyards and tenements that housed large proportions of the working class in both cities.

As we continue this exploration of urban labyrinths, this chapter consider the perceptions of, and atmospheres in and around, the homes of the workers who populated these cities. We will visit some of the dingy blind alleys in which lived the poorest residents of Montreal and Brussels, those who toiled long hours in the factories and workshops, those who worked at sweating industries right in their homes, those whose means of livelihood was found directly in the street where they picked rags, sold goods or simply did what they could to scrape by. To the extent possible, we will listen to what the poor themselves had to say, but we will primarily follow a range of social

¹ The Montreal *Daily Star*, for instance, avoided making an improbable direct comparison to Paris, but nonetheless spoke of Montreal's development in reference to Napoleon III. For his part, the urban planner G.A. Nantel went to great lengths to describe how Paris was a model for Montreal to emulate: See *Souvenir Number of The Montreal Daily Star: Reviewing the Various Financial and Commercial Interests Represented in the City of Montreal* (Montreal: Henning & Camp, 1890), G. A. Nantel, *La métropole de demain : avenir de Montréal* (Montréal: Typ. Adjutor Menard, 1910). Brussels was frequently referred to as a "petit Paris" by locals and visitors alike, *Bruxelles et ses environs*, 8e ed. (Paris: Guides Conty, 1908), *Guide de Bruxelles et de ses environs. Souvenir du Grand Hôtel* (Bruxelles: s.d.), much to the chagrin of Charles Buls who insisted that the distinct personality of the city and its people lay in its ability to differentiate itself from the neighbouring metropolis. Charles Buls, *Esthétique des villes* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe & Cie, 1893), 24.

reformers, hygienists, state-mandated inspectors and other commentators as they expectantly made their way through these back streets and into these decrepit homes. Accustomed to higher standards of personal comfort, these observers of urban life were, in many cases, bewildered by what they witnessed. We will then accompany them back to the reassuring cosiness of their meeting rooms and salons where, in discussing their experiences, they constructed a vision of the city's poorest neighbourhoods that was interlaced with their understandings of the physical and moral self. In so doing, middle-class observers in both Montreal and Brussels participated in a transnational circulation of ideas that drew on evolving standards of decency, privacy, morality, and gender to inscribe social identities and relations upon the landscape of the modern city.

To assess the spatial narratives of the home in this period, we will first examine the way principles of hygiene and scientific rationality informed contemporaries' understanding of the interconnection between house and body, and the parallels they drew between the construction of the home and the health of its occupants. Key to understandings of the home during these years, was the increasingly rigid distinction between spaces and activities considered public, and those understood to be of a private nature. Section two will argue that this process of delineation was an ongoing one, frequently tested by the bourgeoisie in their contacts with working-class families. What bourgeois reformers saw on these visits sometimes shocked them, and in the third section we will discuss the way subjective moral imperatives were framed with respect to the living environment of workers and the poor. Finally, section four will take the analysis beyond individual houses in order to demonstrate the role of ideas about personal living spaces and bodily practises in the broader construction of class and gender identities.

I. WORKERS' HOUSING AND SCIENTIFIC RATIONALITY

a) *House and body*

In her study of British middle-class housing in the late nineteenth century, architectural historian Annmarie Adams notes that Victorians perceived their houses as extensions of their bodies, and inversely, that they saw the "body as a reduction of the

house.” By the last decades of the century, “there was a widespread belief that a house could cause sickness or that domestic architecture itself was sick because it was connected to the body and the house.”² As we will see, this interplay of body and house was at the heart of public discourse on private dwelling in Montreal and Brussels during this period. Though the problem of unsanitary housing was not a new one, the intensification of urbanisation added a sense of urgency to the discussion, as municipal officials, reformers and hygienists worriedly noted the unprecedented levels of density in certain working-class districts.

In both the Belgian and Canadian labour commissions, we hear workers’ distinct dissatisfaction with the state of housing in these cities. Noting the financial strains caused by high rents, workers especially denounced the negative effects of their homes on their bodies, the lack of sanitary installations, the diminutive size of living quarters, insufficient ventilation and the malodorous atmosphere in which their daily lives were steeped. An anonymous witness in Montreal explained that, reacting to a visit from a health inspector, his landlord replaced a rudimentary wooden conduit that led directly to the sewer main with nothing more than a faulty pipe that disintegrated immediately upon being removed. The ground below, he related, was saturated with refuse, generating an unbearable odour, and the worker expressed his conviction that the illness that struck his wife and four children, one of whom died of diphtheria, was caused directly by the poor state of his house and its cellar.³

For reformers and hygienists of the period, the question of housing was indeed a fundamental concern. In the three chapters on the topic in *The City Below the Hill*, Herbert Ames pleaded that, if Montreal workers were not necessarily as poorly housed as those in New York or Chicago, the situation nonetheless called for urgent action as

² Annmarie Adams, *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women 1870-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), 3, 29. On the medical discourse shaping understandings of the home environment in this period, see also Harold Platt, “From Hygeia to the Garden City: Bodies, Houses and the Rediscovery of the Slum in Manchester, 1875-1910,” *Journal of Urban History* 33, no. 5 (2007).

³ *Enquête sur les rapports qui existent entre le capital et le travail au Canada*, 5 vols., vol. 1 Québec : 1ère partie (Ottawa: A. Sénécal, 1889), 719. The negative effects of housing on health were also denounced at the Brussels hearings. Noted one labourer, “La plupart habitent au fond d’impasses malsaines, où l’air est vicié et corrompu par toutes espèces d’émanations, où la lumière pénètre à peine et où le soleil n’a jamais dardé ses rayons.” Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Société belge de librairie, 1887), 582.

few workers disposed of what were considered minimal housing requirements, “where the front door is used by but one family, where the house faces upon a through street, where water-closet accommodation is provided, and where there are as many rooms allotted to a family as there are persons composing it.”⁴ As a charitably-minded businessman, Ames had himself invested in a model residential establishment for working families, and he exhorted others who had the means to do the same, convinced that a properly managed project of the sort could not only be philanthropic, but profitable as well.

Ames also called for legislation allowing the city council to intervene and demolish unsuitable structures, particularly rear tenements. As the archives of Montreal’s health committee show, matters pertaining to unsanitary dwellings and, in particular, to insufficient sewage infrastructures, were frequently brought to the attention of municipal officials by dissatisfied residents.⁵ Keeping a close watch on the state of Montreal homes, the city deployed inspectors mandated to systematically visit and gather data on the city’s houses: their positioning facing the street or on the back of the property, the number of inhabitants, the number of rooms, the condition of the sewer conduits, the presence of a sink and whether it was equipped with a siphon, and the general state of the building and its plumbing.⁶ Undertaken in the name of public health, these inspections also reveal the municipal bureaucracy’s determinations to apply sanitation measures that drew on the latest research in disease and urban planning.

Thus in the beginning of our period, the city doctor, Alphonse Barnabé LaRocque, lamented the fact that the benefits of good hygiene were not yet widely known among the city’s population. Hygiene, LaRocque continued, had to be taught like a religion upon which society’s salvation depended, and his comments clearly illustrate the heavy class and gender consciousness that marked the hygienist movement of the time. If the “enlightened” portion of the city’s population supported sanitary reforms, he noted, “l’obstacle vient des classes inférieures, qui, malheureusement,

⁴ Herbert Brown Ames, *The City Below the Hill. A Sociological Study of a Portion of the City of Montreal, Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 40.

⁵ AM, CS, VM 45. These issues were also discussed in the annual “Rapport de l’état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal.” See also Robert Gagnon, *Questions d’égouts : santé publique, infrastructures et urbanisation à Montréal au XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 2006).

⁶ “Rapport de l’état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l’année 1887,” 13.

ignorent les bienfaits de l'hygiène."⁷ Because hygiene was closely associated with the home, Larocque also emphasised the special importance of imparting upon women the hygienic knowledge through which they would raise healthy and vigorous children. For Montreal hygienists in particular, the matter was further complicated by the diverse origins of the city's working class. Larocque perceived the rural migrants that populated poor neighbourhoods as ignorant of the most basic rules of hygiene, while others attributed the worst faults to the cultural traits of the city's increasingly cosmopolitan residents. According to another hygienist, "no one can deny but that the unsanitary condition of things among Asiatics is due to mental proclivity. This is true also of Spaniards, Portugese, and their descendants in South America." When members of such communities rented homes built by an American or an Englishman, he added, they quickly destroyed the sanitary installations and poured "streams of filth" out of their windows and into the courtyard where it would dry in the sun.⁸ As these allusions to class, gender and ethnicity indicate, hygienic discourse in this period typified social belonging and distinctions, signifiers of identity that played a prevalent role in shaping the corporeal and spatial stories through which the home environment was understood.

b) *Air and light*

During the 1880s and 1890s, knowledge about bacteriology and contagion theories gave a new impetus to this growing army of disciples of the hygienist cause.⁹

⁷ "Rapport de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1882," 23. For more on the Montreal and Quebec health boards in which Larocque was heavily involved, see Benoît Gaumer, Georges Desrosiers, and Othmar Keel, *Histoire du Service de santé de la ville de Montréal* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002), and François Guérard, *Histoire de la santé au Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996).

⁸ F. P. Mackelcan, *Our Health and Our Diseases, Condition of Montreal in a sanitary point of view we must reform or continue to suffer: addressed to physicians, to families, to property owners, to architects, to aldermen* (Montreal: Lovell, 1879), 32. When the author made these comments at the beginning of our period, he considered this to be a rather limited problem. By the end of this period of sustained immigration, Montreal hygienists had developed a deep suspicion of ethnic minorities. Commenting on immigrant groups in the city, "surtout les exotiques" whose homes seemed to have been "transportés comme par enchantement au-delà des mers" one hygienist lamented that "il suffit d'avoir une fois traversé leurs quartiers et mis le pied dans leurs maisons pour entrevoir à quel point y dominant l'insalubrité, l'encombrement, la malpropreté." E.E.M. Gouin, "Le logement de la famille ouvrière. Ce qu'il doit être, ce qu'il est, comment l'améliorer," *L'école sociale populaire*, no. 9-11 (1912), 28.

⁹ These were sparked, in particular, by the discoveries of Robert Koch in the 1870s and 1880s. See Jean-Pierre Goubert, *La conquête de l'eau : l'avènement de la santé à l'âge industriel* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont, 1986), 50. When it came to ensuring the health of a house, "ce qu'on ne voit pas est plus essentiel que ce qui est exposé à la vue," warned hygiene professor, and Brussels water-service engineer,

Hygienists contributed prolifically to this discourse by multiplying studies exposing urban sanitary failings, as well as more accessible instruction manuals designed to show urban dwellers how to improve their bodily practices, and make them more amenable to modern hygiene standards. They participated in what historians Michèle Dagenais and Caroline Durand refer to as “a new discipline of the body” corresponding to the diffusion of new social and political norms of sanitation and cleanliness.¹⁰

As they dissected workers’ houses room by room, hygienists consistently framed their observations in reference to the body and the dangers to which it was exposed. Indeed, this was a period in which the body was understood as being fundamentally integrated into both its physical and human environment, an environment “qui le menace autant qu’il peut le menacer.”¹¹ The air one normally breathed like a “brise bénite” was “chaud, chargé de poussière et d’humidité pour l’ouvrier de la manufacture qui, ruisselant, suffocant, en a bien besoin pour ne pas mourir!” noted Séverin Lachapelle, doctor and professor of hygiene. But instead of retiring to the solace of a balmy home at the end of the day, “la grande cloche de l’usine est là pour l’appeler tous les matins au point de jour, et l’exigence du capital ne lui rend sa liberté que lorsque déjà la nuit couvre la terre.”¹² Despite the development of zoning practices intended to create spatial delineations between industry, residence and commerce,¹³ workers frequently had little choice but to live close to the factories where they continued to breathe the polluted air, day after day. The very exigencies of the system in which they worked thus had direct implications on where they could live, adding to the physical toll on their bodies.

As for the houses themselves, they were denounced as being small, unventilated and dark. For the Montreal hygienist E.E.M. Gouin, these factors represented the “triple défaut de nos habitations ouvrières,” and he pointed directly at the forces of modern

Félix and E. Putzeijs. Félix Putzeijs and E. Putzeijs, *Hygiène appliquée. Les installations sanitaires des habitations privées et collectives* (Bruxelles: Ramlot frères et soeurs, 1904), 10.

¹⁰ Michèle Dagenais and Caroline Durand, “Cleansing, Draining and Sanitizing the City: Conceptions and Uses of Water in the Montreal Region,” *Canadian Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (2006), 650.

¹¹ Olivier Faure, “Le regard des médecins” in Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 18.

¹² Séverin Lachapelle, *La santé pour tous, ou Notions élémentaires de physiologie et d’hygiène à l’usage des familles* (Montréal: Compagnie d’imprimerie canadienne, 1880), 219.

¹³ Christian Topalov, “La ville ‘congestionnée’: acteurs et langage de la réforme urbaine à New York au début du XXe siècle,” *Genèses* (1990), 108. On Brussels zoning specifically, see Marcel Smets, *L’avènement de la cité-jardin en Belgique: histoire de l’habitat social en Belgique de 1830 à 1930* (Bruxelles: P. Mardaga, 1977), 7.

industrialisation to explain the lamentable state of workers' homes. It was, he argued, "les transformations modernes de l'industrie, le machinisme, la concentration des capitaux, la constitution des grandes entreprises, le développement des transports" that had forced so many people to live in such limited space, deprived of air and light.¹⁴ Calls for better air circulation and abundant light formed the mantra of hygienists around the world. Bodies forced to spend long periods in dark and stagnant air were condemned to perish slowly and painfully.

Others also decried a tendency for many homes to be overly humid and built on contaminated land. In Montreal, commented the secretary of Quebec's Board of Health, housing construction struggled to keep up with urban growth, and too little time was spent thinking about the orientation according to which residential buildings were erected, worsening the problems of ventilation. Buildings were considered to be too high for the width of the streets, reducing them in appearance to narrow alleys. Apartments often faced dark inner courtyards, rooms were designed with no windows, and large, salubrious homes were subdivided into small, crowded apartments, all of which diminished the amount of air and light available. These conditions simply prepared the body for disease, lamented the hygienist. "On sait que l'air introduit dans le poumon à chaque instant sert à purifier le sang, et que cette purification est nécessaire au maintien de la vitalité de l'individu." But if the lungs were filled with polluted air, impure blood would flow through the body, and its organs would be unable to perform their functions normally, causing fatigue, lack of attention, headaches, loss of appetite, nausea, insomnia, dyspepsia and anaemia.¹⁵ The urban layout, the home environment and the functioning of the body were thus inextricably interrelated.

Thus the house meant to relieve and revitalize the worker after endless hours of dangerous industrial work, more often than not exposed it to weakness, disease and death. Without repeating what these Montreal hygienists were saying, we can affirm that the same matters pertaining to overcrowding, lack of air and light, humidity, absence of

¹⁴ Gouin, "Le logement de la famille ouvrière," 18, 32.

¹⁵ Elzéar Pelletier, *Nos logis insalubres. Our Unhealthy Dwellings* (Conseil d'hygiène de la province de Québec, 1910), 16. Without enough fresh air and light, cautioned one doctor, "on voit nécessairement apparaître une série de manifestation morbides par altération du sang." Inadequate hygiene led to higher death rates, preceded in all cases by "une dégénérescence chronique de l'organisme." Report by Dr. Lantsheere, in Ville de Bruxelles. Comité de patronage des habitations ouvrières et des institutions de prévoyance. "Rapport sur l'exercice de 1899" (Hereafter "Comité de patronage annual report"), 23.

water-closets and overall dilapidation were being denounced in Brussels as being fundamentally contradictory to the ideal regenerative qualities a house was supposed to have, indicating the extent to which specialists in the two cities drew from the global circulation of hygienic knowledge in this period.¹⁶ Brussels hygienist Marie Du Caju, for instance, drew explicitly on the connection between body and home. “Une habitation n’est salubre que si elle est *sèche et propre*, et si *l’air pur* et la *lumière* y ont un libre accès. Le médecin entre bientôt où le soleil et l’air n’entre pas.” Accordingly, Du Caju recommended that people avoid living close to factories, without, however, addressing the lack of options many workers had in this regard. But, irrespective of where one happened to live, the rules of hygiene remained of the same importance. “La propreté,” she insisted, “est un luxe à la portée de tous; elle est surtout le luxe du pauvre, [...] une fée bienveillante [qui] embellit tout ce qu’elle touche.” Even the most insalubrious home could be improved as long as its tenants remained committed to cleanliness.¹⁷

In the vicious cycle that poor hygiene represented, the body itself was in some cases presented as its own worst enemy. Du Caju exposed in rigorous detail how the simple act of breathing posed a potentially lethal threat to the home environment. This automatism, she explained, reduced the amount of oxygen in a room, replacing it with dangerous carbonic acid that altered the air, resulting in nefarious consequences to the health of its inhabitants. When the same air circulated in and out of human lungs too many times, it became unclean, “il se charge de *miasmes* ou *matières animales* abandonnées par le sang dans les poumons,” producing a revolting smell, symptomatic of the lurking dangers. “L’haleine de l’homme,” she concluded, “est mortelle à l’homme.”¹⁸

Of course, the sanitation movement had swept through Brussels in the mid nineteenth century, demolishing vast sections of central working-class neighbourhoods

¹⁶ On the international exchanges of hygienic knowledge at the turn of the century, see Anne Rasmussen, “L’hygiène en congrès (1852-1912) : circulation et configurations internationales” and Serenella Nonnis Vigilante, “Idéologie sanitaire et projet politique. Les congrès internationaux d’hygiène de Bruxelles, Paris et Turin (1876-1880)” both in Patrice Bourdelais, ed., *Les hygiénistes : Enjeux, modèles et pratiques* (Paris: Belin, 2001), 213-239 and 241-265 respectively.

¹⁷ Marie Du Caju, *Manuel domestique d'alimentation et d'hygiène* (Termonde: Ant. Du Caju-Beeckman, Imprimeur-librairie, 1889), 41, 45. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

and vaulting the Senne, but the city's poor were increasingly concentrated in the remaining blind alleys. "Les mesures hygiéniques qui les ont chassées de leurs taudis malsains les ont suivis dans leurs nouvelles demeures," commented one public servant.¹⁹ Outbreaks of infectious diseases were frequent in these alleys, and they were considered a menace to public health across the city. Municipal officials attempted to impose strict measures, with obligations to declare any outbreaks of disease and decontaminate the houses in which patients were located. Particularly insalubrious alleys were demolished by the city, but the cost of such action was too high for it to become a widespread practice, not to mention that this approach created major relocation issues. "En cette matière," stated one councillor, "il ne faut pas agir au hasard; il faut agir suivant un plan d'ensemble, en ayant une ligne de conduite bien déterminée."²⁰ Just as creating a modern home environment required careful application of rational knowledge about hygiene, construction techniques and bodily practices, so too did building a modern city require acting according to well-established plans that would ensure the streets be filled with salubrious housing.

Before analysing the atmosphere of these back streets and blind alleys in more detail, it is important to note that, in Belgium, the question of working-class housing was regulated by a law adopted on 9 August 1889. Inspired by the findings of the *Commission du travail*, the law came as a response to the insalubrious housing conditions that hygienists, doctors, architects and philanthropists were so energetically criticizing. The centrepiece of this law was the creation of local committees known as "comités de patronage des habitations ouvrières et des institutions de prévoyance." Comprised of five to eighteen members, depending on the locality, named by the national and provincial governments, these committees were responsible for investigating the housing situation within their jurisdictions, overseeing the construction of houses specifically for members of the working class and supporting credit and

¹⁹ Ministère de l'intérieur et de l'instruction publique - Conseil supérieur d'hygiène publique, *Habitations ouvrières* (Bruxelles: F. Hayez, 1888), 106.

²⁰ BCB, 5 October 1885, 502.

savings institutions that would help workers set aside funds for the purchase of their homes.²¹

Initiated by the Catholic majority in parliament, this law, notes historian Annick Stélandre, had a primary overarching objective, namely favouring individual home ownership for workers.²² Reducing the role of the state and increasing individuals' involvement in their housing conditions, the thinking went, would ensure greater social order and improved hygienic conditions as workers would hold a personal stake in their material surroundings. Provide workers with the possibility of owning their comfortable and hygienic accommodations instead of a cramped and unhealthy slum, and "le sentiment de la propriété individuelle qui s'affirme [...] enraye les fallacieuses idées de collectivité."²³ As Albert Soenens, judge and president of the patronage committee responsible for the western communes of Brussels, explained, "un des moyens les plus puissants de faire régner, au sein des classes ouvrières, l'esprit d'ordre, de faire naître chez elles le désir de l'épargne, de combattre l'insouciance, si funeste à la famille comme à la société, c'est d'ouvrir au travailleur la perspective de devenir propriétaire de la maison qu'il occupe."²⁴

However, the deeper significance of this law lies in the impulse it gave to the broader debate about the housing question. In the Belgian capital, the patronage committees were very active, commissioning two important investigations into living conditions, meeting on a regular basis to discuss housing matters, and publishing annual reports. The body of sources available on the subject is thus more extensive than in Montreal, but as we join investigators in their impromptu visits of working-class homes, we will see that beneath the positivist veneer discussed above, lay intensely corporeal

²¹ F Hankar, A Van Billoen, and A Ven Melle, *Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Exposition internationale de Milan en 1906 / A. Lesigne, 1906), 2. For more on this law, see Smets, *L'avènement de la cité-jardin en Belgique*, Chapter 6. On the judicial connections between housing and hygiene in France during this period, see Robert Cervais, "La maladie, la loi et les mœurs" in Claire Salomon-Bayet, *Pasteur et la révolution pastorienne* (Paris: Payot, 1986), 286-289.

²² Annick Stélandre, "Épargne et propriété. La loi du 9 août 1889 sur les habitations ouvrières," *Cahiers de la Fonderie* 6 (1989), 22

²³ Association pour l'amélioration des logements ouvriers, *Rapport annuel 1894* (hereafter AALO), 32.

²⁴ Albert Soenens, *Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique* (Bruxelles: Veuve Ferdinand Larcier, 1894), 27. Stélandre points out that although 60 000 housing units were built in the 25 years following the creation of these committees, this favoured only a small proportion of industrial workers, a certain "elite" whose salary allowed them to spend 20 or 25 years devoting a significant part of their budget to the purchase of a home. Stélandre, "Épargne et propriété," 23-24.

and emotional considerations that highlight the body's role in the construction of spatial understandings of the private sphere.

II. THE RELATIVE PRIVACY OF THE HOME

a) *Shocking!*

From the second half of the nineteenth century, historians have shown, the distinction between public and private spaces, and the specificity of activities and corporeal practices performed within each realm, became increasingly delineated in bourgeois society.²⁵ The home became a marker of this distinction, and even the house itself was designed, with parlours and bedrooms, to offer privacy to individual members of the family.²⁶ And yet within this cultural context, the bourgeoisie developed, indeed craved, an intimate familiarity with the homes of workers.²⁷ During this period, the practice of inspecting workers' homes was common. Aside from formal patronage committees, the members of which took very seriously their obligations to report on the hygienic state of houses in their district, a range of people, including journalists reporting on the lamentable state of different neighbourhoods, politicians interested in redressing their city's image, members of philanthropic organisations on their missions to succour society's less fortunate, as well as public health officials, all found reasons to make their way into working-class residential areas. By the sheer numbers of people interested in the homes of workers, the traffic could at times be rather heavy in these narrow alleys.

²⁵ One of the most meticulous examinations of the evolution of this distinction is Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, trans. Edmond Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). The following address the public and private divide within a specifically urban context: Goubert, *La conquête de l'eau*, Platt, "From Hygeia to the Garden City.", Jean-Luc Pinol, *Le monde des villes au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1991), Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville : les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2006). On the way it evolved in Montreal, see Michèle Dagenais, *Faire et fuir la ville : espaces publics de culture et de loisirs à Montréal et Toronto au 19e et 20e siècles* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2006). On Brussels, see Claire Billen and Jean-Michel Decroly, *Petits coins dans la grande ville : les toilettes publiques à Bruxelles du moyen âge à nos jours* (Bruxelles: Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles, 2003).

²⁶ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 26.

²⁷ "À tous, il nous est arrivé plus ou moins souvent de pénétrer dans les logis d'ouvriers," boasted one Brussels reformer. Alexandre Bidart, *L'exposition du mobilier ouvrier à Saint-Gilles (Bruxelles)* (Bruxelles: L.-G. Laurent, 1901), 3.

On the surface, their objective was to gather as much information as possible on the state of workers' homes in order to identify and bring about the most efficient and rational solutions. If we consider two major investigations carried out by the Brussels patronage committee, the first in 1890, the second in the period 1903-1909, we see that the stated objectives were clearly informed by modern research methods. In the first, led by reformers Charles Lagasse and Charles de Quéker, the authors set out to systematically map out the city, creating a visual portrait of working-class homes drawn according to a range of statistics on the number of houses, their inhabitants, their rent, the types of ventilation system, the number of available toilets, the quality of the water supply, the presence of courtyards, staircases, and even the proximity of establishments selling alcohol.²⁸ As we will see, the investigators were dismayed by what their observations had revealed, and they did not hesitate to express these feelings. Consequently, when a new investigation was initiated by the architect Émile Hellemans in 1903, the watchword was given to ensure a greater emotional distance from the object of inquiry. "Ainsi," commented the author, "nous avons écarté, autant que possible, des observations recueillies, l'erreur inévitable, connue, dans la science, sous le nom d'*équation personnelle*."²⁹

But despite this clearly stated ambition of evacuating personal biases in favour of positivist quantification, sources on housing are rife with colourful, evocative and passionate language. While microbiology legitimated sanitary concerns, hygienists also sought to capitalise on these scientific foundations to amplify the reach of their message, to scandalise and shock authorities and citizens into action.³⁰ Indeed, members of the *Commission du travail* lamented that "on a jusqu'à présent peu réussi à émouvoir l'opinion publique." While it was deemed necessary to "dresser avant tout une statistique vraiment scientifique concernant les logements d'ouvriers," the underlying objective was to send an emotional shockwave to the population in order to jolt a sense

²⁸ Charles Lagasse and Charles De Quéker, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières en 1890* (Bruxelles: Ville de Bruxelles, 1890), 5-6.

²⁹ Émile Hellemans, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières en 1903, 1904 et 1905. Rapport présenté au Comité de Patronage de la Ville de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Imprimerie des Institutions de Prévoyance, 1905), viii.

³⁰ Georges Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale : l'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 227.

of “passion” about the issue and encourage people “animées de sentiments philanthropiques” to invest themselves in the cause.³¹

Corporeal references were central to this strategy, as in Hellemans’ emphasis on the disgust provoked by latrines in certain homes. “Ainsi, encore (qu’on nous pardonne ce détail vulgaire, mais d’une importance capitale), il n’est plus possible de tolérer qu’une seule latrine serve à plus de *soixante-douze* (72) personnes!”³² In appearance a simple denunciation of inadequate sanitary facilities, this line is revealing, not least because it immediately follows the author’s expressed faith in the importance of detached scientific inquiry. Feeling the need to apologise for the ostensible vulgarity of what he is about to say, the architect is nonetheless willing to upset middle-class sensibilities by making an explicit allusion to a part of the living environment, and the bodily functions associated with it, that his contemporaries would have found distasteful to discuss. Indeed, as historian Jean-Pierre Goubert argues, this period was characterised by the privatising of bodily practices, particularly those associated with the toilet, which, in middle-class homes, was moved from the outdoors to the privacy of the home.³³ Hellemans’ uses of italics, his repetition of the figure 72, and the exclamation point with which he punctuates the sentence may seem like grammatical details, but they underscore his sense of exasperation and disgust. For all of the scientific objectivity he confidently displayed, the “personal equation” undoubtedly coloured his observations.

b) *Paying a visit*

Analysing the construction of the notion of the urban ‘slum,’ historian Alan Mayne criticises historians for being “gullible” in their acceptance of “disingenuous

³¹ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Comptes rendus des séances plénières, mémoires, rapports, lettres, etc., envisageant la question ouvrière dans son ensemble*, 4 vols., vol. 4 (Bruxelles: Société belge de librairie, 1888), 167. “Il y va de l’âme et du corps d’hommes et de femmes créés à la même image que nous, faits comme nous pour vivre par l’intelligence et par le cœur,” insisted Hellemans. Hellemans, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières*, ix.

³² Hellemans, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières*, ix-x. Emphasis in the original.

³³ “La défécation n’est plus autorisée qu’en ces lieux. Uriner ou déféquer ailleurs que dans la maison, à l’extérieur dans les rues ou sur les places, est socialement *proscrit*.” This dynamic, explains Goubert, had a definite sensorial imperative, the priority being “épargner la vue et supprimer l’odeur.” Goubert, *La conquête de l’eau*, 88-90. Emphasis in the original. The Belgian housing specialist Maurice Falloise noted that buildings with several apartments, as many workers lived in, should be designed such that each household had access to its own balcony on which all water-related facilities were located, thus reducing the possibilities for people to come into contact in the context of henceforth highly private activity. Maurice Falloise, *De la construction d’habitations ouvrières* (Liège: La Meuse, 1906), 41.

pledges given by bourgeois observers.”³⁴ Indeed, caution must be exercised to avoid reifying these descriptions of working-class homes as empirical observations of a fixed reality. Yet this sensorial and emotional language was central to bourgeois spatial narratives. In a period where understandings of individual privacy were sharpened, where bodily practices were increasingly relegated to specially designed spaces hidden from the gaze of others, what does the bourgeoisie’s fascination with the intimacy of workers reveal? Pursuing the analysis of the bodily tropes and corporeal experiences used in mediating the relationship with residential space, we will now follow reformers directly into the homes they visited. If hygienists were prone to exaggerate their observations for the good of their cause, we will also see that the language they used is revealing of their own interiority. Bodily experiences conditioned subjective feelings of surprise, shock, and shame, while reformers’ repeated transgression of the public-private divide suggests that this distinction remained under cultural construction. The frequently recurring tension between the self-assured objectivity in which reformers framed their inspections, and the profound personal effect these appear to have had upon them, is indicative of how their own bodies, their own corporeal confrontations with modernity, their own standards of revulsion, and their own fears, informed the interior perceptions with which the relationship, both to the urban poor and to the spaces they occupied, was constructed.

Investigators, hygienists, doctors, architects, philanthropists, politicians or bureaucrats, members of the middle or upper classes of society, crossed the threshold of the homes of the poor with a sense of anticipation, shoulders slightly hunched, ears cocked, eyes squinting, and breath held. As their sight adjusted to the dimness, which, they reported, prevailed in these settings, they were startled and disturbed by what they saw and felt. Their physical senses were struck first, as their bodies came into contact with what was for them an unpleasant environment. In the Brussels section of a national study on workers’ housing produced by the Conseil supérieur d’hygiène publique, for example, the doctor M. Janssens, a prominent hygienist and civil servant, discussed the fate of one “pauvre maison,” its corridors, walls, and staircases covered in a “couche

³⁴ Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities, 1870-1914* (London: Leicester University Press, 1993), 2.

immonde de saleté.” To reinforce this feeling of disgust, Janssens continued by listing all the elements of disrepair that affected the physical atmosphere of the house: damaged sewer pipes, broken *sterfputs*,³⁵ clogged-up latrines, an out-of-order water pump, leaky faucets, and shattered cobblestones in a courtyard littered with filth. Overcrowding, ignorance, heinous envy and “mœurs populaires” were, he reasoned, the real causes of all these “actes de vandalisme et de sauvagerie.”³⁶



Figure 15 Working-class homes. Representation of a rear tenement in Montreal in the early twentieth century.³⁷

Municipal investigators at the service of the Board of Health in Montreal made similar descriptions, notably in denouncing the “exhalations offensives”³⁸ of “fosses [...] des plus primitives,” dug directly into the ground, reinforced with a few wooden planks

³⁵ Essentially a draining well leading to the underground sewage pipes, the term comes from the typical *Bruxellois* dialect and combines the Flemish words *sterf* and *put*, meaning death and hole. The term is highly evocative, and its use subtly added to the grimness described. In Montreal, the English term “slop trunk” sometimes found in the sources also offers a startling imagery.

³⁶ Ministère de l’intérieur et de l’instruction publique - Conseil supérieur d’hygiène publique, *Habitations ouvrières*, 107.

³⁷ *Le bien-être des enfants* (Montréal: La Patrie, 1912), 9.

³⁸ “Rapport de l’état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l’année 1885,” 12.

susceptible to rotting away³⁹ and leaving a “deposit of fecal matter on the floors [...] from two to three inches thick.”⁴⁰ Noting that entire working families, even two, were sometimes housed in a single room, one doctor concluded that “à Montréal il y a des maisons où un éleveur ne mettrait pas ses animaux.”⁴¹ The Montreal hygienist Elzéar Pelletier even compared some of the homes he visited to medieval dungeons, where “quand l’on voulait, sans mort violente, se débarrasser d’un rival dangereux, on l’enfermait dans un cachot obscur et l’individu cessait vite d’être dangereux; s’il en sortait, il n’était plus que l’ombre de lui même.”⁴² Faulty plumbing caused smells and messes that bothered these inspectors on a personal level, and contributed to conditioning their attitudes. Qualifying these spaces as primitive and savage, moreover, cast them and their inhabitants as hindrances to the progress and civilisation promised by modernity.

But entering these homes was also a poignant experience on a personal level for reformers discovering an unfamiliar aspect of the modern city. In the wake of the creation of patronage committees in Belgium, for example, independent philanthropic organizations were formed. Though not under the aegis of the state, groups like the *Association pour l’amélioration des logements ouvriers*, nonetheless benefited from royal patronage and the support of influential personalities, drawing its membership and funding from the city’s political, professional and aristocratic corps. Modeled after the patronage committees, the organization was divided into smaller groups, each responsible for keeping a close watch on the hygienic conditions of housing in different sections of the city and for sponsoring building initiatives. Drawn from the upper echelons of society, many members had no particular qualifications in housing issues, though it can be said they made up for it with a deep personal zeal.⁴³ Focussing on the scandalous scenes they witnessed added impact to the accounts through which they

³⁹ “Rapport de l’état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l’année 1899,” 10.

⁴⁰ AM, CS, VM 45, 28 August 1882.

⁴¹ Province de Québec, *Rapport de la Commission Royale de la Tuberculose* (Province de Québec, 1910), 78.

⁴² Pelletier, *Nos logis insalubres*, 16.

⁴³ “Il me semble que notre œuvre, bien comprise, est l’une des plus utiles, des plus fécondes que l’on puisse encourager dans les temps troubles où nous vivons. C’est, à mes yeux, l’œuvre sociale par excellence, la réforme des réformes, et elle vient à son heure!” affirmed the Associations’ president at a general assembly. AALO (1895), 9.

hoped to stress the direness of the situation, but also betrayed the subjective dimension of their undertaking.

One Dr Legros, a member of the Brussels patronage committee, related a recent walk down the rue du Canon and into the *impasse* of the same name. “Je n’ai pu faire autrement que d’y entrer,” he claimed, suggesting that it was a sense of imperious duty that exercised this powerful attraction. Continuing his story, Legros emphasises his sensorial reaction to the alley, once again bringing both his body and that of the residents to the heart of the matter. “Vous dire l’infection, le fumier de cette voirie, n’est pas possible,” he gasped. The root of the problem lay not in a lack of modern conveniences, but rather in their misuse and insufficient upkeep, he suggested: “en face de l’entrée, une pompe dont l’égout est obstrué et, par ce fait, la cour à demie sous une eau répandant une odeur nauséabonde; des bacs à ordures débordant d’immondices, des linges sales aux fenêtres, ajoutez à cela des femmes et des enfants à moitié vêtus et vous aurez le spectacle de cette agglomération au centre de la ville de Bruxelles.”⁴⁴ Legros’ spatial understanding in this case was shaped, at one level, by his sensorial encounter with these odious odours, but his personal narrative found its full resonance in his confrontation with the exposed bodies of the local women and children, whose demeanour contradicted his established views of the dignified environment a modern capital should portray.

Stories of the sort were told year after year at the gatherings of these patronage committees and philanthropic associations. As they milled about the luxurious assembly rooms of City Hall or downtown hotels in the company of other dignitaries, ministers, members of the nobility and *dames patronesses*, these reform-minded philanthropists gave a lot of thought to the material conditions of their less fortunate compatriots, evoking these spaces in bodily terms. In one self-congratulatory tale, for instance, members reported on how they had assisted a poor but deserving family in leaving their insalubrious downtown tenement for “une jolie maisonnette à Laeken [...] avec un jardin où ils peuvent cultiver des légumes.” Attention to the way the two residences are contrasted reveals the emphasis placed on the physical atmosphere and its corporeal consequences in creating the spatial narrative. In their first home, the family, comprised

⁴⁴ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1904), 12.

of two parents and their eight children, had been confined to two miniscule rooms, one of which doubled as a workshop for the father, a cigar-maker. “L’atmosphère, viciée encore par l’émanation des feuilles de tabac qu’on faisait sécher, était à peine respirable.” In their new suburban home, the family had escaped the narrowness of both their old apartment and the density of the central city. They now disposed of five rooms, breathed fresh and vivifying country air, and their bodies were the better for it. Thus, “la santé du père, qui était gravement compromise, s’est sensiblement améliorée et les enfants ont gagnées des couleurs qu’on ne leur avait jamais connues auparavant.” And all of this for the same rent as they had paid downtown.⁴⁵

III. HYGIENE AND MORALITY

Hygienists frequently decried what they considered to be inappropriate or even dangerous practices that, in some cases, had a direct effect on the environment in which they lived. Mackelcan, for instance, listed a litany of malodorous “domestic habits” that added to the hygienic “evils” afflicting so many houses:

the nursing of children is so conducted that no corner is free from odours from year’s end to year’s end, and these special odours are frequently complicated with those of cabbage water and other cookery, sometimes with dirty clothes left in soap-suds, or a pickle tub already tainted, or a gallery spout fetid from top to bottom, or an ill-used closet, or dirty sink and cupboard beneath, or a pot of broth turned sour, or mouldy things in pantry, or a full spittoon, or, worse, still, the floor itself a spittoon, or a bucket of old fat that is intended for soap-making, with, as a standard institution, a scuttle to store refuse of all kinds intended for the scavenger.

Mundane bodily practices were thus shown to have unsuspected consequences, resulting in “ill-cared for” children and large numbers of “humpbacks and cripples and blind, besides those that annually succumb.”⁴⁶ But the author’s discussion of these practices exceeds purely health-related considerations. His tone is accusatory, hinting at a deeper element of subjectivity at work in these considerations of the home. As Mayne argues, these “representations of the abominations supposedly given free reign beyond the slumland threshold” served to define and reinforce the “broad moral commonwealth of

⁴⁵ AALO (1896), 21-22.

⁴⁶ Mackelcan, *Our Health and Our Diseases*, 30.

bourgeois community.”⁴⁷ Indeed, these titillating experiences not only shocked the bourgeoisie’s bodily senses, but their sense of morality as well, and a consideration of the narratives which defined these spaces must indeed account for the interaction between these moral and physical dimensions of human interiority.

a) *Mens sana in corpore sano*

To varying degrees, virtually all of the written sources addressing the question of housing in Montreal and Brussels contain explicit references to the connection, in the minds of their authors, between good hygiene and sound moral standards, placing the discourse in these two cities firmly within the orbit of a generalised “moralisation de la propreté” in the west during this period.⁴⁸ As Gouin summarised, “il faut insister sur cette dépendance *essentielle* entre la situation morale de la famille et l’état matériel du foyer.”⁴⁹ In Brussels, Soenens, for example, argued that the housing crisis should be the purview of “moralistes” as much as of hygienists, and he saw the issue as “unes des bases essentielles de toute rénovation sociale et un élément indispensable à la moralité aussi bien qu’à l’hygiène publique.”⁵⁰ In the same way that hygienists saw the quality of the home as having a direct effect on the health of the body, the home environment was also seen as having a direct influence on the health of the soul.

The health of the body and of the soul were thus intrinsically intertwined. “L’âme immorale,” wrote the Montreal hygienist F.A. Baillaigé, “tue le corps, parce qu’elle l’énervé et parce qu’elle brise dans l’homme l’unité d’harmonie qui fait sa force.”⁵¹ For Du Caju, corporal dirtiness, a sign of baseness and uncouthness, constituted the most degrading and contemptible form of negligence. “Plus inséparable de notre personne que la malpropreté du vêtement,” she suggested, bringing the exterior, physical problem to an interior, moral level, “elle est en quelque sorte plus près de notre

⁴⁷ Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, 151.

⁴⁸ Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale*, 207. On the moralising discourse in Brussels specifically, see Patricia Van Den Eekhout, “Brussels” in M.J. Daunton, ed., *Housing the Workers, 1850-1914: A Comparative Perspective* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 67-106. as well as Peter Scholliers, “Construire le bon et le mauvais. Les ouvriers à Bruxelles vers 1900,” and Janet Polasky, “L’approche moralisante de la question sociale. Le modèle du bon ouvrier,” in *Cahiers de la Fonderie* 36 (2007), 12-19 and 25-30.

⁴⁹ Gouin, “Le logement de la famille ouvrière,” 16. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁰ Soenens, *Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique*, 27.

⁵¹ F. A. Baillaigé, *La nature, la race, la santé dans leurs rapports avec la productivité du travail; applications à la province de Québec* (Joliette: chez l’auteur, 1890), 45.

âme, tout en nous marquant d'une flétrissure visible."⁵² In the context of modern liberalisation that emphasised the notion of the individual's responsibility to act in a way that ensured the health of the wider society,⁵³ those who combined a sound body and soul became productive individuals, while those who neglected these constituent parts of their existence simply impoverished society by consuming an undue share of its resources: "les bras de l'un sont des baguettes de fée qui découvrent les trésors de la terre; l'autre est un gouffre où disparaissent les produits du sol."⁵⁴

The oft-repeated Latin phrase, *mens sana in corpore sano* became the slogan of turn-of-the-century hygienists, some of whom professed an almost evangelical faith in these precepts. The anonymous author of the examination of urban poverty, *Montreal by Gaslight*, evoked the "pale faces, sunken eyes, and wasted cheeks" of the city's poorly-housed workers in an attempt to jar his readers into awareness. "In a Christian city, is this right?" he asked, harmonising the calls of science and religion.⁵⁵ On this note, it hardly seems fortuitous that hygienists called their studies 'catechisms,'⁵⁶ or that reformers rejoiced at the "miracles"⁵⁷ they believed they worked. They compared themselves to missionaries who travelled the world, giving time, knowledge and even their lives to bring civilisation to "des peuplades sauvages."⁵⁸ Their rallying cries could even be compared to the words of an evangelist rousing his disciples into recruiting more followers: "Que chacun de nous amène un nouvel adhérent, que ce nouvel adhérent nous en amène un nouveau à son tour, et le temps ne sera pas éloigné où nous serons une armée formidable, l'armée du bien marchant en avant pour améliorer les logements défectueux et bénie par les malheureux qu'elle aura secourus."⁵⁹

Some hygienists in the period continued to draw on traditional understandings of the interdependency of body and soul, arguing that a person's physical attributes were telltale symbols of their inner self and personality. One's physical "constitution," was

⁵² Du Caju, *Manuel domestique d'alimentation et d'hygiène*, 9.

⁵³ Olivier Faure, "Le regard des médecins," 40.

⁵⁴ Baillaigé, *La nature, la race, la santé*, 46-47.

⁵⁵ *Montreal by Gaslight* (Montreal?: s.n., 1889), 19.

⁵⁶ See for example, *Catéchisme de tuberculose* (Montréal: Ligue Antituberculeuse de Montréal, 1908),

Joseph Israël Desroches, *Catéchisme d'hygiène privée* (Montreal: W.F. Daniel, 1889).

⁵⁷ AALO (1895), 22.

⁵⁸ "Comité de patronage annual report," (1898), 10.

⁵⁹ AALO (1902), 24. On the "quasi-biblical tones" of urban reformers in this period, see Mayne, *The Imagined Slum*, 151.

seen as an indicator of “tempérament.” A nervous disposition, for instance, was revealed by a thin, spindly body, while strong bones and powerful muscles were the signs of a sanguine personality.⁶⁰ But, more broadly, new scientific knowledge gave hygienists a new cause for optimism. They came to believe that individuals, by following the laws of hygiene, could shape their environment in ways that limited the spread of disease. This feeling of agency could thus be directed at the moral and social problems in cities. “Those who believed that nature could overcome nurture,” argues historian Stanley Schultz, “revelled in the courses of action open to them.” In the same way that the physical environment could be modified to counter diseases, so too could non-physical problems be attacked. “Human action,” adds the author, “could alter the face of the city and reshape the moral health of the urban populace.”⁶¹ Thus if some of the blame for the housing situation could be placed on entrepreneurs who, in their search for profit, built hastily and shoddily, the unhygienic behaviour of these houses’ occupants became the real target of the reformers’ cause.⁶² Though unsanitary privy pits were constructed by unscrupulous landlords, it was the fact that they were “fréquentment souillés par des visiteurs maladroits ou négligents,” that truly made them problematic.⁶³

This moral dimension was central to the reform-minded bourgeoisie’s understandings of workers’ homes and bodies. Unable to take on the economic realities behind these housing troubles, hygienists sought to mould and influence the personal choices and actions of workers. Poverty was certainly no excuse for neglecting hygiene, they insisted. Quite the contrary, added Du Caju, “si la pauvreté sale est repoussante et ignoble, la pauvreté propre, qui se respecte dans ses apparences, émeut et inspire l’estime.” Scientific conceptions of hygiene as a collection of strategies to increase bodily resistance against disease were also intrinsically brought to the interior level of

⁶⁰ *L’Hygiéniste* 1, no. 2 (July 1894), 34-40. The Montreal hygienist J.I. Desroches took up a similar theme in of his books, adding that specific hygienic rules were required for each personality type. See Joseph Israël Desroches, *Traité élémentaire d’hygiène privée*, 2e ed. (Montréal: W.F. Daniel, 1890), 24. The study of “nasography” even purported to read people’s personality from the shape of their nose. *L’hygiène illustrée* 2, no. 3-4 (March-April 1911), 14. See also *L’almanach du peuple* (1900), 30. Most of history’s “grands hommes” had large noses, affirmed the writers, citing as examples Hippocrates, Luther, Michelangelo, Mazarin and Corneil, among others.

⁶¹ Stanley Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 113.

⁶² On this theme in the American context, see Topalov, “La ville ‘congestionnée,’” 100.

⁶³ Putzeijs and Putzeijs, *Hygiène appliquée*, 209.

values and emotions, and seen as a way to inculcate a love of order, respect of one's self and others, even "le désir d'être compté parmi les personnes de bonne compagnie."⁶⁴

The connection between a hygienic home environment and morality was thus framed as a question of social betterment, a matter of living up to one's responsibilities in order to contribute to the development of a more prosperous and healthy community. Herbert Ames, for instance, argued that adequate housing fostered an atmosphere that encouraged people to be more "independent and self-reliant," in contrast to overcrowded tenements where a lack of privacy jeopardised both health and morals.⁶⁵ This attitude was very much reflected in the conviction we have noted among reformers, that home ownership for workers was the preferred solution to urban housing problems. The financial responsibility of owning one's home, they believed, would favour moral propriety and a sense of responsibility among the working-class, encouraging such values as order and thrift, promoting a wholesome family life, as well as eliminating various forms of vice.

b) *Immorality and vice*

It is precisely on this last point, the notion of vice, that the interdependence of morality and hygiene was most ardently defended. Indeed, if hygienists and other reformers decried the material conditions in which lived so many working families, it was but a small step to equate the inferiority and inadequacy of the accommodations with that of the individuals. Describing a residential *impasse* in Molenbeek, for instance, the local section of the *Association* noted that the typical resident performed only menial tasks, was drunken and lazy, while "la femme est peu soigneuse et mauvaise ménagère. Les enfants y sont élevés dans le vice et l'oisiveté."⁶⁶ Throughout these reports, the urban poor are said to have a "penchant naturel" for dirtiness, clutter and disorder, they are described as being in "parfaite inconscience" of their situation,⁶⁷ and

⁶⁴ Du Caju, *Manuel domestique d'alimentation et d'hygiène*, 9.

⁶⁵ Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, 41-44.

⁶⁶ AALO (1896), 30.

⁶⁷ AALO (1901), 19, 24.

living in a generalized state of “torpor” and “indifference.”⁶⁸ The moral shortcomings according to which the workers were judged, then, were determined, to a considerable degree, in close correlation with the perceptions that their homes were deficient, unsanitary, even dangerous.

If we look more closely at some of the specific vices that reformers frequently mentioned, we see the link between body and home drawn upon quite explicitly. The question of alcohol consumption, deplored by the Molenbeek committee, above, is a case in point. Workers in both cities were frequently accused by housing reformers, as well as by their employers, of indulging too frequently in the pleasures of drink, squandering away their already meagre salaries instead of investing their earnings in better lodging for their families. The insalubrious atmosphere of their homes was directly invoked, for, as one specialist explained, these dwellings “n’offrent pas le moindre charme au travailleur et le poussent tout naturellement à chercher des distractions au cabaret, favorisant ainsi singulièrement l’alcoolisme et ses funestes conséquences.”⁶⁹ If a disagreeable home environment favoured alcoholic tendencies, this environment was in turned worsened by the family-related problems caused by alcoholism, noted the hygienists.⁷⁰ And in the middle of the problem stood the worker’s body, ravaged by the effects of alcohol on the system; effects compounded by the fact that the drinks workers could afford to purchase were generally of poor quality and sometimes of counterfeit composition.

Undoubtedly, the housing reformers’ most gripping concerns regarding the notion of morality in the body-home connection revolved around the thorny issue labelled promiscuity. The very first article of the *Association’s* programme, in fact, defined the organisation as a social undertaking created to improve working-class housing “et surtout d’y combattre la promiscuité.”⁷¹ From a purely hygienic perspective, the intense promiscuity resulting from the concentration of so many individuals in these narrow dwellings augured nothing but problems. As Soenens

⁶⁸ Forest Comité Officiel de Patronage des Habitations Ouvrières et des Institutions de Prévoyance de Saint-Gilles (Anderlecht, Saint-Gilles et Uccle), *1er Rapport Annuel. Travaux du Comité en 1901* (Bruxelles: A.R. De Ghilage & Cie, 1902), 81.

⁶⁹ A. Vander Moere, *Habitations ouvrières* (Bruxelles: Jules de Meester, 1901), 4.

⁷⁰ Province de Québec, *Rapport de la Commission Royale de la Tuberculose*, 61.

⁷¹ AALO (1895), 3.

explained, “l’encombrement et la promiscuité si généralement constatés dans les logements des quartiers populaires engendrent les maux physiques les plus redoutables; ils étioient l’enfance, diminuent la résistance vitale et amènent la débilitation qui expose l’homme sans défenses aux atteintes de la maladie.” However, the author continued, these physical calamities were only the first step toward the development of a host of serious moral problems that afflicted society and inevitably brought about the “dégénérescence de l’espèce” in the form of the proliferation of alcoholism and criminality, increased dependency on public assistance, as well as the inevitable spread of epidemic diseases that were propagated well beyond the homes in which they originated.⁷² Even shared sanitary accommodations constituted an “evil,”⁷³ an affront to “les règles élémentaires de l’hygiène et de la morale.”⁷⁴

But if modern understanding of digestive bodily practices struck reformers’ sense of morality, they were even more obfuscated by the delicate questions of sexual promiscuity.⁷⁵ Whereas promiscuity around sanitary installations was qualified as “malsaine” on a number of levels,⁷⁶ when it came to the inevitable promiscuity of sleeping quarters, the matter became downright “désastreux.”⁷⁷ As Gouin lamented, it was in such types of housing that, sooner or later, “la pudeur se perd, le mal s’apprend, des fautes détestables se commettent.”⁷⁸ The lack of personal space available to each member of the household meant that individuals of both sexes would find themselves sharing the same beds, if, as the reformers sighed, “la pailleuse, infectée souvent de

⁷² Soenens, *Les habitations ouvrières en Belgique*, 27.

⁷³ Ames, *The City Below the Hill*, 45. So personally troubled by situation was Ames that he even mounted, on his office wall, a map with coloured representations of where the “privy abomination” was at its worst.

⁷⁴ AALO (1896), 31.

⁷⁵ Historians have noted that understandings of sexuality were also subjected to the increasing rigidity of the division between public and private during a period that nonetheless witnessed a marked interest in scientific interest in sexuality, notably through the research of Freud and the emergence of the discipline of sexology. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité*, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Alain Corbin, *L’harmonie des plaisirs. Les manières de jouir du siècle des Lumières à l’avènement de la sexologie* (Paris: Perrin, 2008). For a recent examination of questions of sexuality and transgression in turn-of-the-century Montreal, see Tamara Myers, *Caught: Montreal’s modern girls and the law, 1869-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ AALO (1903), 13.

⁷⁷ AALO (1895), 22. Émile Vandervelde, *L’exode rural et le retour aux champs* (Paris: Félic Alcan, 1910), 239.

⁷⁸ Gouin, “Le logement de la famille ouvrière,” 7.

vermine, et jetée la nuit au milieu de la chambre” could even be called a bed.⁷⁹ Such night-time proximity, they feared, would facilitate sexual relations, particularly between young people, contributing to the overall atmosphere of immorality which, as we have seen, their sensibilities readily detected in the homes of workers and the urban poor.⁸⁰

Because those who found themselves subjected to these conditions were often members of the same family, what Gouin and other specialists of hygiene and housing in Montreal and Brussels feared were the possibilities for incestuous relations created by these spatial arrangements, and a certain level of discomfort is perceptible in the reformers’ discussion of the matter. As we saw above, Gouin’s reference to incest was rather veiled. Without using the actual word, he simply suggests that “la communauté des chambres à coucher” was responsible for the loss of innocence he deplored.

While many of his Montreal colleagues were also reluctant to openly discuss such a delicate question, references to it in the Brussels sources are more frequent, but not always less oblique. Responding to question 86 g) on the influence of housing accommodations on workers’ morality and the effects of this promiscuity in the *Commission du travail*’s investigation, one anonymous respondent simply let his or her distress speak for itself, cryptically writing, “ma plume refuse de détailler ce qui se passe dans ces malheureux logements. À l’occasion je donnerai des détails.”⁸¹ Others, still refusing to name the evil, simply informed readers of their observations, letting them put two and two together, such as the authors of one patronage committee report who condemned the “tristes conséquences” of this promiscuity, which was becoming, “hélas de plus en plus fréquents : ici, c’est une famille composée de 9 personnes : parents, fils et filles, dont plusieurs adultes, logent dans une même chambre; là c’est une mère partageant la couche avec son fils âgé de 16 ans.”⁸²

For some housing specialists, however, the question of incest was a fundamental one, and, as a symptom of the broader urban downfall that coloured so many spatial

⁷⁹ Lagasse and De Quéker, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières en 1890*, 9.

⁸⁰ Indeed, new conceptions of time, and the decline of traditional delineations between night and day during this period, gave rise to a vision of the night as a time of danger, subversions, and charged sexuality. See Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930*, trans. Pierre Gottfreid Imhoff and Dafydd Rees Roberts (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 23, 178.

⁸¹ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 1039.

⁸² “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1912), 102.

stories, needed to be confronted. Both major investigations conducted in Brussels during this period referred to a problem, it should be noted, that brought bodily considerations to a most acute level of awareness in the broader narratives about these neighbourhoods. Hellemans, for his part, had little difficulty in letting the “équation personnelle” intervene in his condemnation of the “intense” and “deplorable” promiscuity and incest his inquiry had uncovered, referring to the “commerces infâmes existant entre frère et sœur, père et fille, et même entre mère et fils!”⁸³ Fifteen years earlier, Lagasse and De Quéker had been just as shocked by what their own study had revealed. More than half of the families the investigators had visited, many of which were comprised of more than five people, lived in one-room dwellings. No need to be a strict moralist, they declared, to understand the possible consequences of such a state of affairs.

Begging forgiveness for revealing certain “détails quelque peu naturalistes,” they proceeded to illustrate the sources of their concern by recounting the story of one family of ten, sharing a single, if relatively spacious, room and made up of a seventy year-old patriarch and his wife, three children from his first marriage, two daughters and a son from his second marriage, as well as his current wife’s two daughters from a previous marriage. There was only one bed in the room, shared by the parents. The eight children, aged between 17 and 29, slept on what the authors referred to as “un immense sac-à-paille” which they tossed into a corner during the day. What resulted from this situation appalled the investigators: three of the four young women, they discovered, were pregnant. The two youngest ones, they added, did not betray the slightest hint of shame in designating their stepbrother, Jef, as “l’auteur d’une situation qu’il ne leur était plus possible de cacher.” When they asked Jef about it, he initially denied his responsibility, before admitting to it in the same way one confesses for pulling some sort of practical joke, and then raised the issue of the third sister’s pregnancy, pointing the finger at another one of the brothers. “Tout cela se disait avec un tel cynisme... naturel,” commented the authors of the report, “qu’il faut avoir entendu la conversation pour croire.” The investigators also recounted their efforts to obtain explanations from the father, but, they explained, this “ivrogne endurci” did not seem to understand their

⁸³ Hellemans, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières*, 19.

observations and abruptly ended the conversation, telling them that “personne n’avait à se mêler de ses affaires ni de celles de ses filles.” The story ends with the revelation that the investigators sought the assistance of a *dame patronnesse* who gave the family money for a larger flat. No sooner did the father have the money in hand than he and his wife left for her hometown of Charleroi, leaving the children on their own in the capital.⁸⁴

What these accounts say about the veritable frequency of acts of incest in Brussels or Montreal is impossible to ascertain. Though the issue was frequently denounced, Lagasse and De Quéker admitted that they did not know whether many such cases existed, and “pour l’honneur de nos ouvriers” they wished to believe not. Only their empirical statistics about the numbers of people per room in these neighbourhoods allowed them to doubt that such stories were not exceptional. Moreover, we do not know of sexual improprieties that may have existed in the homes of the bourgeoisie itself, as no one was mandated to investigate the bedrooms of these cities’ wealthier residents. However, these accounts bring bodily and moral conceptions, elements of the reformers’ interiority, to the heart of their understanding of these unique spaces, created from the push of modern industrialisation. Reformers focussed distinctly on the workers’ physical surroundings, their bodies, and their morality, imputing their perceived moral proclivities to their spatial environment. They condemned this suspected sexual behaviour, but they also demonised the actors, attacking their physical and moral state. Lagasse and De Quéker portrayed the young women as flighty and unawares, showed the young man as a careless buffoon, their (step)father as an irresponsible drunk and their apartment as a flea-ridden den of iniquity. In such a way did the modern urban landscape come to be defined in these bodily terms, terms through which space was given meaning according to such categories of opposition as bourgeois and worker, salubrious and insalubrious, moral and immoral.

c) *Sub-human bodies*

As historians of the bourgeoisie argue, the hold of this social group over the reigns of power and influence, though steady, was in no sense guaranteed, needing

⁸⁴ Lagasse and De Quéker, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières en 1890*, 8.

perpetual reaffirmation and consolidation.⁸⁵ Historian Geoffrey Crossick, for instance, suggests that questions of struggle for the exercise of control over the urban context played a decisive part in the development of a class consciousness within the bourgeoisie.⁸⁶ This dynamic is readily apparent in the ways in which, as we have observed, the urban reformers of Brussels and Montreal rendered moral judgement on the working class, affirming, in the process, their belief in their own moral superiority and in their capacity to dictate the terms on which urban space should be inhabited.

In some cases, this strategy went as far as virtually dehumanising the urban poor through discourses that associated their moral state with an animal existence. Bodily references were, of course, central to these constructions. As one pair of reformers explained, citing the thoughts of the abbé Cuylits, a Brussels priest heavily engaged in social causes, scourges such as tuberculosis and alcohol affected the bodies of the residents of these “abnormal” dwellings, but the worst consequence of all was “l’immoralité et l’impudeur, parce que la promiscuité et les misères d’une vie presque animale ramènent naturellement à des mœurs d’animaux.”⁸⁷ In Montreal, Gouin took much the same line, noting that the city’s insalubrious homes stripped workers of their dignity and evacuated their sense of moral responsibility. The resident of such homes, “ne se maintient guère au dessus de l’animal qui vit sans autre souci que sa pâture journalière.”⁸⁸

In a 1904 patronage committee report, Hellemans, commenting on the state of the Impasse de la Baleine, known to be particularly insalubrious, focussed specifically on the body of a particular woman whose face “est ravagée atrocement par un lupus et qui chaque année donne cependant le sein à un enfant.” He continued his gruesome description by focussing even more explicitly on these facial features: “les lèvres ont

⁸⁵ See for example, Geoffrey Crossick, “La bourgeoisie britannique au XIXe siècle : recherches, approches, problématiques,” *Annales, histoire, sciences sociales* (1998), Simon Gunn, “Ritual and Civic Culture in the English Industrial City, c. 1835-1914,” in *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750*, ed. Robert J. Morris and Richard H. Trainer (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), Jürgen Kocka, “Modèle européen et cas allemand,” in *Les bourgeoisies européennes au XIXe siècle*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Paris: Belin, 1996).

⁸⁶ Crossick, “La bourgeoisie britannique au XIXe siècle,” 1102.

⁸⁷ Léonce de Castillon and Fernand Bansart, *La question des habitations à bon marché et des logements à bon marché en Belgique et à l'étranger. Étude du projet de loi belge instituant une société nationale des habitations à bon marché* (Bruxelles: Établissements généraux d'imprimerie, 1914), 16.

⁸⁸ Gouin, “Le logement de la famille ouvrière,” 9.

disparu, une oreille est mangée, le nez est remplacé par un trou profond, des pellicules qui se détachent continuellement de la face, tombent abondamment sur les vêtements.”⁸⁹ While we can speculate that Hellemans’ description may have been overstated, the emphasis on the woman’s corporeal deformations and insistence on continuing to breast-feed children, reveals the authors’ anxieties about the physical and implicit moral dangers of this environment at the heart of the modern city. As historian Anson Rabinbach argues, nineteenth-century thinkers tended to “equate the psychological with the physical and to locate the body as the site where social deformations and dislocations can be most readily observed.”⁹⁰ Through Hellemans’ language and imagery, this woman is practically reduced to a sub-human level, made into a monster that not only typifies the threats associated with the impact of modernity on urban space, but who also symbolises, in a profoundly corporeal way, the bourgeoisie’s deepest fears about what these filthy alleys, these dark sores on the city landscape, could represent.

IV. SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THE HOME

a) *When bourgeois and worker meet*

This keen interest in the housing question brought these middle-class reformers into direct contact with workers, contributing to the shaping of the class relations that structured the spatial narratives of residents of Montreal and Brussels. To be sure, many commentators favoured the development of distinct working and middle or upper-class neighbourhoods.⁹¹ As we saw in Chapter 3, certain members of Brussels’ and Montreal’s most privileged social groups advocated the construction of transport infrastructures that would allow workers to live in the surrounding suburbs, freeing the central city of these dense working-class districts that were seen as threats to the physical and moral health of the wider city. In the countryside, explained Montreal

⁸⁹ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1904), 10.

⁹⁰ Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 21. On the evolving social meanings of bodily deformations, see also Henri-Jacques Stiker, “Nouvelles perceptions du corps infirme” in Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 279-297.

⁹¹ See, for example, Roderick Macleod, “Salubrious Settings and Fortunate Families: The Making of Montreal’s Golden Square Mile, 1840-1895” (PhD thesis, McGill University, 1997). This is also discussed by Walter Van Nus, “A Community of Communities: Suburbs in the Development of ‘Greater Montreal’” in Isabelle Gournay and France Vanlaethem, eds., *Montreal Metropolis, 1880-1930* (Toronto: Stoddart in association with the Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1998), 59-67.

hygienist A.A. Foucher, houses were independent from one another, allowing light and fresh air to inundate people's homes.⁹² For his part, De Quéker favoured a horizontal development of the city that would counteract the perceived negative effects of its skyward momentum.⁹³ Besides, he noted, living further away from the centre would provide workers with the opportunity for a daily, hygienic walk to and from work.⁹⁴

Others, however, noted that if individual homes were preferable, they did not believe that urban multi-family apartment buildings necessarily had to be insalubrious. Properly applied, the laws of hygiene could bring physical improvements and moral uplift to virtually any home.⁹⁵ Furthermore, proponents of this view, especially in Brussels where the more limited amount of land on which to build made this particular form of promiscuity almost obligatory, claimed that the solution to the moral shortcomings of the working class was to continue to make room for them in the city's prosperous neighbourhoods, convinced that the good example set by the bourgeoisie would inevitably wear off onto the workers: "les ouvriers perdraient ainsi par le contact avec des gens un peu plus polissés [sic] quelque chose de leur fréquente rudesse, en même temps que s'atténuerait dans leur esprit cette idée fausse que la population ouvrière constitue une classe à part nettement distinct des classes bourgeoises."⁹⁶ Recognising the challenge posed by the constantly increasing property values in central Brussels, the president of the *Association pour l'amélioration des logements ouvriers* insisted that creating contact between the poor and members of the "classes bourgeoises et supérieures" was a salutary objective, and that this "'coude à coude' de la vie commune, les relations de bon voisinage du protecteur avec le protégé" had to be encouraged.⁹⁷ As we have seen, the bourgeoisie of these cities constructed luxurious neighbourhoods that reinforced the social differentiation of residential space, suggesting that this line of argument was more rhetorical than sincere.

⁹² "Dans les villes, au contraire," he continued, "les maisons sont accolées les unes aux autres, les constructions qui s'élèvent en face ou en arrière sont hautes et interceptent les rayons directs du soleil [...]." A.A. Foucher, "La lumière considérée dans ses rapports avec l'hygiène." *Journal d'hygiène populaire* 4, no. 2 (1887), 29.

⁹³ "Comité de patronage annual report," (1907), 34. See also Gouin, "Le logement de la famille ouvrière," 18.

⁹⁴ "Comité de patronage annual report," (1904), 97..

⁹⁵ Falloise, *De la construction d'habitations ouvrières*, 41.

⁹⁶ AALO (1896), 16.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Residents of working-class neighbourhoods, however, did not always adhere to reformers' spatial understandings, nor did they necessarily appreciate their frequent presence in the intimacy of their dwellings, and varying levels of resistance can be detected in the sources. To be sure, municipal officials and philanthropic reformers were aware of the fact that their presence in workers' homes could be interpreted as an intrusion. This is evident, for instance, in the outline of the rules to be followed by the Montreal sanitary police in which officials were reminded that in diligently applying hygiene by-laws, they were to remain respectful and polite toward the residents of the homes they inspected.⁹⁸ At the beginning of the 1890 investigation in Brussels, the police officers responsible for collecting the data on behalf of the principal investigators were cautioned, in no uncertain terms, that despite the zeal expected of them, their efforts "ne doivent pas donner lieu à une enquête vexatoire pour les ouvriers." The investigation had to be carried out with a good deal of tact, they continued, suggesting that it was better to leave certain questions unanswered than to "faire des constatations et des mesurages contre le gré des habitants."⁹⁹

Despite these admonitions, reformers sometimes received a rather cool reception when entering the homes of workers. In Brussels, *Association* members, boastful of their work, were reluctant to report negative experiences. Yet their frequent references to the workers' resistance to their message bespeaks the tensions they may have faced when visiting these alleys and penetrating these homes.¹⁰⁰ Repeated recommendations to attempt to befriend the workers also suggest that bourgeois reformers were not always welcomed with open arms. Wherefore the need for "quelques marques d'intérêt et quelques petits services," or a "mot d'encouragement" and a "parole dite à propos de l'intérêt que l'on montre pour les enfants du pauvre," if not to overcome or placate existing feelings of hostility?¹⁰¹ The reformers' need to develop and discuss such strategies indicates that the implementation of hygienic norms, and the attempts to reconfigure urban space according to notions of progress and social improvement, were also the result of confrontation and the expression of competing claims to these spaces.

⁹⁸ "Rapport de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1885," 16.

⁹⁹ Lagasse and De Quéker, *Enquête sur les habitations ouvrières en 1890*, 4.

¹⁰⁰ In 1897, to cite but one instance, the Bas-Ixelles section reported, "le comité se plaint de la résistance qu'il rencontre lorsqu'il veut éloigner une famille de quelque demeure malsaine." AALO (1897), 27.

¹⁰¹ AALO (1896), 22, and (1895), 19.

In support for their cause, housing reformers readily affirmed that workers appreciated the efforts directed at them, but while we have little evidence of what workers were indeed thinking, certain sources do reveal an element of resentment. On the recommendation that they would be better off leaving the city centre of Montreal or Brussels, for instance, we can surmise from their unwillingness to acquiesce that many in the working class disagreed with this assessment. Each day, the city seemed to be improving itself, noted one contributor to the Montreal weekly, *L'ouvrier*. Where tumbledown hovels once stood, elegant and sumptuous stone houses were going up. In the midst of all this progress, however, "l'ouvrier, sac au dos, émigre vers les quartiers éloignés, et cherche dans la banlieue les loyers bon marché, qu'il ne peut plus trouver au centre," and continued to live in insalubrious homes, which, in many cases, offered little respite against the cold of Montreal winters.¹⁰² We have seen that workers denounced their housing conditions to the Belgian *Commission du travail*, but, to them, the solutions proposed by the bourgeoisie were inadequate. Moving further afield, for instance, would only extenuate workers who were already physically drained. Forced to wake up earlier and arrive home later, they would have less time to rest, and would be forced to take long, tiring walks in both directions. As for trains and tramways, the additional cost their use implied would negate the savings engendered by the lower rents in the suburbs. Furthermore, the ideal of home ownership for workers seemed unattainable, almost preposterous in light of their economic standing. Noted Conrardy, "quant à supposer que de simples ouvriers puissent être propriétaires de leurs habitations, je pense que ce serait une amère ironie que croire à un pareil phénomène."¹⁰³ What was really needed, several noted, was more state-subsidised housing built specifically for the city's workers.

b) *Domestic gender relations*

In addition to the class tensions they nourished, the spatial dynamic of these cities' residential areas was also intersected by understandings of gender relations.

¹⁰² *L'ouvrier*, 19 January 1884, 2.

¹⁰³ Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Réponses au questionnaire concernant le travail industriel*, 582.

Many of the hygienists and leaders of the housing reform movement, most of whom were men, felt that working-class women had a particularly crucial role to play in the great societal stakes of salubrious housing. It hardly seems fortuitous, for instance, that in his corporeal allegory of all that was sick in popular housing, Hellemans chose to embody his understanding of social ills in a female form. Women, it was understood, could make or break the working class home. In a fundraising letter sent out by the Brussels patronage committee, the president and secretary summarised this point of view quite succinctly, writing, “On a dit et répété avec raison que c’est la femme qui bâtit la maison et qui la démolit. Ne pouvons-nous pas affirmer encore que c’est la femme qui élève le travailleur, par son esprit d’ordre, par son économie, par sa propreté et l’attraction qu’elle met au foyer domestique, ou bien qui ruine de bonne heure l’avenir de l’ouvrier, par son incapacité morale et sa négligence comme mère ou comme épouse?”¹⁰⁴

Because they were mandated to produce and maintain a salubrious environment and pleasant atmosphere in the home, women were seen by housing reformers as bearing a particular responsibility for the social and moral order of the city.¹⁰⁵ Note, for instance, the expressly gendered language used by the Montreal hygienist Desroches in discussing hygiene as the “sister” of morality, the “legitimate daughter” of common sense and experience.¹⁰⁶ Along with this feminized conception of hygiene itself, much of the popular literature on the subject was geared specifically to female homemakers. As the keepers of hygiene in the home, it was particularly important that women be properly educated and kept informed about both what was expected of them and how they were to carry out their responsibilities. Indeed, noted Baillaigé, if the nation’s mothers had “en science de l’hygiène la centième partie de ce qu’elles ont d’amour et de

¹⁰⁴ AVB, Fonds maisons ouvrières, Archives du comité de patronage des habitations à bon marché et des institutions de prévoyance de Bruxelles, box 10, letter dated 23 April 1892. “Woman [...] in the role of housewife and street woman, comes to personify the promise of the modern city and the nightmare images of the city gone wild,” writes Mayne. Mayne, *The Imagined Shum*, 190.

¹⁰⁵ On the gendered construction of the ideal housewife in Belgium and Quebec during this period, see Éliane Gubin, “Le modèle de la femme au foyer en Belgique avant 1914” and Nicole Thivièrge, “Écoles ménagères et instituts familiaux : construction et reproduction de la norme féminine (1880-1980)” in Eliane Gubin, ed., *Norme et marginalités : comportements féminins aux 19e-20e siècles* (Bruxelles: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1991), 97-115 and 117-131.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Israël Desroches, *L’Homme et l’hygiène : conférence faite devant l’Association des instituteurs catholiques de Montréal, à l’Ecole normale Jacques-Cartier, le 26 mai 1893* (Province de Québec, 1893), 1.

bons soins, il y a plusieurs de nos frères et de nos sœurs, qui dorment au cimetière, qui seraient aujourd'hui du nombre des vivants et donneraient plus de force à la famille canadienne-française."¹⁰⁷ Housing reformers believed that the best-kept homes belonged to women who had previously worked as servants, having learned the values of order, cleanliness and thrift while at the service of upper-class employers. As for women who had only known the workshop, the reformers judged that their housekeeping skills tended to be sub-par.¹⁰⁸

Throughout the period, we find a host of manuals, newspapers and almanacs brimful of recommendations, tips, and admonitions counselling women to act as the foot soldiers of the battle for the spread of hygienic homes and behaviour. In its very first issue, the Montreal *Journal d'hygiène populaire*, for instance, stressed "l'importance des femmes pour faire avancer la cause."¹⁰⁹ Suggestions were given to guide women in thorough and frequent housecleaning, while various reminders of bodily cleanliness encouraged regular bathing and gave advice on how to care for sometimes neglected body parts such as hair, nails or teeth.¹¹⁰ Such matters, noted the Brussels publication *L'Hygiène illustrée*, were important because they were at the very core of daily existence. After all, they added, "c'est en traitant avec quelques soins et un peu plus de méthode ces mille riens dont la vie est faite, qu'il est possible de la rendre plus agréable, plus douce et plus pratique."¹¹¹

A key element of this discourse, moreover, and undoubtedly more revealing in terms of our exploration of how ideas about hygiene affected people on a personal level, was the way in which familial relationships between women and their children and husbands were framed. Providing children with a clean home, and showing them how to care for their bodies, were societal responsibilities that befell all mothers, charged with

¹⁰⁷ Baillaigé, *La nature, la race, la santé*, 48.

¹⁰⁸ AALO (1903), 17.

¹⁰⁹ *Journal d'hygiène populaire* 1, no.1 (May 1884), 2.

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, Séverin Lachapelle, *Femme et nurse, ou Ce que la femme doit apprendre en Hygiène et en Médecine* (Montréal: Province de Québec, 1901), Comité de Rédaction du *Conseiller des Ménagères, Almanach illustré des ménagères* (Bruxelles: Conseiller des Ménagères, 1895), Du Caju, *Manuel domestique d'alimentation et d'hygiène*. Lucy Schmidt, *Le livre des mères*, 7 ed. (Gand: Société coopérative "Volksdrukkerij", 1912), as well as *Le Foyer. Bulletin des intérêts féminins*, published in Montreal between 1905 and 1926, and *Almanach de la jeune fille et de la femme*, published in Brussels from 1909-1914.

¹¹¹ *L'hygiène illustrée* 1, no.1 (October 1910), 11.

ensuring that “nos enfants deviendront des hommes forts et utiles à la patrie.”¹¹² In fact, predicted Lucy Schmidt in her *Livre des mères*, the moral influence of cleanliness was strong enough that through it, children brought up in the respect of hygienic principles would gradually gain in social rank, because care for one’s physical person demonstrated a propensity for personal improvement in all aspects of life. “De là à sentir le besoin de cultiver son esprit par l’instruction, il n’y a qu’un pas à franchir,” she affirmed, before adding that “l’avenir est aux hommes qui auront conscience de leur dignité d’homme et voudront s’élever par leur perfectionnement moral.”¹¹³

As for the dynamic with their husbands, women were expected to keep a tidy and comfortable home so that, after a long day at the factory, men would prefer staying in with their families to wiling away the hours in the streets or at the local cabaret.¹¹⁴ Women, according to this logic, were held directly responsible for the behaviour of their husbands, and had only themselves to blame for their husbands’ repeated absences from the familial abode. Noted the Brussels *Almanach illustré des ménagères*, “c’est tout bonnement parce que vous ne savez pas les retenir, parce que votre intérieur n’est pas bien aménagé, parce que vos allures sont parfois détestables, parce que votre humeur est morose, enfin, en un mot parce que vous n’êtes pas ‘bonnes ménagères.’” It was women’s own negligence in failing to provide their working husbands with a pleasant and salubrious home that contributed to the laziness, debauchery and drunkenness that afflicted so many working families, went this frequently repeated line of thinking.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Schmidt, *Le livre des mères*, 36-37.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Gouin, “Le logement de la famille ouvrière,” 7, 14.

¹¹⁵ Comité de Rédaction du *Conseiller des Ménagères*, *Almanach illustré des ménagères*, 12.



Figure 16 “Deshonorée.” Illustration by the Belgian artist A. Struys, depicting familial discord in the working-class home.¹¹⁶

In their contacts with working-class women, housing reformers played on these conceptions of gender in a variety of ways. It was not without pride, for instance, that the representative of the Forest section of the *Association* recounted how his members had been able to play on what they understood to be women’s penchant for jealousy in order to obtain better results. When speaking to women in their district, the members would compare the house they were visiting to that of its neighbour, hinting that the others were better cared for and more orderly. “En accompagnant cette comparaison de la remarque que leur maison, devenant plus propre et plus coquette, retiendrait chez lui le père, l’époux, nous avons eu la satisfaction de constater des changements absolument remarquables.”¹¹⁷

Patronage committees spared no efforts to reinforce this gendered understanding of the home. Every year, the Brussels section organised its famous *Concours d’ordre et*

¹¹⁶ *Exposition Internationale de Bruxelles. Catalogue de la section internationale de l’hygiène et des arts médicaux et pharmaceutiques* (Bruxelles: Hayez, 1897).

¹¹⁷ AALO (1895), 19.

de propreté, designed to reward women who worked the hardest to improve the urban environment by ensuring that their homes were as clean and salubrious as possible. According to the rules, the competition was open to married, widowed, and ‘abandoned’ women who registered before the deadline. Women with criminal records, who ran liquor outlets, gave false information about themselves, or were generally of “moralité douteuse” were excluded outright, creating a category of individuals who were formally marginalized and deprived of the opportunity to participate in this official channel for improving the urban environment. The evaluation of the home was conducted following a point system in which participants were graded according to the number of persons comprising the household, the family’s financial situation, children’s attendance of school, the type of employment held by the head of the family, whether the family had savings and insurance, the cleanliness of the home, the bedding, the furniture, as well as the overall impression of the judges. Those with the most outstanding homes won savings accounts and received certificates. To ensure that participants supplied their full efforts, evaluations were not scheduled, but held randomly and without notice. In addition to motivating the participants to keep their homes clean at all times so as to be prepared for an unexpected visit, this strategy also afforded the patronage committee with a further reason to penetrate working-class homes.

To emphasise the message these competitions were designed to send, the committee organised an annual “distribution solennelle des prix,” a lavish awards gala held in the grandiose gothic room of the city hall, attended not just by the participants but also by a range of dignitaries, including members of the committee, city councillors, government ministers and Prince Albert, honorary president of the patronage committee, along with his wife, Princess Élisabeth, future King and Queen of Belgium. Speeches were given, flowers decorated the scene and patriotic songs were played by the royal *Cercle Instrumental*. The organisers consciously produced this atmosphere with the intention of impressing upon the women an aura of refinement and respectability, attitudes they were intended to bring back to their own housekeeping chores. Charles Lagasse, president of the committee, thanked the Prince for his royal presence by noting that “plus d’une lauréate, en s’endormant hier, a fait, grâce à vous d’heureux songes et rêvé que, comme dans les contes de fées, elle était accueillie dans un bon palais par de

bons princes.”¹¹⁸ Emotions ran high at such gatherings, and, according to the person who transcribed the proceedings, the speeches were frequently interrupted by “longs et vifs applaudissements,” even, surprisingly enough, when the women were told by the mayor that so many of the homes in their neighbourhood continued to constitute a bane on the capital’s image, and they would do better to relocate in the surrounding suburbs.¹¹⁹

Beneath the awe-inspiring atmosphere on the surface of these events, the content of the speeches themselves were chock-full of gendered meaning concerning worker’s residential space. The prince, politicians and philanthropists used the tribune to project their vision of the ideal home, and, above all, the specific role they expected of women in fostering this environment. Year after year, women were told that it was up to them to ensure the social and moral uplift of their class, and that innate virtue and motherly judgement were the best tools they had to accomplish this mission. Indeed, asked one minister, what would working families become without woman’s “vertus domestiques” through which she kept her children safe from the dangers of the street, and her husband away from the seduction of the cabaret? Comparing them to the “bourgeois gentilhomme” who wrote literature without knowing it, the minister lauded the women for exercising this virtue with humility and simplicity, without even realising that each day they courageously worked to face the challenges of modernity. “Vous avez contribué pour une part digne d’attention à la solution de ce grave problème qu’on appelle la *question sociale* et qui est l’objet des préoccupations de tant de penseurs,” he told them, in the process revealing his vision of working-class women’s innocent naïveté as they diligently worked for a better society, unaware of the deeper cerebral problems facing their world.¹²⁰

These events served to diffuse more overt political messages as well. Lagasse, for instance, never failed to remind the audience of the great leaps of progress such initiatives were bringing to workers’ homes in particular, and to the urban environment in general. “Il faut être aveugle pour nier les progrès réalisés depuis notre jeunesse, et ces progrès seront constants et durables,” he exclaimed, seizing in passing the

¹¹⁸ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1901), 10-11.

¹¹⁹ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1904), 137.

¹²⁰ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1905), 178.

opportunity to remind the working-class women gathered before him that such progress was the result of sustained efforts from all social classes under a regime of peace, labour and love for the nation. They were not, he insisted, in what can only be seen as an attack on the Parti ouvrier and other socialists, due to the vain efforts of “ceux qui rêvent de révolutionner la face du monde, la nature humaine même, par des bouleversements violents ou même des lois.”¹²¹ What a blessing to society that private interest pursued such laudable social aims, stated the prince on another occasion, proud that those responsible for industrial and commercial activity – “le corps de la nation” – were doing so much to heal its soul.¹²²

In keeping with the economic impetus of modernity, understandings of gender also shaped the construction of hygiene as a consumable product. Indeed, popular turn-of-the-century periodicals contain innumerable advertisements drawing explicitly on the ideas about hygiene being presented in adjacent columns of print, themselves frequently inundated with product placement strategies. Clearly geared to middle and upper-class women with the means to purchase such products, these representations provide an additional angle from which to consider the way in which private acts of personal hygiene, particularly as they related to women’s bodies, were discussed in public settings. The common thread linking these advertisements was the notion that women had a weaker physical disposition than men, and as such needed to compensate by purchasing these restorative products. “Depuis le commencement du monde, la femme a toujours eu plus que sa part de souffrance,” noted one textual ad in the Montreal paper *Le Canada*. Maintaining an aura of mystery around the female body, the author notes that “secret troubles” have always undermined women’s physical well-being. Always, that is, until the new hope brought about by a modern invention with the futuristic name of Ferrozone, a pill that promised to give the body new vitality and energy, bringing an end to the headaches, nervousness and irritability that plagued women’s lives.¹²³

Adverts like this one played on understandings of the connection between the physical and the interior self by promising bodily strength and vitality as well as an overall sense of happiness to those who consumed these pills or tonics. However, they

¹²¹ “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1901), 13.

¹²² “Comité de patronage annual report,” (1904), 133.

¹²³ *Le Canada* 1, no. 285 (9 March 1904), 7.

also showed how the hygienists' crusading language was rooted in broader societal understandings of gender. Beyond merely extolling the values of various soaps, shampoos, brooms and brushes, these ads often pitched such products as necessary to the fulfillment of the roles expected of women. "Les hommes évitent les femmes pâles et faibles. Ils hésitent avant de les marier," warned an advertisement for "Les Pilules Rouges du Dr Coderre." Only young women with rosy cheeks and shiny eyes, sure signs of vigorous health, found model husbands who cared for them and their children.¹²⁴

Once women were settled into their home and family life, however, the stress on their bodies would only increase, they were warned. "Il y a le jour du lavage, le jour du repassage, les jours de couture, etc., chacun de ces jours apporte sa part de travail. Il y a des moments d'anxiété et d'épuisement," empathized another such commercial, showing a woman hard at work with, nearby, a glass of "Vin Saint-Lehon," a vivifying liquid from France that gave new energy to the body and mind, a "tonique idéal des femmes," that allowed women to both soothe their bodies and perform the household tasks expected of them.¹²⁵ For her part, O. Chopard, a Brussels doctor, held a regular column entitled "Causerie de la Doctoresse" in *Bruxelles féminin*, a glossy magazine geared to a wealthier readership. While the health issues Chopard's readers faced seemed to result more from their "genre de vie sédentaire," the challenges of modern life were no less numerous, and the doctor's columns were peppered with advice on hair and skin care, obesity and constipation, along with the names of the most recommendable products and remedies. The discourse on the body and the home we have examined throughout this chapter spread well beyond the scientific tracts and meetings of hygienists and housing reformers. With the emergence of a consumer-driven economy, women in Brussels and Montreal, around whom so much of the body-home discourse was centred, were also potential consumers of products that promised, in the hectic context of the modern city, to alleviate some of the physical and mental strains caused by the transformations of this distinct environment.

¹²⁴ *L'Almanach de Montréal* (1899), 11.

¹²⁵ *Le Canada* 1, no. 257 (5 February 190), 1.

CONCLUSION

In Marius Renard's *Notre pain quotidien*, the protagonists, Madeleine and François, who we first met in Chapter 3, settle into a cozy apartment in the industrial suburb of Anderlecht, just west of Brussels. Faced with the precariousness of working-class life, far from her natural social and family networks, Madeleine works hard to keep her home well-decorated and impeccably clean. When her husband is jailed for his involvement in a workers' uprising and Madeleine finds herself pregnant and alone, she takes solace in preparing the home for the baby's arrival.¹²⁶ Renard, a socialist politician whose work consistently expressed hope for the improvement of conditions for the working class, uses the image of Madeleine's home and her determination to keep it comfortable as evidence that limited means did not condemn the urban poor to a miserable existence. Read in conjunction with the reports of the more conservative-minded housing reformers, Renard's description of this working-class home seems almost defiant, as if his objective was to counter the more prevalent images of workers' housing as sordid spaces of disease and vice.

Nevertheless, in presenting Madeleine's home in this manner, Renard showed his characters living up to a modern, hygienic ideal through which the significance of residential space in the modern city was constructed. Not only did Madeleine and her housekeeping skills conform to the hackneyed gender norms of the woman as defender of working-class moral integrity, but the physical aspect of the apartment itself corresponded with prevailing standards of salubriousness, typified by abundant light and adequate ventilation. Indeed, this vision of the working-class home corresponded with the discourses of the hygienists, politicians, bureaucrats, philanthropists and other housing reformers we have examined in this chapter. In the context of industrialisation and urbanisation in Montreal and Brussels at the turn of the twentieth century, these cities' housing stock constituted a central element of the landscape. With a vast proportion of the urban population made up of workers, the problems associated with the lack of salubriousness in these homes took a significant place in the discourse through which was constructed the spatial significance of these modern cities.

¹²⁶ Marius Renard, *Notre Pain Quotidien* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1909), 145-146, 252-253.

Just as the houses themselves gave texture and colour to the fabric of the modern city, this chapter has argued, so too were the discourses that gave them meaning as constituent elements of urban space grounded in ideas associated with modernity and the body. On the surface, the problem of insalubrious housing was a technical and scientific one, which involved the body directly. Indeed, the most obvious consequence of humid, poorly ventilated houses equipped with decrepit pipes, drains and latrines was the spread of disease, both within these neighbourhoods themselves and toward the rest of the city. From a hygienic point of view, the home, which was supposed to provide rest for the tired body of the worker, seemed to be more of a corporeal danger than a reviving haven. In the wake of emerging discoveries in the fields of bacteriology, hygiene and medicine, there reigned a sense of confidence among housing reformers that modern science held the key to solving these problems. To this end, the merits of personal hygiene and diligent cleanliness in the home were preached through studies, reports and periodicals. Detailed investigations were undertaken and, pen and paper in hand, inspectors took to the streets to map, measure and monitor the relative state of salubriousness in these cities' working-class neighbourhoods.

However, beneath this objective and rational approach to ostensibly scientific problems, we have also seen that there lay deeply subjective and interior preoccupations, connecting housing troubles to middle-class perceptions not only of class and gender, but also of their deeper fears regarding disorder, vice and immorality. If modern hygiene meant providing an environment in which the body could stay healthy and strong, it also required that special care be given to one's mental faculties and moral posture. Indeed, the physical sensations reformers experienced when entering working-class residential spaces were reported and discussed in heavily loaded and profoundly emotional terms. Though historians have argued that this alarmist tone was a consciously deployed tactic to win adherents to a cause, dismissing this passionate language as mere hyperbole would fail to account for these reformers' own interiority. Their confrontation with the physically deformed bodies of the urban poor, the darkness and disorder in which they sometimes lived, the scenes of drunkenness and incest they occasionally witnessed, shocked their sense of morality and values.

The framework of civility in which the bourgeoisie of the period situated its social norms was the product of gradually rising thresholds of shame and repugnance. Bodily practices were increasingly considered distasteful and relegated to the private sphere of the home. However, these distinctions were not fixed or immovable, and this chapter has shown how middle-class reformers were fascinated, and drawn into, the intimacy of workers' homes. By physically experiencing the atmosphere and contemplating the bedrooms and outhouses in which workers carried out their most intimate bodily practices, the bourgeoisie pushed at these limits. They tested the bounds of their own feelings of shame and decency, casting judgement on their fellow urban dwellers and affirming their own sense of identity in the process.

The language of hygiene and morality through which residential spaces were understood was remarkably similar in both cities. To be sure, local contexts varied – Brussels, for instance, was far more densely populated in the centre and the problems associated with overcrowding were more deeply entrenched than in Montreal. In addition, a more established philanthropic tradition in Brussels led to the creation of larger reform-minded organisations that have left behind more expansive sets of sources from which to analyse these questions.

But fundamentally, municipal authorities, hygienists and reformers assessed the question of housing in similar ways in the two cities, drew on a common scientific literature, travelled to the same international congresses. The shared frame of reference on both sides of the Atlantic suggests that, far more than depending on local specificity, ideas about hygiene and the body were fuelled by the globalising tendencies of modernity. This comparative analysis of workers' housing also demonstrates the extent to which discourse about the city and the body, constructed initially through highly localised personal experiences with the material spaces people encountered, gained their fullest significance through dialogues and encounters that far surpassed the immediate environment, demonstrating how individual bodies and private spaces were integrated into the transnational flows through which the urban culture of the turn of the century was reformulated.

As we entered the labyrinths of these modern cities' neighbourhoods, I suggested that the frequently cited notion that a typical day was ideally divided into three eight-

hour segments appropriately reflected the way residents of these industrial cities interacted with urban space. Having visited their factories and homes, on now to the busy streets of Brussels and Montreal, where much of people's time away from house and work was spent, and whose spatial significance was shaped in far more public sensorial experiences and bodily practices.

CHAPTER 6

IMPRESSIONS OF THE STREET: THE BODY IN PUBLIC SPACE

In the autumn months of 1914, as war raged in Europe, the Montreal women's magazine, *Le Foyer*, published the travel diary of an unnamed "friend" who had spent a few weeks in Belgium and Germany seven years earlier. The magazine's intention was to provide its readers with additional perspective on some of the places they were hearing so much about in the news. The visitor had stayed three days in Brussels, apparently spending much of his time in Sainte-Gudule Cathedral, and expressed a rather positive overall impression of the city. To him, nothing in Brussels was more beautiful than its boulevards as they lit up with activity in the evenings. "J'entends un boulevard commercial, achalandé, vivant," he specified before offering a truly sensorial account of his movements through these lively spaces:

Sans discontinuité, le long de ses trottoirs s'alignent magasins, boutiques, kiosques, cafés. On met aux vitrines tout ce qu'on a de plus brillant, de plus resplendissant, de plus éblouissant, tout ce qui tire l'œil du passant, l'arrête un instant et suggère d'entrer. Et tout cela est éclairé par le gaz et l'électricité, à l'intérieur et au dehors, avec une prodigalité telle que ce n'est plus la nuit, mais le jour, le plein soleil de midi. Quant à cette fête des yeux, on ajoute le va et vient d'une foule compacte, l'éclat des toilettes, le bruit des tramways, des voitures, des automobiles, des omnibus, c'est une griserie presque de tous les sens.

The traveller's account effectively renders the charged atmosphere of the modern urban boulevard, highlighting its commercial, consumer-driven character, but more importantly, dwelling on the special atmosphere generated by its dazzling lights, the movement of the dense crowd, the sparkling accoutrements of the walkers, the noise and energy of the heavy traffic, all of which inebriated the senses. So much so, that, although he appreciated the spectacle, the visitor noted that stress and fatigue quickly set in, followed by a longing for a different set of sensory experiences. "Vite, on regagne le quartier paisible où les passants sont rares, où sur la pierre des pavés le roulement des voitures se fait plus sonore dans le silence, où du sein de l'obscurité, on peut voir, dans le ciel, briller les étoiles de Dieu..." he concludes, hinting at his own unease with the

physical and mental intensity of the modern boulevard, with what Simmel called the intensification of nervous life.¹

Having examined the corporeal relationship to space largely in terms of the specific dynamics of industrialisation, we will now accompany residents of Montreal and Brussels beyond the factory and home, into the streets where, during the other third or so of their day, they strolled, drove, shopped, celebrated or mourned, where “le riche coudoie le pauvre, le vice frôle la vertu.” To the Belgian poet Théodore Hannon, the street had its own personality, character and moods. “Elle rit, chante, babille, potine, se repose... Elle se pavoise, elle s’endeuille, elle est en fête...”² The purpose of this chapter is to explore how this personality was constructed, to scrutinize the specific spatial dynamic of the streets of these two cities. How did personal sensorial experiences and intimate bodily practices condition urban dwellers’ relationship to the public sphere of the city, the open spaces where modernity was showcased and exteriorised?

The first section of this chapter is centred on street space itself, focussing on the ways it was undergoing significant transformations through the emergence of a new planning discourse during this period. As we will see, the significance of these material changes lay in the tension between the disappointments city dwellers felt at the sometimes painfully slow process of modernisation, and the broader cultural and national aspirations urban elites sought to inscribe upon the boulevards. The following sections then emphasise the corporeal practices and sensorial experiences through which this new organisation of public space was discussed and understood. In the second, we will delve into the lively atmosphere of Montreal’s and Brussels’ modern boulevards. We will join the crowds of urban dwellers whose spatial stories were shaped by the vivacious gatherings of so many people and the sensorial pleasures street life offered, tasting some of the local specificities that gave each city a unique feel. But if the streets delighted, so too did they threaten, and the third section will examine people’s fears of the bodily and moral risks they associated with automobiles, night-time violence and

¹ “À travers la Belgique,” *Le Foyer : Bulletin mensuel des intérêts féminins* 12, no. 4 (October 1914), 69. Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in Kurt Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1950).

² Théodore Hannon, “La Rue,” in Alexandre Braun, Maurice Benoit, and Franz Mahutte, eds., *Notre pays*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Librairie national d’art et d’histoire, 1909, 1919), 359-365.

street festivities. Finally, sections four and five centre the discussion on the body itself, on how ostensibly ordinary matters like the construction of public toilets or funeral processions reveal some of the diverse and unsuspected ways in which people's corporeal existence shaped the relationship to the modern street. These specific themes have been selected because they recur frequently in the discourses of municipal councillors, journalists, poets, novelists, and other ordinary citizens experiencing these transformations. They emphasise the duality of the physical and interior self as it relates to the urban environment, and, in offering a glimpse of urban dwellers' intimacy in a public context, they offer a novel, perhaps unusual, take on the vicissitudes of street life during these years.

I. CHAOS AND BEAUTY IN THE STREET

To survive the “moving chaos” that defined the boulevards of nineteenth-century Paris, Marshall Berman argues that the “modern man must become adept at *soubresauts* and *mouvements brusques*, at sudden, abrupt, jagged twists and shifts – and not only with his legs and body, but with his mind and sensibility as well.”³ If the boulevards of Brussels and Montreal were perhaps not as large and animated as the ones Berman describes, the author's conception of this dual bodily and mental imperative certainly applies to our two cases. In this period of unbridled urban expansion, city streets were the focus of a new planning impulse, carried out under the aegis of increasingly specialised experts. As historians have shown, the primary objective was to refashion the city according to models that favoured the rapid, efficient and profitable flow of people and goods.⁴ Brussels and Montreal, like most western cities, undertook massive public works to build the streets, parks, lights, sewers and other infrastructures that incarnated the ideal of a more salubrious environment.⁵

³ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 159.

⁴ Anthony Sutcliffe, ed., *Metropolis, 1890-1940* (London: Mansell, 1984), 9, Viviane Claude, *Faire la ville : les métiers de l'urbanisme au XXe siècle* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, 2006), 6, 27-30.

⁵ The historiography of both of these cities has examined various aspects of these processes in their respective frameworks. For Montreal, see Dany Fougères, *L'approvisionnement en eau à Montréal : du privé au public, 1796-1865, Cahiers des Amériques 8 Collection histoire* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2004), Jason Gilliland, “The Creative Destruction of Montreal: Street Widening and Urban Development in the

Planning experts gave particular thought to urban thoroughfares, seeking to facilitate unimpeded circulation. On one level, this required remodelling the physical space of the streets: increasing their width to allow for more traffic, paving them with smoother materials, and redesigning intersections to minimise accidents. On another level, however, modernising the streets of the city involved rethinking the ways people moved and behaved upon them. As we will see in the subsequent sections, the meaning of this milieu was constructed through a reformulation of understandings of commercial activity, speed, lighting, even public decency, all of which engaged the body in various ways. Before discussing these questions of behaviour and deportment, this first section will deal specifically with the significance of these material transformations to the urban environment. My purpose here is not to discuss specialised planning initiatives in detail, but rather to assess how, in a context where the very notion of an urban thoroughfare was being reinvented, people's bodily experiences of this materiality informed their way of experiencing and conceptualising these spaces.

a) *The failure to meet expectations*

Even as they were promised these smooth and open boulevards, urban dwellers frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with the sensorial nuisances and physical discomfort caused by streets that often remained dirty and cluttered, exposing a disconnect between the formal discourse through which streets were thought about, and the material realities experienced by the body. Between pledges for modernisation and the actual accomplishment of these initiatives lay the far less glamorous reality of a landscape in transition, a landscape on which streets were in the process of being paved, waste removal programmes in the process of being implemented. If modern sanitary ideals called precisely for the frequent and exhaustive removal of rubbish, then residents felt justified in denouncing "the present disgraceful state of the streets of Montreal,"

Nineteenth Century," *Urban History Review* 31, no. 1 (2002), Robert Gagnon, *Questions d'égouts : santé publique, infrastructures et urbanisation à Montréal au XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 2006), Paul-André Linteau, *Histoire de Montréal depuis la Confédération*, 2nd ed. (Montréal: Boréal, 2000). For Brussels, see Crédit Communal de Belgique, *Bruxelles, construire et reconstruire : architecture et aménagement urbain, 1780-1914* (Bruxelles: Crédit Communal de Belgique, 1979), Claire Billen, Jean-Marie Duvosquel, and Charley Case, *Bruxelles* (Anvers: Fonds Mercator, 2000), Thierry Demey, *Bruxelles, chronique d'une capitale en chantier*, 2 vols., vol. 1 *Du voûtement de la Senne à la jonction Nord-Midi* (Bruxelles: P. Legrain, 1990).

which they saw as “a source of danger and disease to every member of the community.”⁶ If tramways symbolised smooth and rapid transportation through the traffic of a busy city, then opposition councillors could readily condemn the pools of coal, grease and oil that formed around the vehicle depot, “véritables lacs [...] de boue infecte” that impeded movement.⁷ These unpleasant sensorial experiences, these perceived threats to health and physical safety, regularly reminded urban dwellers that the much heralded forward march of modernity was sometimes more of a stagger or a stumble. A songwriter’s irony bitinglly expressed this disenchantment:

Tout est à la voirie,/ Dans notr’ municipal/ Qu’ c’en est un’ cochonn’ric/ A
l’honneur de Montréal
Puisqu’on est sur la rue,/ Parlons en donc un peu/ Mais pas trop, car ça
pue/ Plus qu’la police et le feu.
Sans s’occuper qu’il dure,/ La permanent *pavement*,/ Tout d’abord on
s’assure/ D’un gros, trop gros *payement*.⁸

Not only were the streets malodorous and poorly paved, but through the administration’s torpor, a smell of corruption seemed to be wafting over them as well.

Such misgivings were particularly highlighted when the streets became the scene of clashes between man-made symbols of order and progress and the unpredictable behaviour of natural elements. When a horse and buggy became tangled in broken telegraph cables in the Montreal district of Pointe Saint-Charles, the owner insisted that it was because of the city’s negligence that his horse “prit l’épouvante [sic], brisa ma voiture et mon harnais et s’estropia lui même.” The municipal administration declined responsibility, insisting that the cables had fallen not because of any shortcomings on its part, but because, on that November afternoon, the wind was blowing like a hurricane,

⁶ Petition from the Montreal Local Council of Women to the city’s health committee, AM, CS VM 45 S1 SS2 SSS1 letter dated 22 April 1899. On the “spectacle” of household waste on Montreal’s sidewalks in this period, see François Guérard, *Histoire de la santé au Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996), 35.

Montreal’s city doctor even called for a specific law forbidding individuals from disposing of fruit and vegetable peelings on the street: “It will be noticed that in summertime the larger quantities of fruit sold and eaten upon the streets has led to numberless complaints on the part of people who have either sustained injury [or] come near doing so by slipping upon the peelings of fruit, especially banana skins.” Clearly this was no simple practical joke. AM CS, VM 45 S1 SS2 SSS1 Undated letter from Laberge to Health Board in box containing items from 1897 to 1898.

⁷ BCB, 11 December 1893, 641-642. (Richald)

⁸ J.H. Malo, *La romance de Montréal sur l’air : Gai lonlon joli rosier du joli mois de mai* (Montréal: J.H. Malo, 1909). Clientele politics, favouritism and corruption indeed coloured municipal politics in Montreal during this period. See Michèle Dagenais, *Des pouvoirs et des hommes : l’administration municipale de Montréal, 1900-1950* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 10, 13-14.

toppling over signs, fences and even chimneys.⁹ The city thus shifted the blame away from its own incapacity to ensure efficient circulation, and directly toward the randomness and unpredictability of nature, forces antithetical to the human rationality upon which the success of the modern project depended.

In the same vein, the presence of animals in the street increasingly irritated proponents of salubrious and efficient thoroughfares. An integral part of the urban scenery until the late nineteenth-century, animals provided food, transportation, raw material for manufactured goods and fertiliser, but their presence was increasingly seen as a nuisance and as a threat of accidents and disease. Under the impulse of hygienic conceptions of urbanism, animals and the industries associated with them were increasingly relegated to the outskirts of the city.¹⁰ But this too was a gradual process, and the discourse on the issues gives a sense of people's frustrations with the climate of transition in which they lived. A Brussels councillor, for instance, seized on this matter, which "a ému l'opinion publique," and denounced the passage of farm animals arriving into the city at the Luxembourg station in the east, and making their way to the abattoir in the west. Herds of beasts could thus be seen plodding along some of the city's busiest and most prestigious exterior boulevards amid the crowds, a spectacle he saw as "un danger réel et un grand inconvénient pour le public."¹¹ Montreal's city doctor gave the debate a sensorial edge, writing that the open carts of manure that farmers sometimes drove into the city were the object of numerous complaints, "à cause des odeurs désagréables qui s'en dégagent."¹² Despite frequently repeated claims of the hygienic superiority of the countryside, the contact between human and animal bodies in city

⁹ AM, CIE, VM 40, S2, D40, letter from Léandre Fauteux dated 12 November 1880, followed by undated inspector's report.

¹⁰ Sabine Barles, "La nature indésirable : l'animal, ressource et nuisance urbaines, Paris, XIX siècle" (paper presented at the Urban Europe in Comparative Perspective Conference, Stockholm, 2006), 1-7. For a vivid analysis of the presence of animals in the nineteenth-century city, see Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years, 1830-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 111-116. The question of hygiene in abattoirs was particularly sensitive in this period, as the records of the Montreal Board of Health and the Bulletin communal de Bruxelles demonstrate. In Montreal, two officially sanctioned and frequently inspected abattoirs, one in the eastern district, the other in the west, faced competition from clandestine private abattoirs. Benoît Gaumer, Georges Desrosiers, and Othmar Keel, *Histoire du Service de santé de la ville de Montréal* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2002), 88.

¹¹ BCB, 28 November 1881, 789. (Allard)

¹² "Rapport de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1886," 44.

streets was an uncomfortable reminder of the evolution of norms governing the use of public space.

b) *Beauty and Harmony*

Speed and efficiency, however, were not all that modern boulevards were expected to offer. As urban historian Thomas Hall points out, creating a “distinguished townscape” became a fundamental objective of late nineteenth-century planning, alongside circulation and hygiene.¹³ While city streets were meant to embody the heights of rationality, urban dwellers also looked upon their material layout for a reflection of the more interior feelings of pride and accomplishment that, as we have seen, corresponded with the ideals of modernity. Together with articles exposing the design and measurements of boulevards conceived to facilitate the expeditious movement of the maximum number of people, the Belgian architecture and planning journal also ran pieces calling for a cityscape steeped in “Beauté” and “Harmonie,” conciliating “besoins modernes” with the “aspirations artistiques de notre race,” and insisting that the problem of city-building “était à la fois objectif et subjectif, qu’à la science pouvait et devait se mêler l’art.”¹⁴ Whether they emphasised physical movement or the subjective impressions garnered by ocular observation, these competing, yet intertwined, visions stemmed directly from people’s corporeal and sensorial presence in the streets.

Explaining this duality, urban historian Françoise Choay notes that the rationalist and scientific vision of urban planning interacted with a traditionalist, or ‘culturalist,’ approach that favoured sinewy streets, emphasised the heritage and distinctness of older buildings, and drew its inspiration from a nostalgic critique of modern developments and an idealised vision of the city of the past.¹⁵ In Brussels, one of the most outspoken proponents of the softer charms of urban design was the mayor Charles Buls. Faced

¹³ Thomas Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Development* (London: E & FN Spon, 1997), 285. See also Harold Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 302.

¹⁴ E. Creplet, “Voies publiques. Élargissement des carrefours pour les besoins de la circulation,” *Tekhné* 8, (18 May 1911), 91-93; “Le tracé des villes,” *Tekhné* 2, (6 April 1911), 17. On calls for “magnificent, park-like boulevards” in Montreal, see A. A. Gard, *How to see Montreal* (Montreal: The Montreal News Company, 1903), 106-115.

¹⁵ Françoise Choay, *L'urbanisme. Utopies et réalités* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), 16-25.

with the proliferation of what, to him, were “artificial, dry and mathematic” boulevards, this “esprit délicat” called for the conservation of older streets and lanes, as well as for an urban and architectural development influenced by continuity with established practices, and that accounted for the hidden beauties of disorder.¹⁶ We might imagine him agreeing with a French traveller for whom the straight lines and systematic uniformity of Montreal’s new boulevards were disappointing to those who preferred “les capricieuses arabesques, les romantiques fantaisies des anciennes villes.” Something was lost in such streets, which, he regretted, resembled the “rues récentes de Londres et de Bruxelles.”¹⁷ In Montreal itself, the well-known architect Percy Nobbs also criticized the excessive symmetry of modern city planning. “When the elements bear the natural character of crookedness, let us with great care plan crookedly,” he pleaded.¹⁸ The city’s unique geographical position and varied topography, he believed, afforded it the opportunity to create a truly distinctive layout that would reflect its specificity.

Thus, on both sides of the Atlantic, the discourse on the evolution of material space was tempered by a discourse that drew on more subjective questions of artistic appreciation, and above all on the notion that urban dwellers’ sensorial contact with the environment should evoke cultural identity. Buls expressed this clearly when he wrote of the patriotism that informed his vision of an ideal streetscape, one that embodied a “respect filial pour les souvenirs du passé; de telle sorte que tout Belge pénétrant dans l’antique écu que dessine la ceinture verdoyante des boulevards, y sente palpiter son cœur comme s’il rentrait au foyer paternel.”¹⁹ In Montreal, where the notion of national identity was increasingly questioned and contested during this period, the urban planner G.A. Nantel drew on prevailing ethnic tensions to make the same point, but in reverse. How was it, he asked, that a sense of national pride was not better inscribed in this newly built city? “Pourquoi faut-il rougir jusqu’aux oreilles quand nous avons à promener des étrangers dans la partie Est qu’habitent, en majorité, les Franco-

¹⁶ Charles Buls, *Esthétique des villes* (Bruxelles: Bruylant-Christophe & Cie, 1893), 7-9.

¹⁷ Xavier Marmier, *Lettres sur l’Amérique : Canada, Etats-Unis, Havane, Rio de la Plata* (Paris: Plon, 1881), 90.

¹⁸ Percy Nobbs, “City planning as applied to Montreal, in *For a Better Montreal: Report of the First Convention of the City Improvement League* (Montreal: 1910), 45.

¹⁹ For Buls, perfectly rectilinear streets were for unscrupulous Americans, while Brussels, on the contrary, owed it to its heritage to highlight its Flemish and Walloon influences. Buls, *Esthétique des villes*, 8, 41.

Canadiens?”²⁰ The modern street represented more than simple practicality; it bore a fundamental connection to the broader construction of cultural or national identity, even though the voluntary actions taken to transform its physical constitution often fell short of stated objectives.

II. THE EXPERIENCE OF BOULEVARD MODERNITY

a) *The movement of the crowd*

Having considered the subjective implications of the street’s material form, this next section will take us directly onto the boulevards, amid the animated crowds that enlivened these cities. Individuals, each in their own ways, performed their *soubresauts* with varying degrees of agility and good will, implicating their bodies and minds in the discourses through which these spaces were constructed as sites of modernity. A distinguishing feature of these boulevards, one that contributed directly to the intense atmosphere, was the high concentration of people, the density of the crowds that converged on these spaces, responding to an urban magnetism fed by human curiosity, by “nos sens qui désirent être satisfaits, car nous aimons à entendre de belles choses, de goûter un bon pâté, d’aspirer un parfum délicieux, de boire quand on a soif, de prendre un bain ou se rafraîchir quand il fait chaud, de manger quand on a faim, de se reposer quand on est fatigué, de caresser l’objet qu’on aime.”²¹ Bodily tropes were central to descriptions and understandings of the boulevard atmosphere, not just in terms of individual sensorial experiences, but also in the way the shape, movements, and sounds produced by these colourful crowds came to define the meaning of the street.

²⁰ G. A. Nantel, *La métropole de demain : avenir de Montréal* (Montréal: Typ. Adjutor Menard, 1910), 152.

²¹ J.J.S Jacquemin, *Des habitations ouvrières dans les villes. Résolution de cette question ou moyen de faire des “millionnaires” par le multiplicateur de capitaux et de maisons d’habitation, Exposition universelle et internationale de Liège 1905* (Liège: Librairie Nierstrasz, 1906), 35.



Figure 17 “Vie urbaine bruxelloise,” poster by F. Toussaint depicting the bustle of Brussels’ central boulevards, ca. 1900.²²

The author Louis Dumont-Wilden, self-styled *flâneur* of Brussels, particularly enjoyed the early hours of the evening, a transitory time between the end of the work day and the beginning of the city’s nightlife, when the streets filled with people leaving their jobs, heading home or for a night on the town. “Et le flâneur se promène au milieu de tout cela,” he wrote,

respirant avec curiosité le parfum de vie et de vice qui s’exhale de partout : des vêtements, des cheveux, de la fumée du tabac, des magasins, de la voix des crieurs de gazettes et du pavé même dont il semble monter. Cette odeur l’anime, l’enfièvre; il lui semble, à cette minute, qu’il vit toutes les vies qu’il voit palpiter autour de lui; il sent battre le cœur de la foule, le cœur de la ville; il voit ce plaisir qui passe, il l’aspire, il s’en imprègne, il le tient à sa portée, mais n’y touche pas.²³

²² Reproduced in Petra Gunst and Maarten Van Ginderachter, *Belgique, un aperçu historique*, trans. Catherine Warnant (Bruxelles: Musée BELvue, 2005), 18.

²³ Louis Dumont-Wilden, *Coins de Bruxelles* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1905), 10-11.

This passage is revealing in the way it underscores the importance of sensorial experiences in the construction of spatial narratives, the interaction between material realities and ideas, between what is observed and what is felt in the city street. Dumont-Wilden is particularly attentive to his sense of smell. He is aware of, and takes pleasure in, the aromas of the street, and in particular of the people who animate it, their clothes, their hair, their tobacco. To him, these smells make this space literally come alive, and they enliven him with anticipation and excitement as the beatings of the crowd's heart become his own. But this intensity and pleasure, he warns, also give way to dreams of wealth and power, threatening to intoxicate the observer with a deceptive sense of invulnerability.

Ultimately, this spectacle “ne peut se prolonger,” and at the end of this quotidian interlude, the streets, boutiques, cafés, and covered passages gradually empty themselves: a tobacconist doses off in his shop, a dog wanders by, from a few dying cigars strewn about drift thin columns of smoke, and as the *flâneur* puts his hand to his pocket, he notes the emptiness of his wallet. At that moment, “toutes les misères, toutes les douleurs, cuisantes ou légères, que cette foule a roulées avec elle sous l'éclat du décor, s'attachent à son souvenir, lui serrent le cœur, et il rentre chez lui brisé, fourbu et triste, songeant à quelque pénible et banale besogne du lendemain.”²⁴ From ecstatic thrills and exhilaration, to deception and melancholy, Dumont-Wilden shows how the street, as experienced in all of its sensorial materiality, could open up the entire gamut of emotions, how the bodily interactions through which space acquired meaning for urban dwellers was bound to their deepest subjectivities.

Indeed, the heterogeneous crowds that populated the streets of Montreal and Brussels were, in the popular imagination, the protagonists of the spatial stories through which meaning was attributed to these sites. The author and journalist Franz Mahutte identified the various types of individuals who coloured the city's streets, the “calicots et ouvrières” making the most of their few hours away from work, “gens chics” out for a laugh, “étudiants tapageurs et étudiants timides,” local shopkeepers, tipsy military men, even “bonnes gens de la campagnes éberlués par des choses insoupçonnées qu'ils voient

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

et entendent.”²⁵ For the Montreal authors Bray and Lesperance, the city’s ethnic mix defined the character of its streets. Walking along, they met “unmistakable descendants of the ancient Iroquois Indians,” and at another turn they came across “a company who, by their dress and talk, take us back to the peasant classes of older France; while crowding everywhere are ladies and gentlemen of the most approved modern type, according to the fashions of London, Paris and New York.”²⁶ Beyond their presence in the street, it was also people’s outward appearance, dress and talk that gave texture to these encounters, and incarnated the distinctions between past and present, tradition and newness that characterized the city’s engagement with modernity.

The distinctive soundscape of these crowds further contributed to this sense of cultural specificity. Street vendors hawking their wares, for instance, gave this modern tableau a touch of local colour. In the illustration below [Figure 18], the silhouettes reveal an assortment of bodily forms and movements, inviting the reader to imagine a cacophony of repetitive calls, cried out in the distinctive *Bruxellois* dialect: “*Klierkoop! Klierkoop!*” hollered the clothes vendor. “*Crevettes et crabes: Gernaude en Krabbe!*” replied the woman pushing a cart of seafood. The Montreal author Arsène Bessette drew on the encounter of a young, rural French-Canadian with the multicultural and permissive atmosphere of Saint-Laurent boulevard to evoke this unique spatial environment. As the protagonist discovered his new city, he heard the Jewish tailors calling out, “*Vant a suit gentleman? ... Big sale here, to-day!*” and felt a shiver as “une grande brune, déhanchée, le toisa de la tête aux pieds et lui murmura en passant : *Come Deary, I love you!*” These words, spoken in English, the intensity of this movement, of women brushing past him, of businessmen hurrying along, and others strolling more leisurely, cigar on the lips and cane under the arm, brought to light Montreal’s metropolitan bustle.²⁷

²⁵ Franz Mahutte, *Bruxelles vivant* (Bruxelles: Bureaux de l’anthologie contemporaine des écrivains français et belges, 1891), 7.

²⁶ A.J. Bray and John Lesperance, “A Glimpse from the Mountain: Montreal” in George Monro Grant, ed., *Artistic Quebec: Described by Pen and Pencil* (Toronto: Belden Brothers, 1888), 106.

²⁷ Arsène Bessette, *Le débutant* (Bibliothèque Québécoise, 2001 [1914]), 79.



Figure 18 "Bruxelles, Cri-de-rue."²⁸

b) *Local (specifi)cities*

These idioms and accents thus gave tinges of local personality to the implantation in each city of this transnational process of urbanisation. Indeed commentators in both cities frequently emphasised these specificities, highlighting the bodily experiences through which people developed feelings of belonging and attachment to their city. In Montreal, for instance, snowy winters were described in terms of the enjoyment and uplift they procured. It was "the health-giving properties of

²⁸ E. Drot, "Bruxelles Cri-de-rue," Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles, Fonds Iconographique, H-400.

the climate,” that gave the city “its principal charm,” suggested the local photographer and guidebook author N.M Hinshelwood. Winter, he noted, with the “dear tinkle of the sleigh-bells,” and, above all, “the sight of the pure white mantle of snow” always seemed to arrive like an old friend after a long absence. To him, snowfalls transformed urban space. Houses “seem to snuggle cosily down,” and “appear lower because their roofs, lintels, steps and sills are capped with adornments of the ground’s new colour.” As the “little fleeces” fell, they also changed the observer’s sense of distance, giving the impression that the trees and sky “blended into a new intimacy.”

This virtual spatial reconfiguration was accompanied by a more emotional shift as well. As the “enchantment” of the snowfall settled in, and the immensity of the modern world seemed to diminish, people felt uplifted by a spectacle that made them visibly “more cheery.” Spirits lifted, cheeks became rosy, laughter rang out, the sight of children skipping along with their sleds and the “enhanced brightness of their eyes” added to this feeling of gladness. Even cabbies and policeman could not bring themselves to scold the little boys pelting snowballs at them.²⁹ As the urban environment was modified, even by an ephemeral snowfall, so too did people’s moods and appreciation of the city change, if only for a moment. In Hinshelwood’s eyes, the phenomenon that best exemplified the sensorial pleasures through which he developed his attachment to Montreal was a natural one, an event which human beings had no role in shaping, one whose occurrence they could only await, and enjoy when it happened. In the modern industrial metropolis, it sometimes took a dose of nature’s goodwill for people’s spatial stories to take a truly happy turn.

For the Brussels novelist Eugène Demolder, among others, it was the city’s famed beer-serving establishments that best typified the joyful charms of the streets and incarnated “l’âme de la cité.” Using a not-so-subtle bodily metaphor he described this holy city of beer, this Eden of pint-drinkers as “rieuse, couronnée de pampres, la taille dodue, la gorge goulue et les seins joyeusement épanouis.” To Demolder, this “culte du

²⁹ N. M. Hinshelwood, *Montreal and Vicinity: being a history of the old town, a pictorial record of the modern city, its sports and pastimes, and an illustrated description of many charming summer resorts around* (Montreal: Desbarats & Co. printers, 1903), 87-88. On the annual celebration of winter during this period, see Sylvie Dufresne, “Le carnaval d’hiver de Montréal, 1883-1889,” *Revue d’histoire urbaine* 11, no. 3 (1983).

houblon fermenté” defined the sights, smells and sounds of the streets. Describing the city’s numerous breweries, he noted the way they “exhalent les fumées des cuves en ébullition et répandent dans les rues des brouillards aux parfums d’orge, qui rampent paresseusement le long des façades aux lourdes brumes de l’ivresse.” The movement and bodies of the workers and the sounds of their labour added colourful detail: “de solides gaillards, vêtus de velours brun, un tablier gris au ventre, une calotte de toile sur la tête” used their solid hands to move the overflowing barrels, and when these “pissent leur écume par leurs jointures, ils les alignent sur de lourds chariots chargée de chaînes, qui filent, attelés de grands chevaux, avec des bruits de ferraille, vers la clientèle.”³⁰ Indeed, for many Bruxellois, the sensorial comfort offered by the city’s small pubs represented the last ramparts against the onslaught of modernity, places that had to be inscribed in the city’s collective memory before the “pioche des démolisseurs” made them all disappear.³¹

c) *Representating workers in the city*

Urban dwellers’ relationship to the streets was also shaped by understandings of class, and by the possibilities for contact between the classes they afforded. Belgian writers, for instance, expressed a fascination at the unique atmosphere of the Marolles, a working-class neighbourhood in the heart of the old city, essentialised during the period as the “dépositaire de l’âme du vrai Bruxelles.”³² Georges Eekhoud’s novel, *L’autre vue*, typifies this class-based construction of the streets in a way that draws heavily on the bodies of workers. His young bourgeois protagonist, Laurent, becomes literally infatuated with a group of male, working-class youths, through whom he discovers the Marolles. Laurent’s initial contact with them is a physical one, their knees and elbows touching, their breath tickling the back of his neck and his ears as they talked around a

³⁰ Avant-propos d’Eugène Demolder, in Amédée Lynen, *Bruxelles en douze lithographies* (Bruxelles: H Lamertin, 1896), 1-2.

³¹ See A. Laurent, *Bruxelles, ses estaminets et ses bières* (Bruxelles: Bibliothèque de la brasserie, 1883), 5-6.

³² “Ainsi, au début du XXe siècle, en plus d’être la réserve des bruxellois indigènes, les Marolles servent de terrain de jeux aux bourgeois et à leurs littérateurs.” Pierre Van Den Dugen “De la gaité frondeuse à la nostalgie. Aux origines d’un Bruxelles qui bruxelles (XIXe-XXe siècles)” in Serge Jaumain and Paul-André Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville. Bruxelles et Montréal au XIXe et XXe siècles* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2006), 342-344.

table. Later, “ils me tâtèrent les biceps, me tapèrent la cuisse, éprouvèrent ma résistance musculaire,” relates Laurent, himself returning these marks of interest.³³ From the outset, this cross-class interaction takes the form of a sort of masculine ritual, a game of seduction in which physical interaction helps overcome the social barriers which demarcate the modern city.

Laurent’s description of these workers’ physical attributes shows how, to him, the essence of their interiority resides in their bodies, their virility, what he calls their beauty. They are corporeal beings above all, providing him with a stark contrast from the stuffy intellectual world he is fleeing. It is with this frame of mind that he ventures through the city in their company, exploring the neighbourhoods they live in, meeting their friends, taking part in their games and drinking, observing the “volupté du mouvement” of their bodies, the “ressort de leurs muscles.”³⁴ Physical force, agility and muscular resistance are at the heart of their conversations. Indeed, the relationship between Laurent and the youths climaxes when they bring him to the wrestling gym. Laurent marvels at the force and beauty of their movements in the ring. Then, suddenly, but only half against his will, he is dragged in himself, immediately impressed by the contact with his opponent’s skin and muscles. “Je palpe le relief des muscles, je me régale au toucher de ces méplats et de ces cambrures élastiques quoique fermes,” comparing the sensation not to “la volupté amoureuse,” but to a transcending religious experience.³⁵

The author Marguerite Baulu offered a similar bodily interpretation of the Marolles, but focussing on feminine types. In *Modeste Automne*, we follow a young domestic servant into the neighbourhood, where she settles after marrying a local worker. The Marolles, states the author, are populated by two sorts of women, offering a vision of this space defined by the contrast between these corporeal archetypes. Modeste belongs to the first group, comprised of the simple, “forçates admirables de l’usine, du travail en journée, de la maternité et du devoir conjugal.” Beside them are

³³ Georges Eekhoud, *L’autre vue* (Paris: Société du Mercure de France, 1904), 62.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103. Indeed, during this period, “l’ostentation du muscle, le défi, la joute, le goût pour les formes de violence rapprochées se manifestent dans la rue, à la foire comme à l’atelier.” Corbin, “Douleurs, souffrances et misères du corps,” in Alain Corbin, Jean-Jacques Courtine, and Georges Vigarello, eds., *Histoire du corps*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 251.

the “Marolliennes jouisseuses. Femelles buveuses, coquettes, endettés, toujours attablées dans un cabaret, avides de planter dans leurs cheveux des bijoux canailles, leur faste pitoyable est cause que chez elles il sent la crasse et la faim.”³⁶ This contrast comes to a head when Modeste confronts her husband’s mistress, Peau d’Or, whose very name evokes her body, in a charged scene of violence and intimidation. In the midst of rue Haute, coloured by the noise of music and dancing in the cabarets, the odours of deep frying, spilled beer, mussels, snails, and unwashed people, the two come face to face. Modeste is frail, meek and trembling, while Peau d’Or is confident, boorish and aggressive, and the eyes of the other women in the street twinkle as they hope, in vain, that the scene, “suivant la saine logique des Marolles” would end in “des coups, des cheveux arrachées et, qui sait? peut-être un peu de sang.”³⁷

For his part, Marius Renard takes us beyond the Marolles, on a rather more uplifting voyage of self-discovery in the streets of Brussels. Indeed, central to the plot of *Notre pain quotidien* is the way Madeleine’s mental map of the city expands. As her knowledge of her environment increases, so does her maturity, her confidence in herself and her ability to confront the personal challenges she faces. Her first steps in the crowded streets are hesitant, and she finds herself feeling “indécise dans le remous de la cohue,” among “les cris, les appels, et le roulement des fiacres.” But even on this first encounter, she takes interest in “l’aspect des choses,” in the reflections of the street lamps on the buildings, the clicking sounds of the tramways coasting along their tracks, the dark silhouettes of urban dwellers walking in all directions, the glowing windows of the cabarets, the sounds of horsemen’s calls and whips, the laughter of children playing, the crowds of workers heading home after a day in the factory. Immediately, she feels her determination rise, “les sensations craintives s’évanouirent et le calme revint.” And when Renard writes, “résolument, Madeleine s’en alla vers la vie,” the equivalency between “vie” and “ville,” though unstated, is resoundingly obvious.³⁸

³⁶ Marguerite Baulu, *Modeste Automne* (Paris: A. Leclerc, 1911), 178-179.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁸ Marius Renard, *Notre Pain Quotidien* (Bruxelles: Association des écrivains belges, 1909), 25-32. Arsène Bessette framed the experience of his character, Paul, in similar terms, heightening the readers’ imagination through the onomatopoeia flowing from his pen “Le jeune homme, d’abord étourdi par ce va-et-vient continu, accompagné du bruit agaçant des tramways, mêlé au toc-toc régulier du trot des

Renard's line reflected the current of thought we have previously encountered that emphasised the influence of the urban environment over individual behaviour. Indeed, middle-class commentators of the period insisted on the educational potential of the streetscape. In a letter addressed to *Tekhné*, the French modernist architect Robert Mallet-Stevens, a regular visitor to Brussels, wrote that because houses, public buildings and monuments were constantly seen by a wide range of people, architects had a responsibility to please and to educate. For "la classe pauvre" who had neither the means nor the time to visit museum exhibitions and attend concerts, he emphasised, "l'art de la rue est la seule source où elle puisse puiser un peu de beauté!"³⁹

The Montreal Catholic newspaper *L'Ouvrier* also addressed workers on this theme, attempting to convince them that they would find personal fulfilment by enjoying the urban atmosphere with their senses. Moralists, noted the paper's editor in chief, under the pseudonym "Papa-Noé" distinguished between natural and fictitious pleasures, those that had no cost – family life, friendship, conversation and reading – and those of luxuries and fineries, material possessions one paid for and displayed for all to see. The latter only created insatiable desires, insisted the author. Urban boulevards full of people wearing fancy clothes and elegant jewellery were thus a beautiful spectacle that pleased the senses, one workers could simply observe and enjoy without themselves acquiring such possessions. "Là où il faudrait dépenser pour faire l'acteur, l'ouvrier peut mettre à la caisse d'épargne un fort joli montant en demeurant spectateur," concluded the editor.⁴⁰ While this can be read as an attempt to disengage workers from modern society, Papa-Noé's curious logic is nonetheless particularly revealing in the way his political message consists of encouraging a particular sensorial appreciation of modern streets.

These examples thus help us unpack the perceived connections between class and space, not among workers, but for middle-class observers of urban mores. The characters we have examined are often pedestrian, in both senses of the term: walking through the streets of the city, and defined according to clichéd characteristics that make

chevaux sur l'asphalte, reprit bientôt son sang-froid et s'amusa de ce spectacle nouveau pour lui." Bessette, *Le débutant*, 79.

³⁹ *Tekhné* 26, (21 September 1911).

⁴⁰ Papa-Noé, "Les plaisirs à bon marché," *L'Ouvrier* 1, no. 8 (19 January 1884).

them operate primarily on a physical rather than intellectual level. But in this movement, pleasure and suffering, physical vigour and violence, masculinity and femininity, their authors rely on the body and senses to formulate their vision of the street. Beyond telling us about middle-class writers' understanding of class distinctions, the construction of these spatial narratives in terms of corporeal practices and sensorial experiences highlights the extent to which bodily tropes shaped the construction of the relationship to city streets.

III. THREATENED BODIES

After an exhilarating walk along the outer boulevards of Brussels, Madeleine "pour la première fois, n'eut pas un sommeil tranquille," writes Renard.⁴¹ If the boulevard atmosphere exalted the senses and contributed directly to the way urban dwellers gained knowledge about and identified to their environment, Madeleine's troubled sleep serves to suggest that this intensity of affect also risked harming the body, and, by extension, the soul. After all, just as Hinshelwood's snowfalls could delight the senses, winter could also freeze the body and threaten one's survival. See how people exposed to the cold felt their muscles become numb and paralysed, their blood stagnating, their sensibilities disappearing, deplored a Montreal hygienist. "Vainement, pour les réchauffer, ils frottent leurs mains bleues. L'onglée douloureuse étreint leurs doigts et leurs orteils; leur nez, leurs oreilles, leurs joues, si peu qu'ils soient exposés à l'air vif du dehors, rougissent et se congestionnent."⁴² As for the breweries and cabarets that so warmed and charmed Demolder, their presence on the urban landscape was synonymous, in the eyes of many observers, with problems of alcoholism, employee absenteeism, and the breakdown of family life. See how the worker's soul died away as the pressures of industrial life pushed him to abandon his family and seek the noise, smoke, and acrid odours, the drink and debauchery of the cabaret, lamented Van Tricht. And when this worker returned home, drunk and swaggering, his face bore the hideous

⁴¹ Renard, *Notre Pain Quotidien*, 93.

⁴² Dr. J.R., "Les Frileux," *Le Montréal* 1 no. 2 (15 October 1899), 14.

expression of a satiated brute. “Sa femme pleure, il jure; elle se plaint, il crie, il frappe et l’enfant, le pauvre petit enfant, caché dans un coin, tout tremblant et tout en larmes regarde avec effroi cette espèce de monstre qui est son père.”⁴³

This section will thus consider the way the febrility of the boulevards was also constructed as a source of danger, violence and decadence. For many urban dwellers, the boulevards incarnated not just a sense of diminishing security, but a loss of identity and moral propriety as well. To begin, I will examine a key issue of boulevard life, traffic and circulation, and discuss the physical and mental reconfigurations imposed by a groundbreaking modern invention, the automobile.

a) *Speed demons*

If increasingly dense and rapid circulation was the very symbol of modern urban development, it also required an adaptation on the part of urban dwellers, suddenly confronted with the necessity to rethink the way they moved through the streets.⁴⁴ “Les rues de Bruxelles et des faubourgs deviennent de jour en jour plus dangereuses pour les piétons, et les trottoirs constituent leur seul port de salut,” complained, in 1913, the *Almanach de la jeune fille et de la femme*. This comment indicates how a strict observance of urban planners’ will to enforce a spatial segregation of pedestrians and vehicles had not yet entirely infused people’s ways of navigating modern streets. Even this safe haven, however, was becoming less and less accessible under the impulse of urbanisation as the scaffolds of construction sites constantly blocked the sidewalks across the city, forcing walkers into the street.⁴⁵

At city council, Brussels burgomaster Émile De Mot picked up on this issue, and publicly harangued automobile drivers, who, he claimed, threatened the lives of the city’s residents by speeding through crowded intersections, “croyant que la voie publique leur appartient exclusivement.” He himself, he stated, had witnessed women

⁴³ Victor Van Tricht, *L’enfant du pauvre. Causerie*, 5th ed. (Namur: P. Godenne, 1895), 39.

⁴⁴ Nadine L. Roth, “Policing Potsdamer Platz: Metropolitan Identity in early Twentieth-Century Berlin” (paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, York University, Toronto, 2006).

⁴⁵ *Almanach de la jeune fille et de la femme*, 1913.

and children miraculously avoid speedsters in Place Royale, and he feared that the Place de la Bourse would soon become known as “le carrefour des écrasés.” To eliminate these dangers, the mayor decreed that drivers would have to slow down to walking speed when circulating in several of the city’s largest intersections. Without going as far as his discretionary powers to regulate matters concerning public security allowed him, he nonetheless let it be known that if the situation did not improve, he could be tempted to take the more radical step of banning cars entirely from certain streets. Objections cited in the press to the effect that automobile drivers were taxpayers like everyone else, and that such measures would hamper the growth of a new industry were not about to sway him, he warned. “Je ne connais pas, Messieurs, d’industrie qui ait des droits acquis à l’écrasement de nos concitoyens,” thundered De Mot, to the approving laughter of the assembly.⁴⁶

In Montreal, as well, the growing presence of cars complicated urban dwellers’ movement through the streets of their city. The intensification of this challenge was highlighted with acuity on an August evening of 1906, when an automobile driven by one Herwald Thomas Atkinson, barrelling down Sainte-Catherine Street in an eastward direction, swerved to avoid a stopped streetcar, and ran straight into a man and his son who were crossing the street, killing the former and injuring the latter. This first ever automobile-related fatality recorded in Montreal was reported with graphic details in several newspapers. But beyond relating the tragedy, these accounts tell us about city dwellers’ inexperience in sharing their streets with these vehicles.⁴⁷ In *La Presse*, automobiles were still seen as a novelty. Though it was billed as “la machine qui est devenue le plus populaire agent de locomotion à Montréal,” the car remained the privilege of a few “sportsmen” attracted by its originality. The papers also carried the testimony presented at the coroner’s investigation into the death of the victim, Antoine Toutant, in which several eyewitnesses of the accident commented on the high speed at which the vehicle was moving. Much as De Mot had preferred limiting drivers to an

⁴⁶ BCB, 13 July 1903, 5.

⁴⁷ My discussion of this incident are based on the following references: “Les premières victimes de l’auto meurtrier,” *La Presse*, 13 August 1906, 12; “Chauffeur of Automobile Held Responsible for Death of Antoine Toutant,” *The Montreal Daily Star*, 13 August 1906, 6; “Killed by an Auto,” *The Gazette*, 13 August 1906, 5, and on the testimony gathered at the coroner’s inquest on the same day: “Cour des sessions de la paix, coronners, plumitif,” no 450, 1904-1907, BAnQ – centre d’archives de Montréal.

imprecise 'walking speed,' witnesses of the accident, while agreeing that they were stunned by the speed of the car, were unable to express a specific sense of just how fast it was moving. Estimates varied, but the witnesses preferred to describe its movement in relation to what was, to them, a more familiar point of reference: the speed of a horse. And there was no doubt in anyone's mind that no horse would move as fast as Atkinson's car that evening.

We also see in these testimonies the way in which individuals' own movement through these streets was understood by urban dwellers in corporeal terms. Emma Martial, the victim's wife, testified that when the streetcar stopped, she told her husband that they would have time to cross the street. As they stepped forward, she felt a strong gust of wind behind her, before seeing her husband propelled into the air, and her son rolling on the ground. To emphasise that the accident was due to the driver's recklessness as opposed to her and her husband's negligence, she insisted upon the latter's corporeal vitality. "Mon mari était en parfaite santé, il voyait et il entendait bien," she affirmed, adding, "je n'ai pas entendu le bruit de l'automobile car j'y aurais certainement pris garde." For their part, the driver of the car and his passenger, Herbert Dagleish, who were arrested after the incident, both insisted that Atkinson was driving responsibly, and that it was Toutant who had misjudged the distance separating him from their vehicle. Affirming that he had swerved away from the crowd descending from the streetcar, Atkinson claimed to have blown his horn to warn the pedestrians of his presence. "The deceased and his son also stepped out in the way of the auto. The son seemed to hold the father back. As I almost passed through he jumped right in front of the auto," he declared in his effort to exculpate himself.



Figure 19 Press coverage of Montreal's first automobile-related fatality, 1906.⁴⁸

Given the attention brought upon the case, the Montreal Automobile Club also felt compelled to weigh into the debate. Though it issued a circular to its members reminding them to scrupulously obey the rules of traffic, the Club was also aware that the incident could tarnish the image of automobiles, and hamper the organisation's attempts to gain broader acceptance for cars in the city. Strict permit rules were in place, noted the Club officer interviewed by the *Daily Star*, and whose arguments reveal how tense the relationship between cars and people in the street remained: "One thing, however, is sure, that while automobiles may scare people now, since the public is not accustomed to them, they are really less dangerous than a horse." A car could be stopped over the distance of only a few feet, while a galloping horse required several yards to be immobilized, he explained, adding that if something frightened the animal,

⁴⁸ *La Presse*, 13 August 1906, 12.

control could easily be lost, while “the automobile depends entirely on the skill and nerve of the driver.” In the face of increasing movement and speed, navigating the modern street required calculated and rational judgement. The unpredictable nature of horses made them inappropriate for the modern street, signifying a shift in attitudes from the Pointe Saint-Charles incident noted above. Twenty-five years earlier, the animal’s presence in the street was entirely natural, while modernity’s inventions, telegraph cables, had been to blame for the horse’s reaction.

Was Toutant inadvertent or was Atkinson reckless? Difficult to judge – the whole thing happened very fast, and when the dust settled, it remained increasingly clear that people’s corporeal movement through street space was inevitably changing. The testimonies surrounding this accident show how people’s way of physically gauging distance and movement with their eyes and ears needed to be refined in the wake of this changing spatial dynamic, while the framework through which they judged the speed of oncoming vehicles had to evolve from the familiar movement of horses to the more novel velocity of motorized automobiles.⁴⁹ Though Atkinson was ultimately found responsible for Toutant’s death, the accident highlighted the transformations of the modern street, the new ways in which their uses were negotiated among city dwellers, and the central role of the body in this reformulation of spatial understandings.

b) *Ruffians and streetlights*

Further evidence of the perceived threats associated with turn-of-the-century streets can be found in the frequently stated fears that modern boulevards gave free reign to the more villainous characters that made the city a dangerous place. If the boulevards were to inspire and educate through the noble architecture of public buildings and monuments, others streets, strewn with taverns and brothels, also threatened to injure and harm. In both cities, the municipal administrations frequently received complaints about the rambunctious behaviour of youths whose presence in dimly lit byways was perceived as a menace by local residents such as those of Rue Haute who wrote to the

⁴⁹ Historian Keith Walden discusses how streetcar-related accidents symbolised these types of difficulties in Toronto during this period. See Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a late-Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 3-4.

Brussels city council to complain against “des rixes qui ont lieu dans certains cabarets de ce quartier fréquenté par des repris de justice.”⁵⁰ Thus, on one hand, modernity was celebrated for its festive atmosphere, but on the other, the excesses that sometimes resulted were a source of considerable unease and frustration.

In most cases, the perceptions of the threats posed by the unsafe atmosphere of modern streets were expressed according to some of the predominant ideas about class and gender that typically shaped understandings of urban space. Thus in a lengthy debate on the question of whether women should be permitted to act as poor doctors in Brussels, one member of the Conseil général de l’administration des hospices dissented, not because of his judgement of women doctors’ competence, but rather because of the dangers he felt they would be exposed to visiting certain streets and *impasses* of the city at night. “La classe indigente n’est pas toujours accommodante,” he cautioned, referring to a male doctor who had once returned “très mal arrangé” from a nocturnal emergency intervention. “Agiront-ils autrement, les indigents, à l’égard de la femme docteur?” he cryptically wondered.⁵¹

The distinction between daytime and nighttime was indeed a fundamental one in defining the relationship with the streets. In cities such as Montreal and Brussels, where the advancements of modernity had brought extensive gas and, later, electric lighting, residents’ perceptions of their physical security became intertwined with the presence of these beacons. In his 1896 farewell speech, Montreal mayor Joseph Octave Villeneuve reminded the assembly that proper lighting in the city’s streets was as important as their cleanliness. “Si peu de crimes se commettent à Montréal, la nuit, c’est dû au fait que nos rues sont parfaitement éclairées,” he boasted, adding that he had heard numerous foreign visitors praising the city’s lighting system.⁵² This enthusiasm engendered countless requests from citizens and municipal councillors hoping to see light fixtures installed in their neighbourhoods. Such requests invoked modern expectations for free, secure, and effective circulation through urban thoroughfares. Thus Brussels councillor Huisman-Van den Nest evoked the traffic created by over 10,000 vehicles and 50,000

⁵⁰ BCB, 23 June 1890.

⁵¹ Centre public d’aide social, Fonds affaires générales (hereafter CPAS), file #174, report dated 30 December 1897.

⁵² AM, “Discours d’adieu de l’honorable J.-O. Villeneuve,” 1896, 7.

pedestrians who crossed Place Saintelette on a daily basis as justification for his request to have “un éclairage abondant et très intensif” installed in this main point of contact between the city’s centre and its primary industrial districts.⁵³

Requests like this were also framed in the class and gendered terms noted above. One Montreal shopkeeper, for instance, addressed a letter to the city bringing attention to the “dismal state of the lane” situated near his business, particularly at night. He attributed the situation to “the seeming neglect of your Light-Committee not providing sufficient light to enable any strangers or lady to come up after dark without fear of assault from gangs of ruffians who habitually make it a safe asylum on account of its dark alleys off the lane.” “One good arc light,” he pleaded, would be sufficient to avoid the spate of robberies and assaults that affected the neighbourhood and made his customers complain of the dread they had of this “place of refuge for sneak grocery thieves who got away as no one would venture to follow them.”⁵⁴

Lighting fixtures, then, were seen as having a transformative effect on public space, rendering it, through the elevation of the sense of sight, safer and more accessible at night, affording people a greater sense of security as they made use of their streets. But, in more subjective spatial stories, as well, these lights also changed the intangible atmosphere that shaped people’s appreciation of modern cities. Marius Renard, for instance, played on the sensorial impressions caused by the glimmer of streetlights to set the scene for his narratives. Madeleine’s acquaintance with urban space is marked by the illumination of electric lights, particularly in the evening as their beams mixed with

⁵³ BCB, 7 November 1910, 1490. Historian Joachim Schlör points out that at the turn of the century, “more and more, ‘nocturnal insecurity’ is equated with the absence of light, and the erection of street lamps in dangerous places is seen as an appropriate measure to restore security. So the light brings out the growing contradictions within the city; the brighter it shines in the centres, the more starkly do the outlines of the darker regions stand out.” Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London, 1840-1930*, trans. Pierre Gottfreid Imhoff and Dafydd Rees Roberts (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 65. On the development of attitudes about the need for street lighting, see also Mark J. Bouman, “Luxury and Control. The Urbanity of Street Lighting in Nineteenth-Century Cities,” *Journal of Urban History* 14, no. 1 (1987). On the evolution of street lighting in Brussels, see issue 23 of *Les Cahiers de la Fonderie*, “Les lumières de la ville.” (1997).

⁵⁴ AM, CIE, VM40, S2, D57, letter dated 10 April 1899. Aside from ensuring the security of customers, electric lighting also took on an important commercial function as of the late nineteenth century. Seen as a fundamental aspect of the design of department stores in particular, lights served to promote objects on display and attract passers-by. See Serge Jaumain, “Vitrines, architecture et distribution. Quelques aspects de la modernisation des grands magasins bruxellois pendant l’entre-deux-guerres,” in Jaumain and Linteau, eds., *Vivre en ville*, 293-296.

the red and pink glow of the setting sun. The poet Émile Verhaeren emphasised the eerie, radiating glow of gas and electric lights to evoke the streets' more mysterious and sinister qualities. In "Les Promeneuses," Verhaeren describes a group of women who, "en deuil de leur âme," silently walk the streets in the midst of "une atmosphère éclatante et chimique" produced by the diamond-shaped projections of gas lamps, while waves of electricity made the "colossal" city glow like an ocean.⁵⁵

The Montreal writer Gaston P. Labat celebrated the advent of electric lighting as an especially notable form of progress. It was "elle qui nous rapproche le plus du roi soleil et nous devrions nous estimer fiers et heureux de voir, grâce à elle, Montréal étinceler et rayonner la nuit sous ses feux brillants," he exclaimed, echoing the widespread enthusiasm with which electric streetlights were received.⁵⁶ Not everyone was convinced, however. When a municipal councillor from Brussels asked why the city was not proceeding faster in equipping its central boulevards with the new technology, Charles Buls responded that it would be a mistake to abandon gas too readily, arguing that the role of streetlamps was to produce above all a "bel effet," and cast a poetic, even melancholy atmosphere over the nocturnal city. The effect of electric lighting, he had observed in his travels, was "triste" and "peu gai." "Ce qu'il faut au contraire, pour donner un aspect gai aux villes le soir, c'est disséminer les lumières le plus possible et non les concentrer; il faut produire un effet d'illumination en multipliant les points lumineux," an effect best achieved with gas lighting, argued the mayor.⁵⁷ This emphasis on ambiance contrasted with the priorities of those who saw in streetlights the assurance of a greater feeling of safety, but the juxtaposition of these perspectives serves to underscore the many ways in which discourses shaping the modern street were rooted in the way people observed and experienced the material environment.

⁵⁵ Émile Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires précédées des campagnes hallucinées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1949), 113-114.

⁵⁶ Gaston P. Labat, *Almanach municipal de Montréal* (Montréal: Imprimerie Guertin, 1906), 17. On reactions to electric light in this period, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialisation of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 73-76.

⁵⁷ BCB, 12 December 1894, 664-665. Aside from the atmosphere and effect created by gas or electric lights, even the shape of the actual fixtures nourished debates on the aesthetic merits of Brussels' public lighting initiatives. One councillor, expressing his satisfaction at the light produced by new fixtures installed on the Boulevard du Hainaut, also felt compelled to point out that the "réverbères sont du plus détestable effet." From a revolutionary perspective, he joked, the council could congratulate itself on the effect these lampposts produced, as they would be "d'excellentes lanternes pour y accrocher les aristocrates futurs." BCB, 29 April 1907, 846.

c) *Revelry and debauchery*

Indeed, beyond some of the physical risks attributed to modern boulevards, detractors also charged that they threatened the moral foundations of society. From overindulgence in the shops, restaurants and bars that lined them, to more sordid problems of debauchery, drunkenness and prostitution, the boulevards materialised, for many critics, all of society's most damaging moral ills. For those who viewed these spaces with little more than condescension, the appeal of consumerism, luxury and frivolous pleasures that boulevards represented were simply a subject of mockery. Presenting the character of Louise, a young woman modelled after Madame Bovary and who enjoyed walking along the boulevards to seek the attention of men, the Belgian author Abel Torcy chided her misguided romanticism, associating the rhythm of the modern city with the folly of youth. "Pauvre fille," he wrote. Having caught a glimpse of the immensity of the city, the tumult of its crowds, the lights on the boulevards, "elle s'imagina que des passions plus fortes y battaient au cœur des hommes, que la vie plus fiévreuse y offrait des plaisirs plus savoureux."⁵⁸ The same note of disdain underpins a few humorous verses reproduced in a Montreal almanac published in 1896. Written in the voice of a resident of the countryside, the poem ridicules urbanites' tendency to think too highly of themselves and disparage the supposed imbecility of rural folk. You may wear "de beaux plumages," laughed the author, addressing the objects of his scorn directly, but "les coqs de notre village/ peuvent en montrer autant." You may have fancy mirrors, he continued, but "souvent on voit d'vilain' faces/ quand vous vous mettez devant." "Eh! ne vous zeste, ziste, zeste,/ Eh ne vous estimez pas tant!" went the ditty's refrain, framing modern boulevards as spaces where vanity, haughtiness and self-aggrandizement were on permanent display.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Abel Torcy, *À l'ombre des saules* (Bruxelles: Oscar Lamberty, 1908), 39.

⁵⁹ *Almanach comique*, 12 ed. (Montréal: Pharmacie Bernard, 1896), 37. Gaston Labat also used this type of humour in his almanac cited above, ridiculing contemporary consumers' lack of discernment and knowledge, as well as their flighty search for supposed authenticity, as they visited the city's boutiques: "Une jeune femme s'extasie devant un coffret exposé dans une vitrine. – Oh! le ravissant bibelot, dit-elle; il est ancien n'est-ce pas? – Non, madame, il est moderne. – Quel dommage, il est si joli!" Labat, *Almanach municipal de Montréal*, 65.

Critics of the perceived moral depravity that reigned on the boulevards could take a much harsher tone as well. Note, for instance, the stark lines and the dark silhouettes in the image published in the Montreal newspaper *Le Travail* in 1912, addressing the nefarious effects the streets could have on children. [Figure 20] Two boys stand outside their school, a sign on it informing passers-by of its 3 o'clock closing time, and the caption noting that there are not enough parks in which children can play. And yet Montreal is a big city – what can the boys do? The image beneath answers the question by depicting a modern boulevard with a hotel bar, cinema and poolroom lined up one after another. “La rue est [pour l’enfant] pleine de tentations, qui bien souvent le perdent,” reads the caption. In Belgium, the demographer Edmond Nicolai passed a similar judgement on this boulevard atmosphere, not with images, but with the imagery of an evocative choice of words, decrying the promiscuity that stained the moral order of large cities, and the “débauche dorée qui y pavane son luxe arrogant et déplacé.” Streets and theatres were the site of the shameless debasement of an honest and respectable bourgeoisie, a scandal for young girls, and the perdition of future generations. Modernity, he continued, “étréint ses victimes dans ses serres perfides pour en faire des esclaves tenus d’autant plus sous son joug, qu’ils sont tombés plus bas.”⁶⁰ Such voices were part of a hackneyed chorus, but it is their emphasis on the atmosphere of the street that deserves our attention. They reveal deeply-felt preoccupations by stressing the materiality of the street, and expressing the emotional responses that complicated the relationship to urban space in this period.

⁶⁰ Edmond Nicolai, *La dépopulation des campagnes et l'accroissement de la population des villes* (Bruxelles: P. Weissenbruch, 1903), 56.

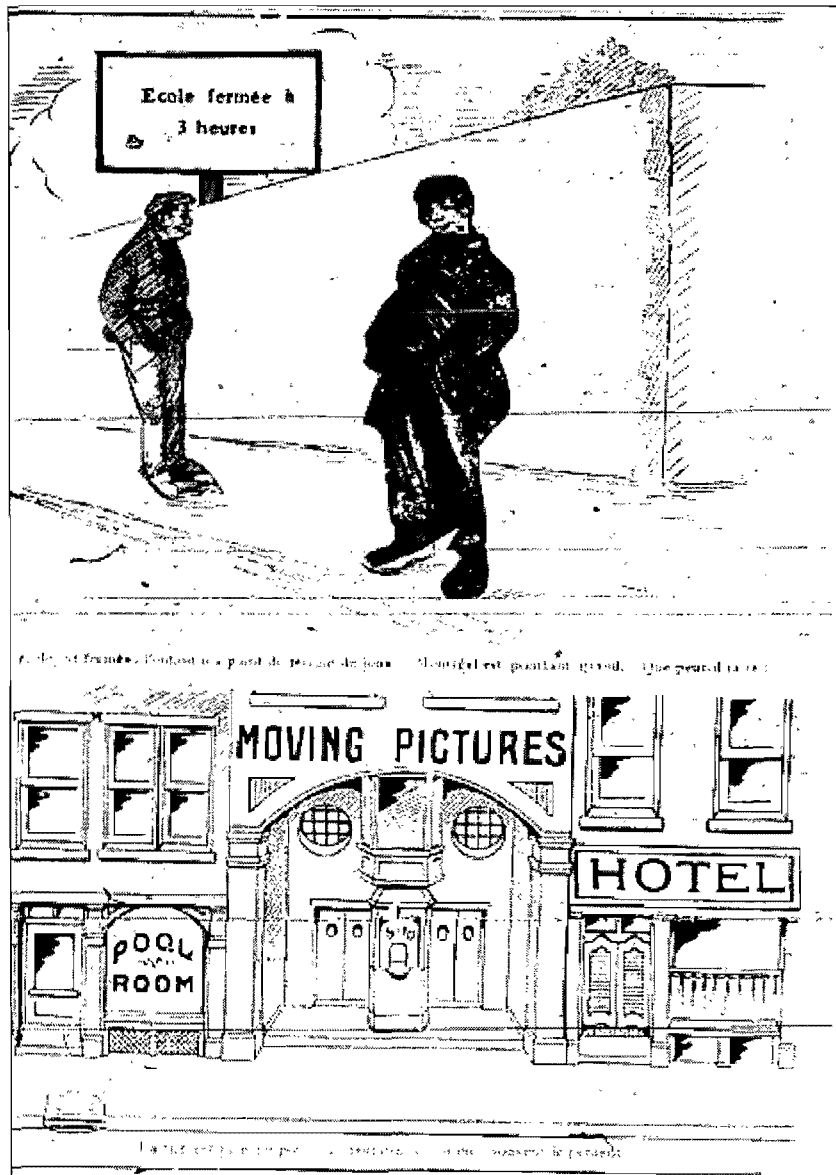


Figure 20 Temptations of the street.⁶¹

The episodes that undoubtedly best exemplified these competing images of the boulevards as spaces of pleasure and enjoyment on one hand, and of excess and immorality on the other, were the debates over a fair held on Brussels' boulevard du Midi every summer. During the 1880s and 1890s, the question was brought before the municipal council for annual approval. Though permission was granted every year, with

⁶¹ *Le Travail* 1, no. 2 (21 December 1912), 1.

one exception,⁶² the margin of votes was sometimes narrow, and the discussions generally heated. To some, the event tarnished the modern city's image, especially as it was held near the southern train station at which international travellers arrived. The fair, argued its opponents, not only typified moral ills, but also concentrated them in a single, compact place. Vagabonds milled about, workers left their professional and familial responsibilities to go drinking, women and children were exposed to drunkenness and immoral talk, the noise of the crowd and of the attractions disrupted the tranquility of the neighbourhood, the temporary installations damaged the trees lining the boulevards, and the generally poor standards of hygiene posed serious threats to the city's public health.

Its supporters, however, argued that, on the contrary, such events benefited the modern city, adding an element of joyfulness, festivity and cultural specificity to its image. They also vaunted the profits generated by the event, but, above all they insisted that the fair offered workers a much needed, and all-too-rare, opportunity for enjoyment and relaxation. This merry atmosphere, added councillor Goffin, was even a defining element of national identity. "C'est d'ailleurs là une tendance primordiale, innée au caractère belge, flamand et wallon, de vouloir manifester, à certains jours, l'attachement à la localité natale par des réjouissances publiques, des kermesses et des ducasses," he declared, not without provoking the ire of some of his opponents.⁶³

What the debate ultimately revolved around, however, were competing understandings of appropriate bodily deportment in the streets of the modern city. With its crowds converging in a single space, the smells of mussels, French fries, and beer wafting through the air, the sound of myriad conversations and the barrel organs of wandering musicians, screeching roller coasters and performers displaying feats of strength or corporeal abnormalities, the fair stimulated people's senses in intense and

⁶² The exception occurred in 1884, when the proposal for the fair was voted down by 11 votes to 9. The following year, when the issue again came up for discussion, councillor Richald, one of the event's primary supporters at the municipal administration, noted that the result of the 1884 decision had simply been to move the fair a few meters away from the Brussels city limits, across the street to the Saint-Gilles side of the boulevard. "Nous avons donc eu tous les inconvénients de la foire sans en avoir les avantages," he dryly pointed out. BCB, 27 April 1885, 361.

⁶³ Councillor Wauwermans replied that he did not see the fair as an occasion for residents to celebrate their "cité natale," adding, "je n'irai même pas jusqu'à dire avec lui que 'la foire est innée dans le cœur des Bruxellois.'" BCB, 25 January 1897, 25-26.

atypical ways. This is perhaps most evident in the writings of literary authors who reflected at length on the sensorial stimulations offered by this exotic atmosphere. The poet Théodore Hannon, for instance, devoted several verses to what he ironically called the “encens de foire,” the “bouquet fôrain” comprised of all of the grease, sausage, doughnuts and other odours he found utterly revolting as he made his way through the fair.⁶⁴ More appreciative, Eugène Demolder portrayed the annual summer event in terms of the animation of the boulevard, the dust created by the innumerable footsteps, the eclectic lighting “pétillant de bizarre couleur,” the sounds of electric machines that “tintinnabulent,” and the “vacarme de festivité bruyante,” without omitting to describe in detail the various characters, strongmen, fortune tellers, lion tamers, clowns, gymnasts, bearded women and other “phénomènes” that animated the scene.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Théodore Hannon, *Au pays de Manneken-Pis* (Bruxelles: Henry Kistemaeckers, 1883), 123-126.

⁶⁵ Eugène Demolder, “Champ de foire,” in Amédée Lynen, *14 motifs de Kermesses* (Bruxelles: Ch. Vos, 1889), 1-7. See also Franz Mahutte’s highly sensorial discussion of the fair in Mahutte, *Bruxelles vivant*, 53-63. As the anthropologist David Le Breton argues, it was precisely against this carnivalesque bodily deportment, inherited from medieval times, that modern conceptions of the body developed, rejecting these festivities, where “dans la ferveur de la rue et de la place publique, il est impossible de se tenir à l’écart, chaque homme participe à l’effusion collective, à la mêlée confuse qui se moque des usages et des choses de la religion.” David Le Breton, *Anthropologie du corps et modernité* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2005), 30.

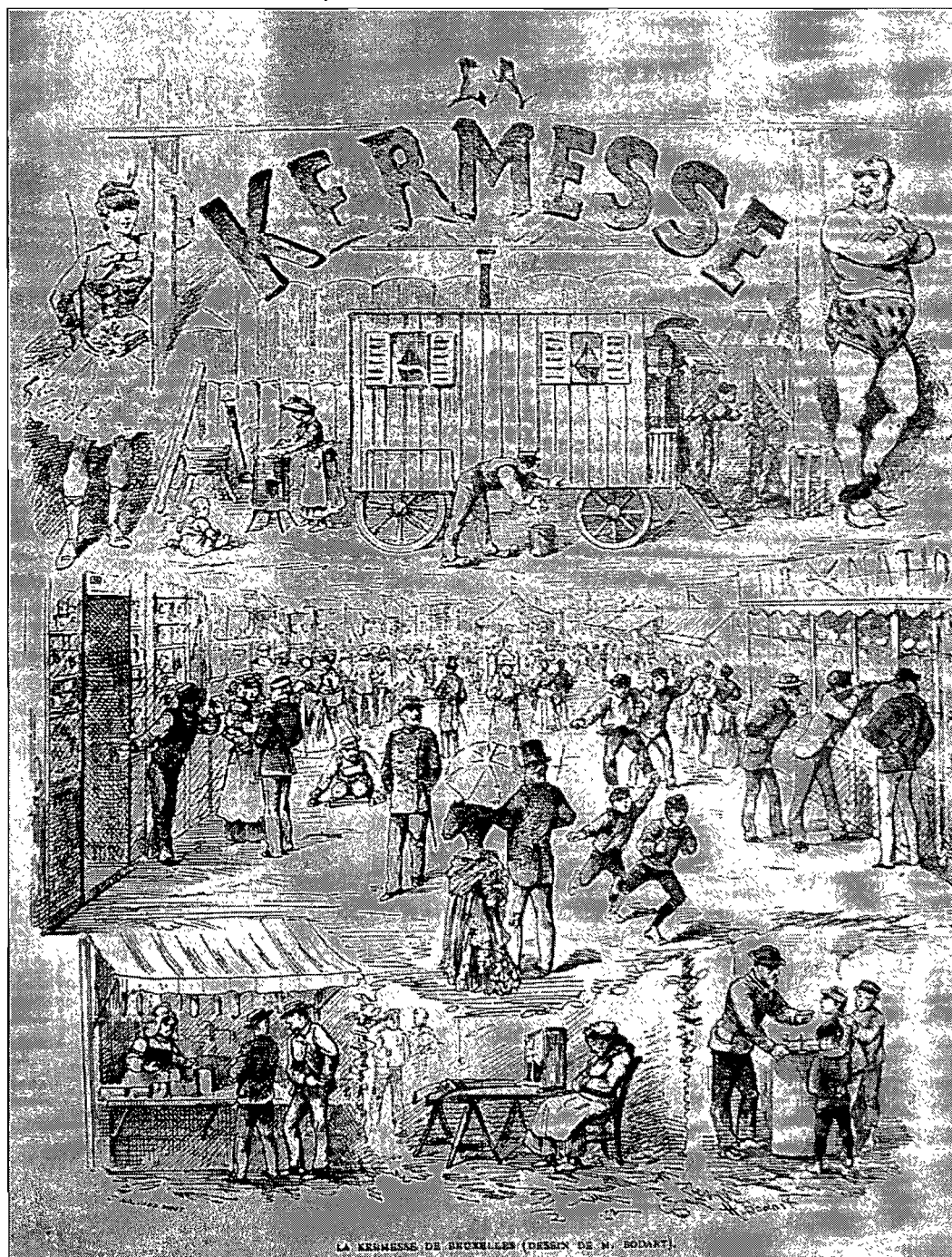


Figure 21 “La Kermesse de Bruxelles,” illustration by H. Bodart, showing the crowd, animations, activities and various body types at the Brussels fair.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ *Le Globe illustré* 43 (1886), 504.

The fair was but one episode, albeit sizeable and annual, in the life of the boulevards, but the comments it generated from both municipal politicians and other commentators reveal some of the many ways bodily matters shaped spatial perceptions. The fair stimulated the senses and displayed bodies in provocative ways, challenging established practices and norms of respectability to which people adhered, sparking debates over whether this activity on one of the city's prestigious boulevards was desecrating or reinforcing national character, offering a break from daily life or threatening public decency. With time, the fair acquired a certain degree of respectability, becoming an established feature of summer life in Brussels. Membership on the council was renewed, longer-serving members changed their position, and by 1900 the council was voting by a large majority to grant the organisers five-year permits. Profits from the event went to charitable organizations which funded a "villa scolaire" for underprivileged children in "un des sites les plus sains du Brabant" with "aucune usine ni fabrique pouvant vicier l'atmosphère."⁶⁷ The early debates, however, were rife with spatial and corporeal significance. Focussed on exterior, physical matters, they brought to the surface profoundly personal understandings of modern society.

IV. NATURAL FUNCTIONS AND PUBLIC DECENCY

In an age that defined its progress and civility, its urbanisation and urbanity, in terms of man's capacity to rationally overcome the whims and impulses of nature,⁶⁸ the inescapable reality that the body, though constructed through layers of social and cultural meaning, was fundamentally an element of that same nature could sometimes be problematic. Modern notions of respectable corporeal deportment occasionally clashed with basic physiological needs. We saw in Chapter 5 how the question of latrines in workers' homes illustrated this difficulty. The present section will continue the spatial analysis of street life in Montreal and Brussels by examining how modern understandings of public decency raised delicate corporeal questions when it came to the

⁶⁷ BCB, 31 October 1898, 681.

⁶⁸ T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 7, David Schuyler, *The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 2.

issue of basic natural functions. The recurring, and surprisingly engaging, debates over the construction of public lavatory facilities in these two cities clearly illustrate this tension.

a) *The great urinal debate*

In an amusing passage of his travel memoirs, the Belgian engineer Georges Kaïser recounts how, when strolling through Montreal after a lunch at which he had consumed a considerable amount of water, he suddenly found himself pressed by the call of nature. “Quiconque m’eût observé m’eût vu fort perplexe, inspectant les alentours, sondant les coins avec une anxiété croissante,” he related, before detailing his woes:

Soudain un policeman! Je fonds sur lui;
 - Monsieur le policeman, je voudrais bien m’isoler un instant. Où puis-je m’adresser?
 - Qu’est-ce que vous voulez faire?
 Je précisai.
 - Ah! Entrez dans un bar,

answered the policeman, directing him to the right. Surprised, our visitor quickly ran into the designated establishment, ordered a glass of sherry and rushed to the back where he was able to find some relief. Noting that already in London he had been “incommodé par la rareté de certains établissements de petite utilité publique,” Kaïser found it rather curious and inconvenient that in Montreal one had to enter a bar to satisfy such needs. “En somme, les étrangers souffrent seuls de cet état des choses,” he presumed, noting that local residents seemed perfectly accustomed to this situation.⁶⁹

Though Kaïser’s anecdote was intended simply to add colour to his account, his frustration at being unable to readily find public toilets nonetheless echoes a persistent problem facing the administrations of both Montreal and Brussels. Indeed, in this period of increasing concern with hygiene, morality, and the connections between the two, the issue of how people were to meet some of their most basic needs in public casts further light on the question of bodily practices in public space, and brings together several of

⁶⁹ Georges Kaïser, *Au Canada* (Bruxelles: Société belge de librairie, 1897), 80-82.

the themes that inform our analysis of spatial meaning, specifically hygiene, morality, security, sensorial experiences, bodily practices and the image of the modern city.⁷⁰ Reflecting Kaiser's comments, elected officials and bureaucrats concerned with matters of hygiene in both cities frequently decried the dearth of public toilets in their cities. "Que dire des urinoirs?" wondered Louis Laberge in his 1885 annual report, the first he penned as city doctor for Montreal: "Ils n'existent pas!" Or rather, he specified, the few that had been installed were in such a state of disrepair that "on pourrait les croire érigés afin de dégoûter entièrement la population de ces établissements pourtant si utiles."⁷¹

The topic was also frequently on the agenda of the Brussels council, and both municipalities periodically received tenders from private interests wishing to undertake the task of furnishing the cities with these structures. It was during a debate over one such proposal that Brussels councilman Delecosse enumerated several of the broader spatial issues associated with public toilets on the urban landscape, in the process laying out many of the arguments that recurred in both cities, and emphasising the connection between public spaces and bodily practices. Not surprisingly, given the matter at hand, one of Delecosse's major concerns was sensorial in nature. Rather than invest in suitable "kiosks" disposed in various places, the city had instead chosen to install "contre les maisons particulières des urinoirs mal aménagés, répandant de mauvaises odeurs, trop peu dissimulés, trop peu cachés aux regards [...]." Beyond the sorry sensorial spectacle they offered, moreover, these run-down corners had also become unseemly "repaires d'immoralité" where "des hommes et des femmes de mauvaise vie se donnaient d'ignobles rendez-vous et [...] donnaient libre carrière à leurs révoltantes

⁷⁰ For an overview of the history of public toilets in Brussels, see Claire Billen and Jean-Michel Decroly, *Petits coins dans la grande ville : les toilettes publiques à Bruxelles du moyen âge à nos jours* (Bruxelles: Musée de la Ville de Bruxelles, 2003).

⁷¹ "Rapport annuel de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1885," 99. Over a decade after Kaiser's passage through Montreal, Laberge confirmed that the situation the traveller had experienced was not exceptional, and argued that the construction of additional public toilets would undoubtedly further the cause of temperance in the city. "C'est un fait bien reconnu," he affirmed, "que le passant, le voyageur ou le citoyen pressé par un besoin naturel n'a pas d'autre moyen, pour se soulager, que d'entrer dans le premier restaurant venu et d'y payer une consommation pour avoir le privilège de l'usage d'un cabinet d'aisance." "Rapport annuel de l'état sanitaire de la cité de Montréal pour l'année 1885," 8. Even in Brussels, where public toilets were more accessible, those living in residential areas away from the centre reported encountering similar problems. Commission du travail instituée par arrêté royal du 15 avril 1886, *Procès-verbaux des séances d'enquête concernant le travail industriel*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (Bruxelles: A. Lesigne, 1887), 28.

passions,” also exhorting considerable sums of money from “d’honnêtes et paisibles bourgeois,” innocently and unsuspectingly venturing into these narrow stalls.

For Delecosse, the only solution to these problems was to build and maintain dozens of urinals in all parts of the city, “ne laissant rien à désirer sous le rapport de la morale ou de l’hygiène,” carefully designed to offer enough discretion while not enabling shady characters to dissimulate their unsavoury activities. Not only would this improve the sensorial scenery and protect people’s safety, it was also indispensable to the citizenry’s good health. The current lack of urinals often forced their users to patiently (or impatiently, he added) wait their turn in line. Himself a doctor, Delecosse noted that he did not need to remind an assembly in which sat four physicians of the disastrous health risks this could pose, particularly among older people. The lack of urinals in Brussels, he suggested, often forced people to either soil their clothing or break the law by urinating on the street, a disagreeable and unacceptable “état des choses qui expose les gens à des accidents, dont les uns sont très graves et dont les autres sont grotesques et prêtent à la raillerie et au ridicule.”⁷²

In Montreal, the archival records contain fewer references to this matter, but newspapers, tenders and letters to the administration nonetheless indicate that similar imperatives were at play. An individual writing under the pseudonym of Jean D’Acier, for instance, wrote into some of the city’s French-language newspapers denouncing what he perceived as petty political wrangling over a simple yet urgent matter, a shameful situation for a city of Montreal’s importance.⁷³ “Tous les jours nous recevons des plaintes de ce genre. Nos édiles vont-ils enfin agir? C’est à désirer,” added *Le Monde* after qualifying as “inconcevable” the fact that all of Sainte-Hélène Island, a popular Montreal park, had but one toilet for the use of women and children.⁷⁴ Laberge, who also insisted on both the sanitary and moral importance of urinals, agreed that the problem affected the city’s image directly. “Les autres villes l’ont compris; Montréal seule, la Métropole du Canada, est encore bien retardataire sur ce rapport,” he noted,

⁷² BCB, 11 April 1881, 479-482.

⁷³ “Pourquoi donc retarder ainsi la réalisation d’une œuvre aussi importante au point de vue du bien-être, de l’hygiène et de la salubrité?” he asked in *La Minerve*, 13 April, 1894. And a few days later: “Cette question est bien simple à résoudre, et nous ne comprenons pas qu’on fasse la sourde oreille aux clameurs qui s’élèvent de toute part à ce sujet.” *La Presse*, 5 May, 1894.

⁷⁴ “Les chalets de nécessité : Va-t-on enfin les construire,” *Le Monde*, 14 April, 1894.

reflecting comments frequently heard in Brussels that the city paled in comparison to Paris and Berlin in the urinal department, and that the citizens' habits gave the city "l'aspect d'un vaste tableau de Teniers, où l'on voit toujours un personnage qui urine quelque part."⁷⁵

But if the lack of public urinals and toilets hampered the city's image, so too, in some ways, did their presence. At council discussions in Brussels, there was always at least one member to point out that, in dealing with claims for additional urinals, it was important to remember that those who lived near them frequently complained of the nuisance they represented. These "établissements de bienfaisance," remarked the alderman De Mot with a hint of irony, "ont ceci de particulier, que tout le monde en demande... pour ses voisins. Il en faut, au loin, pour l'usage externe des pétitionnaires, mais non dans leurs environs immédiats."⁷⁶ Indeed, on the prestigious boulevards of these modern cities, the sight, however veiled, and smell of people satisfying their intimate bodily needs jarred with cultural norms that increasingly confined such practices to the privacy of the home.⁷⁷

In Montreal, the solution imagined to address this dilemma consisted in building these installations in a way that mirrored the ambitions represented by the modern boulevards. Resembling miniature palaces, these edifices were intended to grace the streets with an air of style and elegance, reflecting Montreal's metropolitan status and impressing visitors to the city.⁷⁸ So proposed Alfred Bertin in the plans he submitted to the city for constructing and operating a series of public toilets in some of Montreal's most important squares. It is perhaps telling that the "cabinets inodores complètement séparés les uns des autres et munis d'appareils les plus perfectionnés" with which people were to assuage their "besoins naturels" came just sixth on the list of services Bertin proposed to offer in these rest rooms, behind a gamut of facilities that included an information booth with directories, maps and transportation timetables, newspaper and

⁷⁵ BCB, 3 February 1879, 76. (Durant)

⁷⁶ BCB, 5 August 1895, 6.

⁷⁷ "Jamais peut-être l'histoire de la propreté ne s'était à ce point associée à celle d'un espace : créer un lieu toujours plus privé où les soins se donnent sans témoin, renforcer la spécificité ce de lieu et de ces objets." Georges Vigarello, *Le propre et le sale : l'hygiène du corps depuis le Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 231.

⁷⁸ AM CHS, VM 21, S2, Letter from Alfred Bertin to Hygiene committee, undated, 1905.

stationary stands, clocks, calendars, barometers and weathervanes, telephones, and booths containing an assortment of towels, mirrors, brushes, combs and a “garçon frotteur de chaussures [...] à la disposition des hommes.” Tenders for such contracts proposed pavilions that were to be octagonal in shape, tastefully ornamented and built of brick, stone or reinforced concrete. Beyond their barest functionality, these modern creations thus promised comfort and refinement. Rather than reducing bodily practices to their most fundamental, unsightly, and malodorous expression that clashed with the desired atmosphere of the modern street, Bertin’s little salons proposed to offer sensorial experiences and bodily practices that corresponded to the smoothness, efficiency, hygiene, and comfort that the streets were meant to represent.⁷⁹

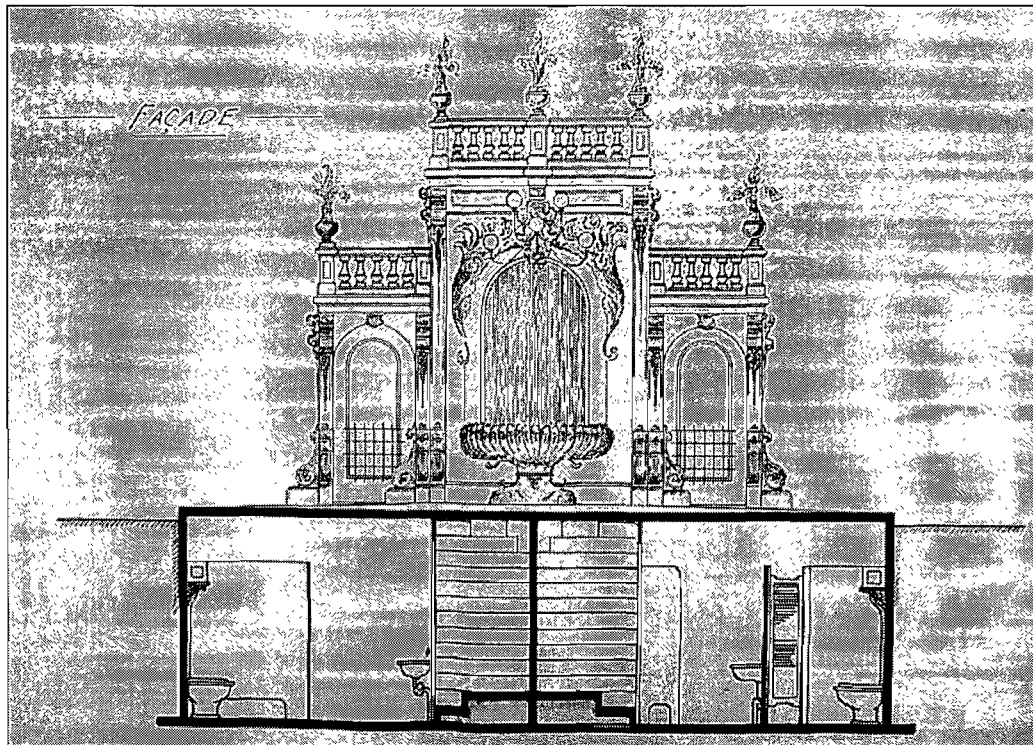


Figure 22 Luxurious facilities. Proposed design for public toilets submitted to the Montreal health committee in 1906.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Ibid* and AM, Commission de l’aqueduc (hereafter CA), VM 47, S4, D7, documents in file dated between July 1890 and May 1894. The squares Bertin had in mind were Chaboillez, Victoria, Place d’Armes, Dalhousie, Viger, Saint-Louis, Dominion, Richmond, and Beaver Hall.

⁸⁰ AM, CHS, VM 21 S2, “Copie du contrat entre la Cité de Montréal et The Progress Construction Co.,” (1906).

Funding such projects was another matter. As we saw, the question stagnated before the council, and it was only in 1913 that the first of these washrooms was opened in Place Jacques-Cartier. It was with great pride and in minute detail that, in the annual report on municipal buildings, R. Drouin announced the installation of this “chalet des plus modernes,” hoping that several more would follow.⁸¹ To be sure, all were not impressed by this lavishness. In a letter to *Le Travail* signed with the pseudonym Jean Veritas, one Montrealer reminded the administration that the population had asked only for a few modest installations in various parts of the city, the nature of which required no luxury. And yet, he deplored, the city was building just one, at an astronomical cost, and in a location that was “fréquenté que deux jours par semaine, les jours de marché, le mercredi et le vendredi. Les cinq autres jours il sera fréquenté par des rats!” The debate is revealing in the way it opposed not just differing understandings on the utility of public toilets, but also in the way it brought bodily practices directly to the heart of competing spatial understandings, in this case between municipal officials who saw the streets as symbols of prestige, and a working-class publication interested in accessibility.

b) *Euphemisms and puns*

Debates over the layout and location of public toilets raised tricky gender considerations as well, though less so in Montreal where the proposed installations were conceived of with separate sections for men and women. In Brussels, where the debate was largely framed in terms of the construction of urinals, gender-related tensions were more preponderant. Reacting to Delecosse’s exposé cited above, councillor André asked his colleague why, in pleading for the hygienic needs of men, “il n’a pas songé aux dames,” an injustice in his eyes. Although Delecosse responded that he was favourable to the construction of toilets for women, the little attention paid to the issue throughout the debates indicates that, in the minds of the councillors, it was of secondary importance. Besides, one such euphemistically named “chalet de nécessité,” located on Avenue Louise, was hardly ever used, noted councillor Janssen at another meeting, not

⁸¹ “Rapport annuel du département des édifices municipaux pour l’exercice 1912.”

specifying why this might have been.⁸² Whereas it was generally agreed that urinals should be placed on major thoroughfares, though subtly, to be sure, Janssen argued that women's facilities should be established "dans des endroits relativement retirés," framing his spatial understanding of bodily practices in conspicuously gendered terms, and giving a distinctly masculine edge to the discourse surrounding the boulevard atmosphere.

One urinal, installed in the parc du Cinquanteaire, noted alderman Leurs, had to be relocated several times on account of its offering "un spectacle peu digne pour les dames, que choquait sa fréquentation."⁸³ Indeed, the councillors seemed more concerned with protecting women from the uncomfortable sight of men relieving themselves by building more discreet urinals, than with providing them with accommodations they could readily use. A decade earlier, councillor Vandendorpe had expressed his indignation at a situation in which a broken water main forced people living in the rue de l'Abricotier to fetch their water near a local urinal. "C'est profondément déplorable," he said, that "les ménagères de ce quartier sont obligées d'attendre que les hommes qui sont au pissoir aient terminé pour aller prendre l'eau nécessaire à leur consommation." Here again, the question of public urinals posed a certain amount of gender-related discomfort, not over the question of offering this service to women, but rather in terms of how the intimate bodily practices of men in public spaces could offend sensibilities and run contrary to attitudes about appropriate forms of interaction between men and women in the theatre of the modern street. Finally, the importance that might have been accorded to the question of providing toilets for women was also diminished by the derision with which the issue was invariably greeted when raised in council meetings. For instance, when referring to the unused Louise chalet referred to above, Janssen coyly stated that "en ce qui concerne les chalets de nécessité pour dames, le besoin ne paraît pas se faire sentir." The men who comprised the assembly burst into laughter at the

⁸² BCB, 10 December 1882, 947. A similar situation was observed in Montreal, where, in reporting on the first months of activity in the luxurious new chalet de nécessité, the hygiene committee noted that, while 55,401 men had visited the "vespasienne" between August and December of 1913, only 14,359 women had done the same. "Rapport du bureau municipal d'hygiène et de statistique de Montréal pour l'année 1913," 13.

⁸³ BCB, 27 December 1901, 973-974.

sensorial double entendre, suggesting that they did not see the matter as one to be taken overly seriously.⁸⁴

This last point, on the councillors' laughter, bears elaborating. We are fortunate that those responsible for transcribing the exchanges at the Brussels municipal council not only indicated where the assembly laughed at what was said, but also how much through the use of such graded terms as "rires," "hilarité," or "hilarité générale," giving us a sense of the atmosphere in the room. When it came to discussions over *chalets de nécessité*, the topic was always good for some salacious puns and repeated sophomoric laughter, showing that, even amidst the venerable and serious elected assembly, the mood could sometimes turn to giddiness. For instance, while discussing the number of urinals the city should install, as well as their emplacement, burgomaster De Mot promised to comply with his honourable colleagues' requests, "à condition qu'ils m'indiquent des endroits propices..." a remark greeted with a "nouvelle explosion d'hilarité."⁸⁵ On another occasion, the public works alderman, also addressing the question of location, evoked the matter of cost before apologizing to his colleague, Grimard, of the finance section, for overstepping his responsibilities. "Oh! je n'y vois aucun inconvénient," responded the latter, to the council's "hilarité générale," "d'autant plus que je n'aime pas à fourrer mon nez dans ces affaires-là."⁸⁶ In addition to such joking around, urinal discussions were also seen as an opportunity for some friendly teasing. During his long tenure, councillor Émile Hubert, for instance, became notorious for his repeated insistence that the city intensify its investments in such projects, to the point that laughter erupted each time he spoke, no matter what he was saying. Consider, for example, the following exchange involving Hubert, who by then anticipated the mockery, De Mot, and burgomaster Adolphe Max upon reaching Item 79 on the agenda, "Urinoirs – Construction et Entretien," on a day in which they were in a particularly jovial mood:

M. LE BOURGMESTRE. La parole est à M. Hubert (*Hilarité générale.*)

M. HUBERT. Vous riez, Messieurs, mais cependant je pense qu'il s'agit d'une question très grave.

⁸⁴ BCB, 10 December 1882, 947.

⁸⁵ BCB, 27 December 1901, 973.

⁸⁶ BCB, 16 December 1911, 1483.

M. DE MOT. Et aussi très humide. (*Nouveaux rires.*)

M. HUBERT. Vous croyez que je n'ai que quelques mots à dire; eh bien vous vous trompez; j'en ai certainement pour dix minutes. (*Rires.*)

M. LE BOURGMESTRE. Pour dix minutes, Monsieur Hubert? C'est de l'incontinence! (*Nouveaux rires.*)⁸⁷

Such laughter is, of course, challenging to interpret, and probably says more about the atmosphere at the council on a particular day, or on the dynamic of personal relationships at play, than on the politicians' profound convictions on the matter. Nevertheless, the recurrence of such humour each time the issue was raised made laughter a critical element of the debate over public toilets. If, on one hand, it can indicate that the question was seen as less pressing than others, it also suggests that this particular form of interaction between bodily practices and public space was problematic enough to elicit a touch of unease among the councillors, a feeling they perhaps sought to diminish by laughing it off. Indeed, the question of such intimate bodily practices on the streets of the city was problematic to the extent that it required these decision makers to come up with ways to balance questions of hygiene, morality, security, and the image of their city as a modern capital, with the awkward question of bodily functions deemed, in modern society, to be an inappropriate topic of conversation. These debates encapsulate the themes of public space, bodily practices and personal subjectivities we have discussed in this chapter, and the laughter it generated adds an additional layer to the interior and emotional quality of modern spatial stories.

V. BODIES OF THE DECEASED

The human body, in all of its complexity, is, of course, ultimately, a perishable organism. Death, wrote the Montreal hygienist Joseph Israël Desroches near the end of our period, is "la dissolution du composé humain, c'est la séparation de l'âme avec le corps, c'est l'entrée de l'âme dans sa destinée éternelle."⁸⁸ While this thesis has discussed the corporeal relationship to space by focussing on the living body – in its

⁸⁷ BCB, 8 December 1913, 1336.

⁸⁸ Joseph Israël Desroches, *Mort apparente et mort réelle, ou De l'assistance corporelle et spirituelle des moribonds : rapport présenté au XXI^e Congrès eucharistique international de Montréal* (Montréal: L.J.A. Derome, 1911), 12.

exaltations and pleasures, in its pain and suffering, at work and at rest – death is also an inevitable aspect of human embodiment. It is thus fitting to close by briefly addressing the ways urban dwellers perceived these streets in reference to bodies of the deceased. As was the case with various attitudes about the body and space that we have examined, understandings of death were also in transition during this period. As historian Philippe Ariès argues, until the Great War, the death of an individual still “modifiait solennellement l’espace d’un groupe social.” But in urbanised, industrialised, and increasingly medicalised societies, a shift was under way. Death and mourning, which had long been public in western culture, were increasingly dissimulated in the home and, later, the hospital. Under the hygienic impulse of the late nineteenth century, feelings of repugnance toward the dead body increased, and a new image of death emerged: “la mort laide et cachée, et cachée parce que laide et sale.”⁸⁹ In this shifting context, the presence of death, an uncontrollable natural occurrence, in the carefully planned and designed streets of the modern city was particularly problematic.

a) *Funeral processions*

In the nineteenth century, hygienic considerations and fears of contagion had pushed burial grounds outside of city centres. In Brussels, cemeteries were opened in the outlying communes, while in Montreal the deceased were laid to rest in the adjacent Catholic and Protestant grounds opened on the summit of Mount Royal at mid-century.⁹⁰ The distance between the town and the cemeteries meant that funeral processions, highly visible and distinctive events in which the bodies of both the deceased and mourners slowly moved through the streets, were regular, though diminishing, occurrences. Ashton Oxenden, Anglican bishop of Montreal during the 1870s, observed that Canadians were “somewhat demonstrative in their sorrows. The Funeral Cavalcades are of enormous dimensions. It is quite a common thing to see a hearse followed by forty or

⁸⁹ Philippe Ariès, *L'homme devant la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 553, 563.

⁹⁰ “The question was once raised whether the Mountain should go to Mohammed, or Mohammed should go to the Mountain – but it was not in Montreal. Here everybody goes to the Mountain – if not alive, then afterward,” mused the American author Henry P. Phelps. For more on the history of these mountaintop graveyards, see Pierre-Richard Bisson, Mario Brodeur, and Daniel Drouin, *Cimetière Notre-Dame-des-Neiges* (Montréal: Henri Rivard, 2004), Brian J. Young and Geoffrey James, *Respectable Burial: Montreal's Mount Royal Cemetery* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003).

fifty carriages, and by one or two hundred mourners,” proceeding to the “very picturesque and beautiful cemetery on the north side of the mountain, about three miles from the town.”⁹¹

Over the course of the century, notes historian Brian Young, such funerals became less frequent. “Distance and cost discouraged the frail, the poor, the lame, and the boisterous from making the trip; except for the corteges of the prominent, large processions or crowds in the cemetery were also discouraged,” writes Young.⁹² Nonetheless, when such events did occur, at funerals held for military personnel, firemen killed in the line of duty, or other noteworthy personalities, they brought large gatherings of urban dwellers together into the streets of the city, with their thoughts and attention turned to the dead body being carried before them. The atmosphere created around this particular spatial dynamic, notes Young, raised questions of decorum, particularly with respect to the participation of women in these predominantly masculine ceremonies, and of members of the working class deemed to be unruly. More controversial burials, such as those of Institut canadien member Joseph Guibord, or the colourful publican Joe Beef, could turn these street-centred events into theatres of religious and class-based conflicts in which public space was invested with competing claims and priorities.

Aside from becoming exterior manifestations of social or political tensions, funeral processions also had, for obvious reasons, a distinct interior and emotional quality to them, particularly in Brussels, where more anonymous ceremonies remained the norm. There, the municipal administration outlined strict rules for such processions in order to ensure that they took place in an atmosphere of order, calm and serenity. All processions, stipulated the rules adopted in 1881, had to be carried out by the administration itself, which thus gave itself the right to control the way in which corpses were moved through the streets. To respect rules of etiquette, processions were performed under the supervision of an “ordonnateur,” whose task it was to oversee the

⁹¹ Ashton Oxenden, *The History of my Life, an Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), 177. “There is however, something very sad and unsatisfactory about the ceremony,” he nonetheless added, “for, owing to the severe cold in winter, there is usually no service in the open air, as in England; and, for the impenetrable state of the ground, no actual internment can take place.”

⁹² Young and James, *Respectable Burial*, 71.

proceedings, ensuring that, through the journey, “le convois ne cesse de marcher avec ordre et décence, que tous les agents sont à leur poste et observent le silence.” His tasks included making sure that no obstacles impeded the cortege’s movement, as well as to mandate one of the pallbearers to stop traffic at intersections until all had passed. He was also charged with ensuring the pallbearers’ behaviour did not compromise the dignity of the proceedings: “Il veille à ce que les porteurs et les cochers ne fument pas pendant la durée des transports funèbres et à ce qu’ils ne s’arrêtent pas dans les cabarets, soit aux abords des cimetières soit sur le parcours de convois, soit pendant le retour en ville.”⁹³ The need to specify this last provision attests to the authorities’ preoccupation with what they considered to be appropriate uses of space in the context of a funeral.

Thus, the fast and efficient streets of the modern city would turn, for a few moments at least, into quiet spaces of contemplation and mourning on the occasion of such processions. Émile Verhaeren captured this spatial dynamic in “La Mort,” a haunting poem depicting the movement of death through city streets. Adorned with black and opulence, he wrote, amidst the sounds of “tambours voilés, musiques lentes,” among vast hearses decked with pale lights, “la mort s’étale et s’exagère.” Relating the sobs and agony of the grieving marchers, the poet focuses on the emotionally laden atmosphere created by the materiality and ornamentation of death in the street – the decorations, the burial garments, the casket, the church bells. The form of the streets themselves also played into his setting of this mournful scene. As the procession makes its way from the city to the faubourgs, the elements of the modern boulevards, cast here in a sombre light, are not the joyful gathering spaces so frequently described, but the straight path of a sorrowful parade:

Drapée en noir et familière,
La Mort s’en va le long des rues
Longues et linéaires.

Drapée en noir, comme le soir,
La vieille Mort agressive et bourrue
S’en va par les quartiers
Des boutiques et des métiers,
En carrosse qui se rehausse

⁹³ “Règlement sur les inhumations et les transports funèbres” BCB, 3 May 1880, 507.

De gros lambris exorbitants,
Couleur d'usure et d'ancien temps.⁹⁴

As in Montreal, funeral processions in Brussels also inscribed class distinctions upon public space. Describing the “longue et banale” route from the city to the suburban cemeteries, for instance, Dumont-Wilden remarked on how pitiful and humiliated looked the mourners of the city’s poor neighbourhoods, dressed in their cheap Sunday best, while, across town, funerals and memorials were attended by “un monde élégant.”⁹⁵ The sadness and pity inspired by the sight of an impoverished family’s funeral was further heightened when it was a child who had died. When Keetje participates in the funeral procession of a young girl from her neighbourhood, Neel Doff’s protagonist feels outraged by the spectacle. “Et cette chevauchée, par les chemins creux, où l’on s’enlisait dans la boue, avec ce cercueil porté par des filles qui, pour éviter les flaques, le faisaient pencher de droite et de gauche, me semblait une chose barbare et irrespectueuse.”⁹⁶ The muddied streets impeding the movement of the young girls, later described as being too frail to accomplish the task that was asked of them, thus give a distinctive spatial context to Keetje’s emotional reaction to the funeral.

Such indignation, it should be noted, was not reserved to fictional characters. At a Council meeting in 1903, members expressed similar sentiments when it was brought to the assembly’s attention that the hearse which the city used for its indigent population often carried the bodies of several children at once, taking a convoluted route from one house to another, and making it impossible for the families to follow. “Or il est déjà pénible pour les parents de perdre des enfants qu’ils ont élevés jusqu’à l’âge de cinq ou six ans, et il est vraiment cruel de les empêcher en quelque sorte de suivre le corps,” pleaded councillor Hubert. “Très bien! Très bien!” responded his colleagues, who later voted to set aside additional funds for the purchase of more hearses in order to alleviate this problem.⁹⁷ The presence of deceased children in the city’s streets thus presented particular sentimental problems which the council acted directly to resolve, indicating

⁹⁴ Verhaeren, *Les villes tentaculaires*, 148-149.

⁹⁵ Dumont-Wilden, *Coins de Bruxelles*, 49.

⁹⁶ Neel Doff, *Keetje* (Bruxelles: Éditions Labor, 1987), 29.

⁹⁷ BCB, 19 December 1903, 1651, and 13 June 1904, 894.

the connection that existed between the interiority of its members and their approach to the uses of urban space as they concerned the delicate question of funeral processions.

b) *Transporting corpses*

But if bringing people's mortal remains into the street evoked intense emotional reactions, the practice also affected urban dwellers on a sensorial level, and clashed with their understandings of modern hygiene. If cemeteries were spaces in which rested the bodies of loved ones, evoking fond memories for those left behind, they represented something entirely different in the eyes of the hygienist, noted the Montrealer J.A. Beaudry, who, concentrating on "le côté purement physique et matériel," saw them as "le champ où sont inhumés les cadavres de ceux que Dieu a condamnés à la pourriture animale." Stripped of its soul, the human body in decomposition thus became a direct threat to the health, and even to the lives, of a modern population, sensitive, as we have seen, to hygienic values.⁹⁸

For his part, Laberge campaigned against the traditional practice of covering with drapes the walls and floors of rooms in which corpses laid in state. These drapes, he argued, prevented the flow of air and the penetration of sunlight, and trapped the dust carried in by visitors, making them potential centres of infection. Conscious that he was involving himself in a delicate battle against an old and established custom, "one which many people cling to," Laberge nonetheless insisted that modern hygienic practices prevail and that funeral rituals be modified to comply with the standards that hygienists were attempting to establish within the urban setting.⁹⁹ It was precisely in this context of modern concerns about the hygienic issues pertaining to corpses, note Pierre-Richard Bisson *et al*, that residents of the municipality of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, bordering the Montreal cemetery of that name, lodged a complaint against the establishment in 1892, expressing fears that the "mauvaises exhalations," emanating from the corpses would seep into the ground, contaminating well water and menacing public health.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ J.A. Beaudry, "À propos des cimetières," *Journal d'hygiène populaire* 7, no. 3 (July 1890), 75.

⁹⁹ AM, CHS, VM 21 S2, "Report from Louis Laberge to Hygiene and Statistics Committee," in box dated 1905-1906.

¹⁰⁰ Bisson, Brodeur, and Drouin, *Cimetière Notre-Dame-des-Neiges*, 93.

Brussels authorities were confronted with similar issues, the archives show. But beyond the actual physical fears of disease provoked by corpses, it was the perception of death, and, above all, of the dead body, that seemed to trouble certain sensibilities. Responding to a complaint about the “odeur pestilentielle” spread by a hospital hearse, addressed by a citizen hoping to see the itinerary modified, the secretary of the Conseil général des hospices expressed his doubts as to the validity of this claim, and wondered whether they did not originate from “des personnes dont la sensibilité des nerfs olfactifs a, peut-être, été aiguisée par la vue de véhicules qu’ils savaient devoir renfermer quelque cadavre.”¹⁰¹ Back at the municipal council, Hubert also complained about the sight of workmen transporting corpses on carts to the Institut de dissection in the early hours of the morning. “Il faut voir ces porteurs venant de l’Hôpital Saint-Jean faire des efforts surhumains pour gravir les boulevards et les rues qui traversent la capitale et arriver enfin éreintés au Parc Léopold,” he exclaimed. Here it was less the cadavers themselves than the display of the men physically exerting themselves to transport them that shocked the councillor’s sense of decency, an interior response he chose to emphasise by directly alluding to a spatial understanding in which it was implicit that the streets of the capital were not an appropriate setting for such a scene. Untrue, responded alderman De Potter, who insisted that such transfers were carried out with the utmost decency and with respect for such spatial considerations. Indeed, it was precisely to avoid drawing attention to the task at hand, to the movement of death in the street, that it was undertaken in a simple fashion. “Il y a un sentiment pénible qui s’attache aux opérations qui se font sur le cadavre. Et c’est pour que le transport des corps se fasse à l’insu du public que l’on y procède la nuit.”¹⁰²

Because the relationship with space was developed to a large extent through the body, the presence of deceased bodies in public provoked tensions. If, on one hand, funeral processions could confer upon modern boulevards a momentary atmosphere of sorrow and contemplation, death was also an irritant in modernising society. Corpses made people nervous, offended both their physical senses and their moral codes of decency and decorum, such that in modern streets built on imperatives of movement and

¹⁰¹ CPAS, Fonds affaires générales, file #42, letter from Wehenke, secretary of the Conseil général des hospices to G. Washer, director, 13 August 1880.

¹⁰² BCB, 13 June 1904, 898-900.

progress, death was increasingly unwelcome. Rules were formulated to minimise contact between the bodies of the deceased and the bodies of those who stayed on to make the city come alive to the promises of modernity.

CONCLUSION

In one of his explorations of “les mœurs bruxelloises,” the author Léopold Courouble depicts a ferocious policeman harassing a group of female street peddlers, choosing among them one victim in particular, a “petite bossue,” called Fintje. Seeing the brute approach, the girl drops her basket of fruit and takes to her heels through the streets. Behind her, the agent, “agile, pressant le sabre sur sa cuisse, bondit par-dessus les tas de pavés et sable répandus dans la rue, et voilà que sa dextre gantée de fil s’abat sur l’épaule de la fuyarde.” Softly, Fintje refuses to answer his aggressive questions, resisting in her own way against the powerful agent. This infuriates the policeman, and as he roars at the girl to follow him to his precinct, his intervention draws a crowd of observers who cannot help but scoff at “le féroce agent et sa grotesque proie.” Fintje follows the agent, resigned but stoic. “Et rien n’est si triste que cette créature tourte, difforme, la grosse tête enfoncée dans les épaules pointues, et frissonnant sous l’aigre brise qui soulève son châle effiloqué et son tablier plein de pièces.” But the story ends on a happy note when the officer lets up as they walk by a little boy who is crying. Suddenly touched, and in a moment of softness, the agent feels compassion, and buys oranges from Fintje, which he gives to the boy, before sending them both on their way.¹⁰³

I cite this story in conclusion in order to illustrate the convergence of street space, bodies, movement and emotion in the modern city. The street is represented in many guises: a space of economic activity, a space under construction and renovation – the materials designed to make circulation more fluid ironically strewn about, impeding the policemen’s movement – a space where people gather, where tensions take shape, where authority is imposed and contested, where physical strength and weakness are on

¹⁰³ Léopold Courouble, “Croquis de mœurs bruxelloises,” in Braun, Benoidt, and Mahutte, eds., *Notre pays*, 401-402.

public display. The contrast between the policeman's swift and agile body and Fintje's weak and frail shell underscores these tensions. We are made acutely aware of the characters' physicality, of the bodily terms on which their interaction and their movement in space is premised. But the spatial narrative at hand is made complete as the exterior and material dimension of the body shifts to the interior plane of emotions. The street is here associated with a variety of subjective sentiments, ranging from fear and hatred to sympathy and benevolence, illustrating how the meaning of the urban environment was constructed by a constant interaction between its material form and the ideas and emotions through which this materiality resonated.

Drawing on representations produced by a diversity of actors and elements that characterised the street life of turn-of-the-century Montreal and Brussels, this chapter has demonstrated that the social and cultural underpinnings of public space were rooted in urban dwellers' experiences with its materiality. These spaces were designed in the spirit of modernity, with a desire to offer smooth, rapid and efficient movement, although, as we have seen, they sometimes fell short of these objectives. But the streets nonetheless became directly implicated in urban dwellers' individual and collective sense of self. From the personal musings of those attempting to feel at home in the tumultuous and unpredictable atmosphere of urban modernity, to the grander political narratives that saw in the material layout of the city a reflection of national character, I have shown how the connection between the public culture of the boulevards and the interior preoccupations of its occupants was constructed.

As planners discussed the layout out of the street, as politicians reflected upon its deeper cultural significance, as moralists criticised the societal implications of the public forms of interaction they engendered, and as authors contemplated the spectacles offered by the atmosphere of the boulevards, all drew upon the senses and the body to construct their relationship to these spaces. Debates over the form and trajectory of the streets or the orientation of street lighting, but also more mundane questions of everyday life such as carnivals, winter strolls, cabarets, public toilets and funeral processions, all revealed people's corporeal connection to their environment, their ways of acquiring knowledge about it, the expectations they formulated, their ways, ultimately, of performing the physical and mental *soubresauts* required to thrive within it. The poetic language

frequently used to describe the modern city and to formulate this meaning further highlights the specificity of the way turn-of-the-century urban dwellers related to space.

As we have seen, the streets of these two cities were etched in conflict, shaped according to class, ethnic and gender distinctions. But they were also the one space that was shared, albeit unequally, by all residents of modern cities like Montreal and Brussels. Local particularities such as topography, historical development, or winter snowfalls in Montreal and summer fairs in Brussels framed the specific mood and atmosphere of each city, offered residents distinct points of reference from which to construct their spatial narratives. But this comparison has also shown that men and women's perceptions of themselves and of each other, their moral codes, their understandings of appropriate behaviour, of class and gender distinctions fundamentally materialized in urban streets and boulevards, irrespective of locality. Indeed, it was through an awareness of both their own bodies and of those with whom they shared these spaces that residents of these modern cities turned their streets, otherwise static and lifeless entities, into the lively public stage on which they revealed their interior joys and sorrows, their personal struggles and aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The body, and the sensorial experiences it procures, are fundamental to social relations. At the turn of the twentieth century, a charged and constantly expanding urban environment was also becoming fundamental to the daily life of ever-growing numbers of people, particularly in western industrialising societies. How did these two realities – one as old as time, the other contingent on precise historical developments – intersect in the urban culture forged during this period? This underlying question has been examined in the preceding chapters, with a focus on the particular cases of Brussels and Montreal between 1880 and 1914. Separated by an ocean, products of distinct cultural and political traditions, both cities were transformed by the growth of industry in these years, though each in its own way, and with relatively little direct interaction between them.

But this was an ocean a-whirl with the tempest of modernity, and the waves it generated cast their ripples in all directions. These two cities, similar in size, both sites of considerable regional influence, but nonetheless slightly removed from the core network of metropolitan centres, thus bore certain key social, economic and demographic similarities that initially inspired the collaborative pursuits of their respective historians. Beyond these points of similarity, however, Montreal and Brussels can usefully be juxtaposed as cases for studying the way global processes of modernity took root in distinct local settings. This thesis has sought to expand upon initial comparative explorations undertaken in recent years through a monographic narrative that draws on the experiences of each of these cities, in order to explore, more broadly, the theme of how urban dwellers constructed their relationship to an environment in seemingly perpetual transformation. Approaching this question through the lens of sensorial experiences and bodily practices has afforded the opportunity to examine this construction from the perspective of city dwellers' interior and subjective engagement with these processes, in addition to providing a theoretical framework that remains largely uncultivated in urban historical analyses of Brussels and Montreal.

Indeed, one of the initial tasks necessary for this undertaking was to delineate a conceptual apparatus through which to uncover the junction of body and city in the context of modernity. The very notion of modernity, the atmosphere of renewal and

contestation it generated, is a multifarious one, prone to contradictory interpretations. Rather than dwelling on the empirical nature of the societal changes wrought by industrialisation and urbanisation, I have followed proponents of a cultural understanding of modernity in concentrating on the discourses and representations through which individuals expressed their experiences of these developments. Colossal factories darkened the landscape and crowds of migrants swelled the ranks of central and peripheral neighbourhoods, but my focus has been less on the specific form of these evolutions than on the ways people thought about, discussed, celebrated or criticised them. This thesis has sought to build upon historical understandings of modernity by concentrating precisely on the ambiguities and contradictions that critics identify as the concept's shortcomings. I have brought out the tensions between rationalist worldviews and interior anxieties, as well as the nostalgia and antimodernism that underpinned this material and ideological movement of renewal. Following these apparent incongruities leads us to the subjective nature of these experiences, allows us to detect the human interiorities at the crest of this transnational wave of modernity.

A result of growing concentrations of capital and of people, modernity was a fundamentally urban phenomenon. In questioning the experience of modernity, this thesis has sought to portray its urban context not just as an incidental background to social or economic developments, but as a primary element of the story, implicated in the unfolding of people's daily lives, in the struggles that confronted them and in the successes to which they aspired. Drawing on a historiography that places the materiality of the city at the heart of residents' preoccupations, this thesis has taken up the suggestion that the significance and meaning of urban space depended at once on the physical evolution of the city and on the intangible place it occupied in social and cultural constructions of this environment.

The body constitutes an instructive vessel with which to navigate this shift from the material to the mental. Physical space was experienced through the body, and it was often in reference to their sensorial and corporeal encounters with the city that urban dwellers constructed their relationship to the environment. This was a period in which attitudes about the body were shifting as bacteriological discoveries raised new concerns about hygiene and public health, particularly in increasingly densely populated cities.

Thought of in corporeal terms, like a living organism dependent on nourishment and good circulation, the city itself was likened to the human body. The moral and physical health of one was understood to depend on the other, further accentuating in people's minds the link between their urban and corporeal existences. This thesis has demonstrated that urban modernisation and, in particular, the spread of industry, the proliferation of workers' homes and the construction of new thoroughfares, heightened urban dwellers' awareness of their bodies during this period of sustained transformation. The corporeal relationship to space was not new to this period, but the intensification of industrialisation and urbanisation at the turn of the twentieth century created sensorial experiences unlike what previous generations would have known. People's eyes, ears and noses, the sources show, were solicited in increasingly acute ways, and contributed to their judgment of the city and of those who lived within it. This consciousness of the body underlay evolving cultural standards and understandings of work, health and hygiene, rest, deportment, privacy and decency, and, as we have seen, brought the movement of the body to the heart of the relationship to the urban environment. Indeed, whereas it is customary for scholarly interpretations of the body to examine the socio-cultural context in which ideas about it were formed, this thesis has aimed to contribute to this historicising of the body by uncovering its spatial context as well. In this way, I have argued that ideas about the body, its representation as a metaphor for industry, as a beacon of societal advancement or degeneration, as a site of moral uplift or debasement, depended upon the spatial environment in which it resided: the smoky workshops and lively boulevards, the prestigious city centres contrasting with agitated and intoxicating industrial neighbourhoods.

The question of the how the body sensed, behaved and moved through urban space thus underlay my reading of a diversity of sources, some more conventional to urban history, such as municipal records, housing and factory inspections, or scientific treatises, others oriented more toward cultural analysis, such as novels, popular magazines and illustrations. Through this diversity of representations, I have been attentive to the ways in which individuals discussed the sights, smells and sounds of the industrial city and its modern boulevards, portrayed the physical nature of factory labour or expressed moral indignation at the cramped and humid conditions of working-class

homes. These corporeal experiences, I have argued, directly informed the spatial stories of the turn of the century, the narratives urban dwellers constructed as they sought to make sense of, and orient themselves within, the cities they inhabited.

How was the urban environment conceived? In this period of unprecedented expansion and of nascent planning theories, cities were increasingly thought of in their entirety, as wholes made up of constituent parts, distinct neighbourhoods upon whose efficient functioning urban society in general depended. Panoramic representations gave a distinct visual form to the ideals of order and progress through which urban elites sought to define the environment. Sweeping images of the city allowed viewers to gloss over the smokestacks and tenements that clashed with contemporary standards of urban aestheticism, offering pristine scenes of a harmoniously functioning whole, the feats of modern human ingenuity framed by a pleasing natural decor, distant sights and sounds of industrial activity reinforcing the image of prosperity without jarring the senses. In their capacity to place the observer in corporeal harmony with a seemingly orderly environment, panoramic tropes were frequent in the discourse of elites eager to celebrate the accomplishments of industrial society, while at the same time concealing the more unpleasant sources of this success.

Perspectives on the urban environment shifted when the vantage point changed, however. Condemnation of the perceived negative effects of industrialisation and urbanisation came from urban reformers or nostalgic authors who focussed precisely on some of the more problematic parts of the whole. As they descended into the industrial neighbourhoods located both within and on the outskirts of Brussels and Montreal, critics presented an entirely different sensorial portrait of these cities. The bodily relationship to space changed once the broad views symbolising order and authority were no longer visible, replaced in people's sensorial perceptions by the chaotic din of factories and machines, and the stench of accumulating trash and sewage. As the rational sense of sight was superseded by the more instinctual sense of smell, industrialisation and its spatial environment were presented not as the paragon of human achievement, but as the tentacles of a beast encroaching upon the countryside, physically oppressing its residents, and sapping the city of its creative forces.

Moving from the general landscape to the specific spaces marked by the rhythms of urban life, our explorations continued in the factories and workshops of the two cities, elements of the landscape at the very heart of the transformation of the urban environment during this period. In their very structure, in their sometimes massive proportions, particularly in Montreal, in the decorative ornamentation of their architecture, these buildings gave visual form to the ambitions and aspirations of the industrialists who built them. To neighbouring residents, however, the growing presence of these installations engendered a changing relationship to their immediate surroundings. We saw from the complaints addressed to local authorities that the smells, sounds, smoke and dust that heralded this ever-increasing industrial productivity intensified the bodily experiences through which urban dwellers, concerned for their health, property value and overall quality of life, defined an increasingly bitter rapport to industrialisation, especially in wealthier neighbourhoods, deemed incompatible with the trappings of industry.

The full corporeal implications of industrial spaces were especially evident inside these factories. Listening to workers comment on the smoke, temperature variations or lack of sanitary measures, as well as on the threats that machines and hazardous materials posed to their bodily safety, we saw that the physical atmosphere incarnated the climate of mistrust and hostility that reigned between labourers and industrialists. If this environment was described and defined in terms of its impact upon the body, this thesis has also shown that the body itself was invoked as a metaphor through which the very process of industrialisation was transforming society. Proponents of industrial growth conveyed images of powerful and brawny workers, whose bodies provided physical evidence of the progress and prosperity of industrial society. Scientists and hygienists observed the working body from a modern, empirical mindset, calculating the cost of maintaining these most intricate of machines at maximised rates of productivity. For their part, hygienists, labour leaders and sympathetic authors invoked poignant images of the bodies of sickly and crippled labourers to denounce these conditions. These representations were also traversed by gender considerations, as the bodies of female workers were invoked alternatively to decry the erosion of societal norms, or in pressing calls for a reformulation of the relationship between men and women. These

varying, often competing, perspectives demonstrate the extent to which perceptions and experiences of the individual body shaped the discourse through which vast societal forces like industrialisation were defined and understood.

From the factory, we followed these tired workers home, to the spaces intended for bodily rest and rejuvenation. Given the rapid rates of population increase in Montreal and Brussels during this period, workers' houses were a prominent feature of the urban landscape and a recurring topic of public debate. House and body were seen as extensions of one another during this period, and it was feared that the sickly state of many homes would threaten the physical health of their inhabitants. Reformers and hygienists placed a high degree of confidence in the redeeming qualities of modern sanitary principles, portraying the housing issue as one to be resolved through rational, technological means. But in a time when western culture increasingly delineated public space from private, relegating intimate bodily practices to the home, supposedly cut off from public view, we saw that the private dwellings of workers exercised considerable attraction upon the bourgeoisie. Under various inspective guises, hygienists and reformers in both cities made frequent trips to the blind alleys and narrow lanes that housed the poorest residents, repeatedly noting that the lack of air, ventilation, sunlight and adequate plumbing that characterised many homes made them sources of physical danger rather than of bodily restoration.

If the colourful and salacious language used to describe these abodes and their occupants were meant to spark public authorities into action, this thesis has also demonstrated that such representations were revealing of reformers' own interior preoccupations, moral standards, and understandings of class and gender roles. As we read of their sensorial experiences, and their observations of the intimate bodily practices of workers, we saw that these homes constituted a point of contact between bourgeois and worker, contacts through which were challenged dominant understandings of propriety and morality. Bourgeois sensibilities were shocked by the hygienic standards, the smells and humidity, and the promiscuity that reigned in the destitute neighbourhoods of Brussels and Montreal. During a period in which the health of body and soul were intimately connected in the mind of middle-class contemporaries, the material and structural shortcomings of the house, and by extension the threat to the

health of those inside, were seen as symptoms of deeper social ills, moral shortcomings that threatened the social order. The penetration of bourgeois reformers into the privacy of working-class families, I have argued, formed the spatial and corporeal contexts in which were defined interior values and concerns of turn-of-the-century urban dwellers.

From these private spaces, we returned to the public domain of the urban boulevard, the vast thoroughfares whose breadth offered the promise of speedy and efficient circulation of people and goods, key to the bolstering of the metropolitan status to which cities like Brussels and Montreal aspired. In this period of unprecedented urban expansion, these streets, newly planned and constructed to display modern standards of beauty and urban aestheticism, required new forms of mental and physical agility, and urban dwellers' relationship to the city was profoundly modified as they learned to navigate through the dense crowds and circulation. However, this thesis has argued, this was also a time in which new understandings of the street were being implemented. By no means did these developments take root overnight, and residents occasionally expressed their impatience at the slowness with which their municipal administrations transformed the ideas of modern planning into material reality. At stake were their corporeal experiences with the street, their impeded movement as detritus lay about or paving remained unfinished, symbolising the gap between ideas and expectations, and the actual development of the city.

Beyond the essential functionality of the street, however, this thesis has also shown that bodily practices were implicated in the many other uses urban dwellers made of these public spaces. Much of the attraction of modern cities lay in the sensorial delights they offered, in their boulevard culture of consumption and leisure. The street exalted the senses in the sights, sounds and smells of the crowds gathering in shops and pubs, enjoying winter snowfalls and summer amusement fairs. However, while the relationship to these spaces was often cast in terms of pleasure and exhilaration, bodily and moral dangers lurked in these streets as well, and the darkness of night was especially feared. Indeed, the moralists who framed urban sites of consumption as synonymous with societal perdition used bodily analogies of physical deterioration, alcoholism, violence and sexuality to emphasise their critique of the modern city. Moreover, if streets carried the potential of more efficient circulation, the growing

number of automobiles also forced urban dwellers to rethink the way they moved through these spaces, sharpening the delineation between street and sidewalk, recasting understandings of distance and speed. Finally, the push of urbanisation, this effort to shape the landscape according to cultural values, often conflicted with the reality that the body nonetheless remained an element of nature. Debates over public washrooms or the route of funeral processions, for instance, reminded city dwellers that the natural functions and cycles of their embodied existence did not always adhere to the calculated rationality of urban development, resulting at times in an uncomfortable disconnect between people's fundamental corporeal existence, and the sanitised ideal of a modern and efficient streetscape.

This thesis has thus examined Montreal and Brussels as sites upon which new ideas about urban space and the human body took root and interacted. To some extent, I have pursued one of the traditional objectives of comparative history, which is to seek out specificities of each case which remain invisible in a unitary observation. The developments of industrialisation and urbanisation in these cities are well known, but examining turn-of-the-century Montreal and Brussels in light of one another has opened some revealing perspectives. For instance, as a city with much deeper historical roots, Brussels clearly experienced the transformations of modernity much more as a rupture or a break with the past. Immediately visible in the qualitative sources on Montreal are the multitude of awe-inspiring panoramic representations that glorified the advent of modernity upon the landscape. Comparing this almost exuberant optimism to representations of Brussels reveals the extent to which the reactions to industrialisation and urbanisation in this older, more historically established city were typically couched in more nostalgic, often bitter sentiments. Contemplating portraits of Montreal, framed in open vistas stretching as far as the eye could see, heightens the impression of the city as a narrow labyrinth of tentacles that recurs in commentaries on Brussels.

Indeed, whereas Brussels expanded in a layering process, new strata of factories and homes built atop older strands of the urban fabric, Montreal's more expansive hinterland allowed for a vast outward expansion, and provided the space necessary for much larger, more imposing industrial installations. While Brussels was Belgium's most important industrial centre during this period, scholars have nonetheless pointed

out that this aspect of the city's development has long remained in the shadows of historiographical inquiry. On the surface, an analysis of the sensorial relationship to factories and workshops in Brussels may seem injudicious, given that from the seemingly subdued presence of industry in this city, we might expect that the sensorial impact was minimal. But being sensitive to the reactions expressed by urban dwellers of a more ostentatiously industrial city like Montreal inspires the researcher to pose similar questions in a less obvious setting.

Conversely, Brussels, a far more established literary centre than Montreal, was the subject of numerous poetic and lyrical representations that allow us to tap directly into subjective engagements with the environment. In Montreal, this type of discourse existed as well, but sometimes required some hunting in less obvious places, ephemerally published periodicals, or novels not ostensibly about the urban experience, for example. An awareness of the pervasiveness of literary contemplations of the urban environment in one setting motivated questions of how the subject was broached in the other, thus influencing the selection of sources, and making their reader better able to tease out nuances that may not have appeared relevant had the analytical framework been focussed on Montreal only.

But beyond these comparative illuminations of each city in reference to the other, it has been striking to note the extent to which the relationship to modern urban space was constructed on similar terms in Montreal and Brussels. We can note varying degrees of optimism or nostalgia, but the process of corporeal engagement with the changing environment, and the discourses that ensued from these contacts and practices, operated in analogous ways, and this despite the history and distance separating the two cities. Centring my observations on these discourses and representations has urged me away from a classical comparative approach geared to analysing and explaining the causality behind various similarities or difference, and has instead motivated a more cross-national perspective through which the notions of modernity, space and the body were followed through these two settings. The objective of this thesis has been less to explain the specific historical developments of Montreal and Brussels, than it has been to offer an understanding of how body and space came together in the experiences of urban dwellers confronted with profound transformations to their milieu.

While sensorial experiences and corporeal practices were the functions of the natural organism that is the human body, their broader significance lay in the social and cultural construction through which they participated in the moulding of personal, as well as collective gender and class-based identities. Though little connected Montreal and Brussels directly to one another, we have seen that, in both cities, the bodily relationship to the material environment crystallised in response to wider trends of urban and industrial expansion. The sources consulted in each city differed according to the specific priorities and customs of their authors, but we can nonetheless see in their analogous form and purpose that they were shaped by the global circulation of ideas about space and the body rooted in western intellectual and scientific traditions. As they entered the frenzied factories, negotiated the busy boulevards and retreated to humid homes, residents of these cities committed basic gestures of daily life. But these experiences were shared with others around the globe, and this thesis has framed Montreal and Brussels as local exemplars of global trends, showing that even in their immediate surroundings, residents of these cities were firmly situated within the cross-national nexus around which modern societies developed.

Industrialisation and urbanisation have typically been studied empirically, as structural elements of societal evolution. Emphasising their cultural dimension and aesthetic representations, however, this thesis seeks to enrich our understanding of these processes by demonstrating their role in shaping not just environments and economies, but human interiorities as well. Unpacking urban dwellers' subjective relationship with modern urban and industrial realities sheds light on their inner preoccupations, their moral judgements, their expectations of class and gender norms; in sum, on the construction of their sense of self. By exploring the streets as sites of tension between private bodily practices and standards of public deportment, by viewing the home as the terrain on which evolving understandings of health and hygiene fused with ideas about the human soul, by presenting factory as places where bodies were constructed as forceful agents of progress or the debilitated victims of unbridled expansion, I have placed these material processes in the realm of human subjectivity, and I have emphasised the many layers of meaning behind the movement of people's bodies through the spaces of the modern city.

These ambitions are lofty, and this enterprise is assuredly not without its shortcomings. Comparative analysis is often criticised for sacrificing depth of analysis in favour of a broader scope, and in situating the spatial stories of residents of Montreal and Brussels within global flows, this thesis has arguably overlooked certain aspects of each city. Focussing on the connections between body and space in a single setting would admittedly have afforded the possibility of examining a greater number of sources pertaining to it, and developing a more nuanced understanding of local specificities. But this greater depth would have been attained at the expense of accounting for the transnational currents so fundamental to the story. Another charge sometimes levelled at comparison is that, in seeking to understand two societies in terms of one another, practitioners fail to account for diachronic evolutions within each given society. Indeed, I have spent relatively little time discussing the changes and evolutions to the urban environment, or to ideas about space and the body between 1880 and 1914. Instead, I have approached these years broadly, as a more-or-less self-contained period, a prolonged moment in which experiences of the city and the body were intensifying with respect to earlier stages of urban and industrial development. If I have overlooked the nuances of certain evolutions, staying within the bounds of a relative short period has allowed me to concentrate on well established and firmly held ideas, as evidenced by the relative consistencies noted in the discourses drawn from each end of the period.

As I conclude this thesis, I am nonetheless aware that numerous avenues of people's relationship to the city remain to be explored. If this *Belle Époque* constituted a relatively distinctive moment in the history of cities, it would undoubtedly be edifying to engage in a temporal comparison that would reveal the uniqueness of these years against a time that preceded this intensification of urban life. Moreover, the globalising period I have covered ended with transnational exchanges going awry, and additional work could be undertaken to examine how the urban experience changed with war. Here a comparative perspective would allow us to distinguish between the experiences of city dwellers who endured military occupation and of those whose engagement with the conflict was more distant. How, it might also be asked, did these processes play out in other cities? Would my argument that corporeal experiences of urban space contributed to, and were shaped by, transnational processes stand the test of a wider

comparative analysis, bringing into the fold the experiences of cities that lacked the resemblances shared by Montreal and Brussels?

Finally, while this thesis has explored the body and senses as key to the shaping of social relationships and personal identities, human existence in society is also bound to individuals' emotional life. Like the body, the emotions are natural phenomena, but they are also learned, and their significance depends largely on cultural context and norms. While this thesis has frequently evoked the emotional responses elicited by corporeal experiences with the city, my focus on the body has not given me the scope to fully problematize the emotions themselves, the way they were experienced, constructed, even manipulated in the formulation of ideas about the city. A more thorough understanding of the way human interiority was shaped by the processes of urban modernity would undoubtedly require greater attention to this other, equally fundamental, side of human existence. Questions and ideas to ponder over a few more *pralines* or *microbrews*...

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 - o l'inspecteur de bâtiments
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McCord Museum of Canadian History

- C283 Fonds Collection de prospectus
- M966 Fonds Pen and Pencil Club

McGill University Archives

- MG 2079 Fonds Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association

b) *Archival records consulted in Brussels*

Archives communales de Molenbeek

- Fonds bâtisses

Archives de l'état à Bruxelles (Anderlecht)

- Établissements dangereux, insalubres ou incommodes

Archives de la Ville de Bruxelles

- Fonds Buls
- Fonds Hygiène
- Fonds Iconographique
- Fonds Maisons ouvrières
- Fonds Police
- Fonds Travaux publics

Centre public d'aide sociale
- Fonds Affaires générales

c) *Periodicals, annual reports and newspapers published in Montreal*

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L'almanach de Montréal, 1894-1899
L'Avant-Garde, selections
Le foyer, bulletin mensuel des intérêts féminins, 1911-1914
L'illustration industrielle, 1880
Journal d'hygiène populaire (Société d'hygiène de la Province de Québec), 1884-1891
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d) *Periodicals, annual reports and newspapers published in Brussels*

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L'hygiéniste. (Bruxelles : Association internationale pour le progrès de l'hygiène), 1894
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Tekhné. Revue belge de l'architecture et des arts qui s'y rapprochent, 1911-1914

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