N A D I N E   K L O P F E R

Upon the Hill: Negotiating Public Space in Early 20th Century Montreal[1]

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Zusammenfassung

Die Konkurrenz zwischen etablierten anglo-protestantischen und aufsteigenden fran-kophonen, katholischen Eliten im Montreal des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts ist in der For-schung häufig hervorgehoben worden. Dieser Artikel argumentiert, dass gerade der städtische Raum bei der Aushandlung innerstädtischer Macht eine zentrale Rolle spielte. Vor allem symbolträchtige Wahrzeichen Montreals wie der Mont Royal stellten das Terrain dar, auf dem sich die verschiedensten Gruppierungen zu etablieren und ihre Macht zu dokumentieren suchten. Am Beispiel des Baus eines monumentalen Kreuzes auf dem Gipfel des Berges im Jahr 1924 wird herausgearbeitet, welche Bedeutungen dem Mont Royal zugesprochen wurden, welch unterschiedlicher Raumdeutungen sich die miteinander konkurrierenden Montrealer Eliten in den Debatten um das Kreuz be-dienten und welche Visionen gesellschaftlicher Ordnung sich darin ausdrückten. Nicht nur zeigt sich dabei, wie wandelbar die Koalitionen der Akteure waren, sondern auch, wie bemüht die sprichwörtlichen "two solitudes" *waren, mit Hilfe des Raums der Stadt einen friedlichen Konsens zwischen den* communities *auszuhandeln.*

Résumé

La concurrence entre anciennes élites anglo-protestantes et nouvelles élites franco-phones et catholiques à Montréal a souvent été mise en évidence. Cet article se concen-tre sur le rôle de l'espace urbain dans les négociations de pouvoir entre les élites de la ville de Montréal au début du 20è siècle. Surtout les espaces chargés de valeur symboli-que tels que le Mont Royal représentaient le terrain sur lequel les différents groupes cherchaient à s'établir et à documenter leur pouvoir respectif. En s'appuyant sur l'exemple de la croix du Mont Royal, monument qui fut construit sur le sommet de la montagne en 1924, il s'agit ici de tracer les significations qui furent attribuées au Mont Royal, les interprétations concurrentes de l'espace urbain qui se manifestaient dans les débats autour de l'érection de la croix, et les visions divergentes de l'ordre social dont ces

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débats témoignent. En effet, non seulement les coalitions des acteurs urbains s'avèrent-elles plus fluides que le suggère l'éternel mythe des 'deux solitudes', mais aussi ces élites s'efforçaient-elles véritablement de négocier une coexistence paisible entre les communautés montréalaises au travers de l'espace urbain.

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Eiffel Tower of Montreal: Introduction

Under the headline "Discover the city's large parks", the official website of the City of Montreal invites visitors to explore the city's "network of large parks" that structures its landscape. By clicking on the spots that mark the 15 large parks on Montreal's map, the visitor can gain more detailed information about each of them. Number 1 in this network is not the largest park, but obviously the one considered to be the most appealing to visitors and the most precious to Montrealers: Mount Royal Park. An article entitled "The green gem" introduces readers to the meaning of this very specific spot:

> Like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, it is practically impossible to visit Montréal without seeing Mount Royal and enjoying the view from its summit. To Montrealers, Mount Royal is much more than a mountain. It's a testimony to their city's evolution, a precious gem that they were able to preserve from urban development. They are proud of it, and rightly so.[2]

Of course the emotional rhetoric of a publicity campaign speaks through this short text on Montreal's homepage. Nevertheless, it also hints at a few underlying assumptions that are worth a closer look. Mount Royal – a hill, 230 meters high, that is nowadays located in the midst of the city – is pictured as an object of constant pride to Montrealers. The perception of the mountain as special and precious is obviously grounded in the mountain's imagined preservation from urbanity. Seemingly untouched by urban development, Mount Royal is conceived of as a natural phenomenon that represents an unchangeable factor in Montreal's landscape. In this narrative, industrial modernity and urbanization processes have moved on around the mountain, leaving no imprint on its green beauty. Today the mountain, so it seems, is the ultimate 'other' for the metropolis on the St. Lawrence: taken out of time – suggesting rapid change – and out of (urban) space. This meaning though is only understandable from the very context of the city and thus hints at a dialectical relationship between Mount Royal and Montreal, at the impossibility of thinking city and mountain separately. Accordingly, the homepage claims that no visitor can avoid seeing Mount Royal, or, the other way round,

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2   http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=175,4878067&_dad=portal&_schema=
PORTAL&nomPage=bt_parc_01, accessed June 23, 2008.

looking at the city from its summit. The gaze in both directions closely knits mountain and city together, thus contributing to the impression of an inextricable link between the two of them. Mount Royal's very difference from the city together with its very presence within the city's boundaries apparently make the mountain an iconic space for Montreal, a landmark, comparable to the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It confers a special identity to the city, occupying not only a prominent spot in its heart, but also in the heart of Montrealers. Moreover, this suggests a certain unity among the city's residents: 'Montrealers' – whosoever they may be – seem united in their appreciation of Mount Royal. If Montrealers create a link between their city and the mountain, then in turn, the mountain as an iconic space apparently forges a link between the city's residents, contributing to an urban, specifically Montreal identity – at least, according to the authors of this website. The short statement on a city's homepage thus raises questions about the relationship between urban spaces, their physical form, their perceptions, collective identities and inner urban power relations.

However, the perception of Mount Royal as an iconic space of Montreal is not a product of the 21st century or of the internet age. As early as 1853 the Englishman William Chambers reported about his visit to the Canadian metropolis: "[…] I had next a pleasant drive out of town towards the Mountain. […] As every stranger in London goes to see St Paul's, so all who visit Montreal require to see the Mountain. Of this mountain, the inhabitants are not a little proud; and they have some reason for being so."[3] Actually, since the 1840s, settlement had started spreading out towards Mount Royal with wealthy merchants like the sugar baron John Redpath erecting suburban villas on its southern slope.[4] Although a trip to the mountain was still perceived as a trip 'out of town' in the 1850s, this was to change rapidly in the following decades. The transformation of large parts of the mountain into a public park contributed to the imagined entrance of the mountain into the city. In the 1870s, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted was commissioned to design a park for the mountain's summit, which was ceremoniously opened in 1876.[5] With its conversion into a public space, Mount Royal moved into the centre of Montrealers' mental map and became widely perceived as located right in the heart of the city[6], even though urban settlement fully enclosed the mountain only as late as the 1930s.[7] It is in this period between the 1870s and the 1930s that a narrative of Mount Royal as Montreal's iconic space was firmly established. In a way, this time

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3   Chambers 1854, 67-68.
4   For the early settlement of the mountain's slopes see Hanna 1980, 38-64, here: 41; MacLeod 1998, 41-42; visual representation of the urbanization process in Robert 1994.
5   For the park's design see Seline 1983; Bellman 1977, 31-43.
6   See "Again Deferred", in: *Montreal Herald*, Oct. 9, 1905.
7   For a detailed analysis of the imagined 'entry' of the mountain into the city see Klopfer 2009 (forthcoming).

span can thus be conceived of as the formative years of the mountain's relationship to Montreal as it persists until today.

This paper focuses on these decades between the 1870s and 1930s, a crucial age in Montreal's history, arguing that in the context of rapid urban growth, increasing cultural diversity and social complexity, the iconic space of Mount Royal took shape as an integrative force. Perceived as essential to the uniqueness of the city, Mount Royal contributed to the construction of a collective Montreal identity, to what has later been termed the *montréalité de Montréal*.[8] While the Mount Royal narrative was thus also a way of positioning Montreal in competition to other cities in an age of urban boosterism and emerging tourism[9], this paper focuses on the story of a cross erected on top of Mount Royal in 1924 to trace the meanings the mountain had for Montreal citizens themselves (*fig. 1*). In fact, competing groups tried to appropriate Mount Royal, thereby filling the *montréalité* with more precise meaning according to their own vision of the city and its society. Defining the iconic space that made Montreal unique conferred symbolic power over the city and expressed the actual power to determine what the city's identity was to be.[10] In this process, Montreal's past and its urban space became closely intertwined: groups of people aimed at making certain local histories visible on Mount Royal. While visually affirming their identity through the choice of a past that was to be remembered in public, this was also one way of claiming that very space and its symbolic power over the city, legitimized through a historical reference.[11] Competing visions of Mount Royal therefore offer us insight into the complex processes of power negotiation in public space. Conceptualizing the mountain as a highly symbolic place, the paper argues though that while Mount Royal was indeed an object of struggles for power that revealed diverging concepts of Montreal's social order and shifting power relations, at the same time it provided the grounds on which symbolic power could be

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8   Originally the concept of "montrealness" or "montréalité" was used by the architect Melvin Charney in 1980, describing what in his eyes made up the essence of Montreal in the realm of architecture and urbanism. See Morisset/Noppen 2003a, 157, 172. According to Morisset/Noppen, Charney is to be situated as part of a tendency since the late 1960s to search for a specific Montreal identity in the face of an international style modernity, but also in view of competing identities such as Québécois, Canadian or North American identities. In the following, the Montreal landscape was reinvented as being typically Montreal – even though the forms of the built environment that were ascribed with this meaning were quite common, such as the grid (172). Morisset/Noppen, 177, therefore conclude that the concept of *montrealness* is thus more an idea about identity than a truly specific form that could be observed in the cityscape. In my opinion though it makes sense to use the notion of *montrealness/montréalité* not as normative concept tied to a certain physical appearance of the city, but as a code for – historically changing – ideas about Montreal's specificity, expressed by contemporaries around 1900 as "essence".

9   Gordon 2001, 12-13; see also Urry 1990.

10 For the concept of urban identity see Morisset/Noppen 2003b, 5-18.

11 For a concise summary of current theories about public memory and their usefulness for Montreal history see Gordon 2001, 3-17.

negotiated, alliances and coalitions between groups of citizens formed and the coexistence of the communities assured – indeed a "space of reconciliation."[12]

Fig. 1: Cross on Mount Royal, Photograph, Nadine Klopfer, 2007

Mount Royal: Iconic space in a fragmented city

What then were the meanings that were assigned to Mount Royal in the narrative as it emerged in the late 19th century, transforming this topographical phenomenon into a highly symbolic place? At the core of the narrative lies the assumption that Mount Royal defined the city in two ways: spatially and historically. Guidebooks,

12   Simon 2006, 16.

travel accounts and Montreal pamphlets of all sorts depicted the mountain, although not much more than a hill, as the feature that gave Montreal its visual distinctiveness.[13] Even though the image of the city itself changed with time from the mid-19th century commercial metropolis to an industrial centre, Mount Royal itself continuously loomed above the city, marking it out in space. Paintings, photographs as well as texts seemed to be unable to represent Montreal without assigning the mountain a prominent position, stressing its dominance in the background or its function as a "crown"[14] to the city. Mount Royal was thus conceived of as giving the city a stable spatial identity and conferring visual continuity to its image. Additionally, it was ascribed with protective power over Montreal and frequently compared to a "[…] venerable sentinel brooding in silent and protecting watchfulness over the city, which lies between its southern base and the majestic sweep of the St. Lawrence."[15] General discourses about mountains as awe-inspiring and dominant natural features influenced this perception along with the close association of mountains with power.[16] Mount Royal, so it seems, crowned Montreal and protected the city, thereby fulfilling the destiny its "royal" name implied.[17]

   The name of the mountain though hints at the second way in which Mount Royal was seen as defining the city: historically. According to Montreal's founding myth, the city on the St. Lawrence would never have come into existence without the mountain. In popular narratives about Montreal's early history as a French colonial settlement, Mount Royal assumed a leading role. It is striking that early encounters of French explorers with what later became the Ile de Montréal obviously could not be described without reference to the hill. In view of the strategic importance of mountains in colonial times this seems hardly surprising. What is noteworthy though is the comparatively extensive space that popular narratives such as tourist guidebooks or convention pamphlets assign to the mountain in very short sketches of the city's origins as well as the repetitiveness of that account. The mountain's meaning is thereby detached from its original meaning as a strategic spot for colonial explorers in an unknown territory and transferred to the context of the city's founding narrative. Thus, Mount Royal gains a new meaning, as crucial factor in Montreal's existence. In this process, it is ascribed with a mythical quality,[18] occupying a precise role in the city's foundation myth: the ever recurring theme in the popular narratives is that of the explorers climbing up Mount Royal. Taking in the breathtaking view from its summit in 1535, Jacques Cartier, the first French to set his feet on the Ile de Montréal, had spontaneously christened the mountain

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13 *Souvenir of Montreal '93*, 1893, 11; Wolff/Erpicum (eds.) 1909, 3; American Association for the Advancement of Science (ed.), 1882, 46-47; see also Schmidt 1996, 14-15.

14 Wolff/Erpicum (eds.) 1909, 3.

15 Langelier, ca. 1920s, no page numbers.

16 MacLeod 1998, 30-32; Cohn 1981, 26-41.

17 *Montreal 1907*, 1907, 21.

18 For a distinction of history, myth and memory see Gordon 2001, 9 with further literature.

Mount Royal in honor of the King of France.[19] Not much is said in these accounts about Samuel de Champlain's visit to the Island of Montreal in 1611 apart from his ascent of Mount Royal.[20] The popular narratives of the actual founding of the city – named Ville-Marie – in 1642 by Paul de Chomedey, Sieur de Maisonneuve, point out that it was founded at the mountain's base. Last but not least, Maisonneuve is also depicted as climbing up the mountain. This time, Mount Royal's role is represented through the lens of religious symbolism, as a chosen place close to God: with a wooden cross on his shoulders Maisonneuve ascended Mount Royal's summit to thank the Lord for preserving the tiny colony from flooding in its first year and erected the cross as a testimony to the colony's deep faith. This story was to become the heart of Montreal's founding myth.[21] In the course of the 18th century then, and with a shift from the early religious intentions of the founding to a more worldly interest in fur-trade and commercial activities, the settlement's original name of Ville-Marie was replaced by "Montreal", a designation derived from the mountain's appellation.[22] Tourist guidebooks frequently neglected to point out the gradual process of this shift by ascribing the mountain with an almost otherworldly name-giving power.[23]

Consequently, by projecting Mount Royal's visual and spatial presence back in time into the city's historical origin, the mountain was also inscribed into broader discourses of discovery and conquest, of climbing up mountains and taking in the seemingly empty land in a possessive gesture, in short: into discourses of power. Not only was the mountain visible, but it also offered the opportunity to look down. For Montrealers in the early 20th century, it thus served as a permanent spatial reminder and visual focus of Montreal's founding myth, a myth that transported assumptions about power relationships and colonization in North America. More specifically, it allowed to reproduce in the present the gesture of taking in the city at the mountain's feet. Visualizing a founding myth frozen in time, Mount Royal was thus associated with power on multiple levels, offering the opportunity to dominate the city visually as well as through claims to its historic origins. In this urban narrative, history and space are as closely linked as Mount Royal and Montreal in the reciprocity of gazes.

The very same decades in which this narrative of Mount Royal emerged have frequently been labelled as Montreal's Golden Age. The city experienced an

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19 Phelps 1904; *Murray's Illustrated Guide to Montreal and Vicinity*, 1893, 25; see Grenier/Bumbaru 1985, 2; Poirier 1992, 43.

20 For example American Association for the Advancement of Science (ed.), 1882, 20.

21 *St. Lawrence Hall Montreal: Tourists Guide 1911*, 1911, 23; Lighthall, 1892, 48. For the importance of the mountain in Montreal's public memories see Gordon 2001, 97-101.

22 *Noms et lieux de Québec:* Dictionnaire illustré (1996), s.v. "Montréal, ville".

23 For example: Canadian Pacific Railway Company (ed.) 1904, 6-7; Hinshelwood 1903, 38; American Association for the Advancement of Science (ed.), 1882, 19; Douzième Congrès International de Géologie, 1913, 4; The Ritz-Carlton Hotel, 1913, 3; *Suburban Montreal as seen from the Routes of The Park and Island Railway,* ca. 1920, 8.

unprecedented economic growth, establishing itself as Canada's dominant commercial and industrial metropolis and undergoing dramatic changes.[24] Between 1871 and 1891, its population roughly doubled from 107 225 to 216 650 residents, and then almost tripled to 618 506 inhabitants in 1921.[25] A wave of immigrants contributed to the city's increase in population, and so did the steady movement of French-Canadians leaving the countryside to seek their fortune in the big city.[26] At the same time, Montreal expanded its territory: In these decades, the city annected no less than 24 surrounding villages.[27] While in 1900 around 70% of Canada's wealth was concentrated in one Montreal neighborhood, the so-called Golden Square Mile[28], the city was also home to thousands of workers earning their living in its booming port, its railroad enterprises and industries. The early 20th century therefore saw a metropolis whose society was characterized by a great diversity and crisscrossed by multiple fault lines especially along class, ethnicity and denomination. In addition to these developments that might be seen as common to the North American industrial city in the late 19th and early 20th century, the fragmentation of Montreal took on a specific twist due to the long and often difficult history of Anglo-Protestant and French Catholic coexistence, those two cultures that both perceived themselves as "'deux nations' maîtresses du terrain à l'origine."[29] That the line between these two cultures was the one perceived as the fault line that ran most deeply is reflected in contemporaries' imaginations of the city's geography.[30] While recent analyses of Montreal's residential geography in the 19th and early 20th century have shown that there actually was not such a strict separation between anglophones and francophones and that the inner diversities of these only seemingly homogenous groups have to be taken into account[31], the persistent image of the city's space until the mid-20th century pictured Montreal's East as French, the as English, with Boulevard St-Laurent acting as border, thus outlining a binary conception of the city's fragmented social structure and space.[32] Whereas this mental separation was doubled by the institutional, official separation that mostly

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24 The economic crisis of 1893 did not hit the city as hard as the crises of 1873 and 1929, Linteau 1992, 16. For the different facets of Montreal's Golden Age see Gournay/Vanlaethem (eds.) 1998.

25 Linteau 1992, 40; 160: Figures from Statistics Canada for the official territory of the City of Montreal at the time of the census. Since 1891, the territory changed; thus population growth can in part be attributed to annexations.

26 Linteau 1992, 159-63.

27 Ibid., 207.

28 Hanna 1980, 51-52; Westley 1990, 25; MacLeod 1998, 1; Jacobs 1988, 46. For a visual impression see MacKay 1987.

29 McNicoll 1986, 263.

30 See also Germain/Rose 2000, 213-14.

31 Linteau/Robert 1985, 216; Germain/Rose 2000, 214-15.

32 In popular Montreal usage, "east" and "west" do not exactly correspond to the geographical reality. What is called east is in fact north-east, and south is south-west. Linteau/Robert 1973, 5.

worked out fine and kept things peaceful[33], events such as the 1885 Montreal smallpox epidemic, the Louis Riel crisis of the same year or the World War I Conscription Crisis demonstrated that tensions could violently break to the surface at any time, often recasting class conflicts in terms of ethnic struggles.[34] Throughout Montreal's history, the struggle for hegemony between those "two solitudes" has been viewed as a major feature in the development of the city, also becoming part of a dominant narrative about Montreal's particularity that has only recently been challenged by new visions of a multicultural urban identity.[35] For contemporaries, C. H. Farnham thus stated a commonplace in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* when he wrote in 1889: "Montreal is a striking exception to the text that a house divided against itself cannot stand. […] The two irreconcilable elements are Romanism and Protestantism: the armies are of French and English blood. […]"[36] In this context, the myth of Mount Royal suggested a unified urban identity in an all too fragmented metropolis.

Looking down

Unlike the first explorers who were taking in the view of surrounding countryside, 19th and 20th century visitors to the mountain's summit were looking down at a bustling and complex modern metropolis. Actually, in the early 20th century, commentators seemed truly obsessed with the panorama that stretched out to their feet had they climbed up Mount Royal. Describing a true feast for the eye, tourist guides and travel accounts revelled in the breathtaking views: "One took in at a glance the great commercial activity of this city, which […] is really the great Canadian seaport […]. A more imposing view it would be hard to find […]."[37] Lifted out of the hustle and bustle of urban life, the modern explorer was able to see Montreal and its surrounding countryside, thereby grasping the broader meaning of this city within a larger Canadian framework and thus assigning it a prominent place within the nation. The complexity and chaos of the city dissolved by taking a step back. The appeal of this ordering, possessive view is also reflected in contemporaries' fascination with panorama photography[38] – photos that suggest an urban unity which in fact the city did not have.[39] Thus, looking down from the

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33 Linteau 1992, 48-49; Linteau/Robert 1985, 217.

34 For the smallpox crisis, less well-known than the other two, see Farley/Keating/Keel 1987, 87-127.

35 Especially after the defeat of the 1995 referendum on Quebec political sovereignty, see Simon 2006, 10; also Germain/Rose 2000, 212-53.

36 Farnham 1889, 83.

37 Robbins 1893, 523.

38 For the ordering, possessive appeal of the distanced view from above in urban panorama photography see Hales 2005, 133-78.

39 Caron 2003, 285-99, notes that panoramic views of Montreal with the mountain in the background evolved in the course of the 19th century, replacing older, fragmented views of the city. Caron traces a parallel development in textual representations of Montreal. She situates this

mountain, one could reproduce the gesture of the first explorers in an industrial age, possessing and ordering this modern city, this metropolis of Canada, even if only symbolically and for a fleeting moment.

Interestingly, there is one tradition of Mount Royal panorama photographs where the panorama is banned to the edge of the picture (*fig. 2*). Here, the photographer's eye captures the act of looking down rather than the view itself, thereby stressing the importance of being up there and of seeing. Moreover, the people themselves do not so much occupy the centre of the stage as the concrete platform. The photos thus focus on the orderly, tidy, man-made structure that shaped the mountain's summit. Hence, for contemporaries, leaving a visible imprint on Mount Royal's peak, mastering its nature, was at least as important as looking down from it.

Fig. 2: The Lookout, Mount Royal Park, Montreal, QC, 1916. William Notman & Son.
Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal, VIEW-16204.

development in the context of a change of paradigm from the romantic landscape representation to a depiction of the city as place of progress in the age of industry. It remains unclear, however, in what way these new panoramic representations of the urban space are related to the industrialization processes, since there also exist earlier panorama views of the city that are clearly romantic in outlook, without showing any icons of modernity's progress.

Looking up

Consequently, access and design of its summit were permanently contested. Who would be allowed to occupy the mountain's top? And: What monument would decorate its peak, thus being visible from everywhere in the city? – these were questions hotly debated throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries.[40]

On Christmas Eve of 1924, Montrealers were presented with an unusal sight that fundamentally altered the city's nightly skyline: For the first time, and thanks to 240 light bulbs, the newly erected cross on Mount Royal was illuminated. Commentators were enthusiastic about this event. "All eyes in Montreal turned towards Mount Royal on Christmas Eve when towards evening the cross at the top of the mountain burst into light. Visible for miles down the St. Lawrence and far on to the South Shore, it shone like a new constellation against the sky […]."[41] Its visibility was a recurring motif in comments on the new monument, and so was its historic and symbolic character. The daily newspaper *La Presse* informed its readers: "La Croix du Mont-Royal est à la fois un monument hystorique [sic] et un symbole religieux. Le touriste qui du fleuve Saint-Laurent la verra briller le soir, trouvera dans ce symbole la source des origines de ce pays."[42] As a monument on Mount Royal's summit, the cross had obviously taken over the mountain's meaning dominating the skyline visually and thereby reminding every one at all times of the city's and even more so, of the country's origins. Unlike earlier proposals like the 1880s plan to mark the top of the mountain with a statue of the Virgin Mary,[43] the cross was widely accepted as an adequate symbol for Montreal. The *Montreal Standard* observed in 1938: "It is the first sight of Montreal which visitors approaching from any direction see. It is also their last impression on leaving. It is thus the very essence of Montreal."[44] This essence was filled with a specific religious meaning and the cross was hailed as

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40 For a short overview of the 19th and 20th century proposals for the mountain's peak see Marsan 1990, 112-15; for a summary of the debates concerning access to Mount Royal's summit see Dagenais 2001, 308-30.

41 "Cross on Mountain", in: *Gazette* Dec. 1924, McGill University Archives (MUA), Montreal Parks and Playgrounds Association (MPPA), MG2079, 2147D, 7-257 "Scrapbook, 1900-1926". See also MacLennan 1952, 71; Rumilly 1975, 317-18.

42 "Causerie sur la croix du Mont-Royal", in: *La Presse,* April 11, 1925.

43 Suggested by the Catholic Archbishop of Montreal, the project arose vehement protests by the city's Protestant – anglophone as well as francophone – congregations. See Procès-verbal du Conseil, lundi 9 avril 1888, Archives de la Ville de Montréal (AVM), Procès-verbaux du Conseil (PVC), bobine 15; Procès-verbal du Conseil, lundi 16 avril 1988, AVM, PVC, bobine 15; Petitions to the Mayor and Municipal Council of the City of Montreal, 16.4.1888, AVM, Fonds de la Commission des parcs et traverses VM44, S4, SS2, SSS10, D2, Box 121-03-08-02. Roy 1988, 262 points out that even the francophone business community had denounced the project.

44 "Cross on Mount Royal first Lighted After St. Jean Baptiste Parade, 1924: Significance Retold"; in: *Montreal Standard*, June 8, 1938.

"memorial to the survival of the Canadian people and the growth of Christianity."[45] As a symbol of Christianity, it drew the support of both Protestant and Catholic communities.

For contemporaries though, this religious meaning was closely connected with a specific historic meaning. The cross was a direct reference to Maisonneuve's cross that he had carried up the mountain in 1643 and therefore to the very beginning of Montreal, to the survival of a tiny colony on a new continent. As the anglophone *Gazette* pointed out the cross was a powerful reminder of the "first coming of the white man to the site of the future metropolis."[46] Furthermore, the newspaper predicted: "[The cross] will have the further and larger effect of proclaiming to all strangers within our gates the fact that this is the chief city of a province and a Dominion firmly founded upon that sublime conception of man's duty to his Creator and his fellows which has been the principal factor in the spread of civilization."[47] In this perspective, the new monument was interpreted as a symbol for the civilizing conquest of a new land and the ensuing progress of the urban age in the context of the British Empire. Montreal's foundation myth, for which Mount Royal stood as a visible sign, was thus articulated more precisely as a narrative of white, Christian superiority, thereby blending religious and racial discourses into a specific interpretation of Montreal's past. In a way, this interpretation allowed to transcend ethno-cultural fragmentations among Montreal's citizens. Reading the cross as a symbol of 'civilization' made up of the components of 'Christianity' and 'whiteness' represented a common basis, the somewhat safe identitary common grounds.

Nevertheless, the anglophone commentators left no doubt about what kind of institutional framework would guarantee this civilizing impetus. The idea symbolized by the cross, the blossoming of white Christian civilization on the North American continent, was clearly set within the institutional boundaries of the British Empire. Montreal's greatness was the greatness of a British Dominion. Thus, the unifying narrative reveals itself as embedded in a narrative of British superiority; the very foundation of that superiority being the ability to include. Due to this inclusiveness, it was easy for the francophone press to agree with its anglophone counterpart. The daily *La Presse* pointed out that the cross was a testimony to the astonishing survival of the Canadian people, thus echoing the *Gazette's* inclusive interpretation: "[La croix] est surtout un emblème, car elle atteste la survivance étonnante du peuple canadien, né sous l'égide de la croix, protégé, développé par

45 "Cross on Mountain", in: *Gazette* Dec. 1924, MUA, MPPA, MG2079, 2147D, 7-257 "Scrapbook, 1900-1926"; see also "Cross on Mount Royal first Lighted After St. Jean Baptiste Parade, 1924: Significance Retold", in: *Montreal Standard*, June 8, 1938.

46 "The Cross on Mount Royal", in: *Gazette,* March 25, 1924.

47 Ibid.

elle […]"[48] which reads almost identical to the *Gazette*'s commentary as quoted above.

However, a closer look at the context of the cross's erection in 1924 reveals an alternative narrative in which the monument was inserted. Ultimately, this narrative suggests a fundamentally different reading of the cross and thus a different vision of Montreal's 'essence'. The proposal to erect a cross on Mount Royal had been the idea of a French-Canadian association, the *Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste* (SSJB).[49] While the *Société* was one of the less radical francophone Catholic associations in the 1920s, it nevertheless defined itself as the French-Canadian national society. Since the mid-19th century, it propagated a moderate form of French-Canadian nationalism that was both rooted in Catholicism and in the French language. Montreal's French speaking, mainly liberal middle and upper classes were its leaders while a broad basis in the working class districts prevented it from becoming an association confined to the elite bourgeois circles.[50] At least for several of its most prominent leaders, French-Canadian nationalism meant aiming at an equal partnership of anglophones and francophones within the unifying context of a bilingual Canadian nation.[51] In a way, the SSJB also acted as link between two competing francophone elite groups, since it cultivated its connections to the city's Catholic clergy.[52] While on the one hand the SSJB's leaders indulged in the rhetoric of the cross as testimony to Montreal's heroic origins, they nevertheless did not neglect to specify what kind of history this was: a French and Catholic history.[53] After all, devout Catholics had founded the city, French Catholics. Maisonneuve's aim had not been to create the commercial metropolis of a new continent within the British Empire, but a Catholic outpost in New France. And so we are left to wonder if the "peuple canadien" mentioned by *La Presse* indeed referred to Canadians, or rather to French-Canadians following the old pre-1840s use of the term "canadien". In fact, the focus on the "survivance" of the Canadian people was in these years, the 1920s, developing as a major French-Canadian identity narrative, as propagated primarily by Lionel Groulx.[54] It is all the more interesting that the anglophone *Gazette* apparently also drew on the myth of "survival", obviously reinterpreting it in terms of white,

48 Article by Victor Morin in *La Presse*, Dec. 24, 1924, AVM, Dossiers de Presse, bobine 259-26.13.
49 For a history of the SSJB see Rumilly 1975, still the most comprehensive account of the society's history with a wealth of information about its protagonists, although written in a spirit of French-Canadian patriotic enthusiasm.
50 Gordon 2001, 101.
51 See "La St-Jean-Baptiste", in: *La Patrie*, June 21, 1924. For the liberalism of the SSJB's bourgeois leaders such as Frédéric-Liguori Béique and their special brand of nationalism see Roy 1988, esp. 89-90, 243-48, 277.
52 Rumilly 1975, 294. For the compatibility of Catholicism and Liberalism in late 19th and early 20th century Québec see Roy 1988, 57-63.
53 Article by Victor Morin in *La Presse*, Dec. 24, 1924, AVM, Dossiers de Presse, bobine 259-26.13.
54 Bélanger 2002, 91-105. See also Bélanger 2003, 373-389. For a more general overview Mann 2005.

Christian survival on a new continent. As Margaret Atwood has suggested, this narrative has also become entrenched in narratives of Canadian identity in the sense of an anxiety to survive in such a vast territory.[55] The myth of survival is thus strongly linked to a colonization discourse about an 'empty' land that had to be occupied.[56] It seems as if the cross on Mount Royal materialized both versions of a founding myth, each implying other notions of community identity.

The reading of Montreal's early history and of the cross as French and Catholic was visualized in the inauguration ceremonies that took place on June 24, 1924. In these ceremonies, the cross was embedded in a narrative of French-Canadian greatness, a narrative that was also spatially inscribed into Montreal's landscape through diverse rituals and underscored by the symbolism of the chosen date. June 24 is 'la Saint-Jean-Baptiste', St John the Baptist's day, the French-Canadians' patron saint. The highlight of the festivities in 1924 was the official blessing of the cross on the mountain. This act, performed by Mgr Deschamps, a Catholic bishop, was inserted into a full program of Catholic ceremonies and events commemorating Montreal's glorious history. After the city's archbishop had read mass in the Church of Notre-Dame, a parade of 24 floats depicting historic scenes wound its way through the city to Mount Royal's eastern slope. The overarching theme of the parade was programmatic: "Ce que l'Amérique doit à la race française."[57] Local heroes like Cartier or Dollard des Ormeaux were represented and so were the explorers Iberville and Bienville or the Jesuits' arrival in New France in 1625.[58] By staging scenes from North America's French and Catholic past, common discourses that implied power such as discovery, exploration, Christianization, civilization and colonization were reinterpreted as specific French and Catholic. A few days before the ceremonies, the daily newspaper La Patrie had predicted:

> [La parade] racontera l'odyssée merveilleuse de notre peuple; elle racontera que le continent américain nord fut découvert, exploré, évangélisé et colonisé par des Français, que toutes les grandes villes sont obligées de saluer comme fondateurs des fils de Français.[59]

In the light of these rituals and their focus on a specific French and Catholic history, it seems more difficult to represent the cross as an inclusive marker of a white and Christian supremacy. In fact, the cross was readable as "une idée toute

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55 Atwood 1972, 33.
56 Beneventi 2005, 106-07.
57 "Ce que l'Amérique doit à la race française, telle sera la devise du 24 juin", in: La Patrie, June 21, 1924; Rumilly 1975, 312.
58 For the veneration of Dollard des Ormeaux as French-Canadian hero since the 1910s in the context of a renewed nationalism see Roy 1992, 22-30.
59 "Les quatre-vingt-dix ans de la Société S.-Jean-Baptiste", in: La Patrie, June 17, 1924.

catholique"[60], even more so, if one had the recent past in mind. As Alan Gordon has pointed out, French-Canadians had erected wooden way-side crosses as protection from army recruiters during the World War I Conscription Crisis, the "Croix de guerre" thereby becoming a symbol of French-Canadian resistance to imperial authority.[61] Hence, the cross on Mount Royal rather appears as a visual affirmation of Catholicism and French-Canadian nationalism, legitimated through a French Catholic reading of Montreal's and North America's history.
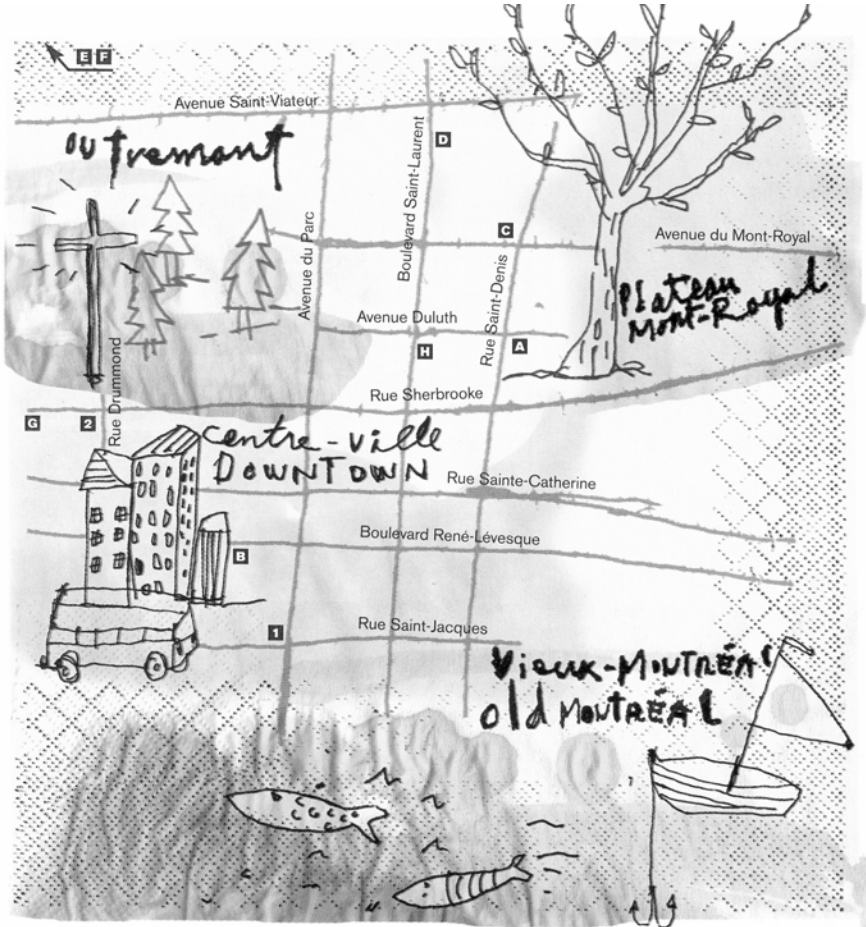

Fig. 3: Montreal Map, in: *En Route* [Air Canada Magazine] 11 (2004), 97.

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60 "Campagne de souscription en faveur de l'érection de la croix du Mont-Royal", in: *La Presse,* Dec. 13, 1923.
61 Gordon 2001, 99, 101.

This was underlined through the spatial structure of the day's festivities that linked the Church of Notre-Dame to Parc Lafontaine, where the parade started after mass, and then to Mount Royal's summit. Parc Lafontaine was the biggest park in the eastern, francophone part of the city at the heart of its well-to-do neighborhoods and it was a traditional place for French-Canadian celebrations.[62] The parade that glorified French influence in North American history thus moved from the heart of French-Canadian Montreal to the city's quintessential landmark, leaving a permanent imprint on its summit. With the erection of the cross, Montreal's iconic space was physically and discursively occupied, thereby giving a more precise interpretation of who was dominating the city, of what made up Montreal's identity and of who was at the root of Canada's or even North America's greatness.

Retrospectively, the erection of the cross has therefore frequently been celebrated as a landmark in the French Catholic reconquest of Montreal in the 20th century. Since the mountain had often been perceived as a space occupied by anglophone, privileged Montrealers,[63] historians have interpreted the cross as "attempt to reclaim Mount Royal for the city's francophone residents"[64] and as "Roman Catholic marker."[65] It seems just as important though not to lose sight of the unifying character of the cross: contemporaries could also read it as a tribute to the civilizing mission of the "white man" in North America. Focusing on the interpretation as "visual marker of the power of French Catholicism in a space which embodied Anglo-Saxon privilege"[66] neglects the ambiguities of the monument. This interpretation also disregards the ongoing power of a moderate version of French-Canadian nationalism in the 1920s that motivated the SSJB and it smoothes over the differentiations within the French-Canadian community.[67] After all, the cross was not a statue of the Virgin Mary; it also refrained from inscriptions that could be all too obvious, as it had been the case with the 'cross of sacrifice' situated in between Montreal's Catholic and Protestant cemeteries to honor the dead of World War I. As Alan Gordon has shown, that cross' French inscription spoke of a sacrifice for "La Patrie", whereas the English text tells of a sacrifice for "King and Country."[68] In the end, even if French Canada of the 1920s is more often associated with the renewed and fervent nationalism of the diverse *Actions* it seems that a francophone liberal, bourgeois elite such as the leaders of the SSJB had still some kind of cultural

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62 "Lafontaine Park, by virtue of having served as the focus of celebrations since the beginning of the century, had become entrenched as a hallowed national site." Ibid., 160.

63 Schmidt 1996, 13-49, describes how the mountain was constructed in the late 19th century as a "domestic enclave for privileged Anglo-Saxon families" (13). Also, the literary imagination testifies to this perception – and to its longevity: In Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, the mountain seems to be part of a totally different world, far away from the protagonists'. See Klaus 2007, 26.

64 Gordon 2001, 99.

65 Schmidt 1996, 56.

66 Ibid., 57.

67 See Roy 1988, 243-48, 260-74.

68 Gordon 2001, 92-93.

hegemony within the francophone milieu. Against the backdrop of former conflicts around the statue of the Virgin Mary, erecting a cross on Mount Royal seems like a very clever move, its openness allowing it to be integrated into two different discourses of identity that existed in parallel. Remarkably, in these times of tensions between the "two solitudes", on Mount Royal in 1924, a win-win situation was created. Another story would be the one about Montrealers who were left out of the deal: protesting against the cross, francophone Protestants found themselves caught in between two different discourses of power.[69] Thus, the peaceful negotiation of symbolic power also excluded Montreal citizens.

Montrealers' love: Conclusion

In the course of Montreal's history, Mount Royal was constructed as a determining factor in Montreal's urban identity through the meaning for the city's space and founding history with which it was invested. It thus became identified with the city, representing Montreal as its iconic space. As such, it seems to have been the object of attempts to possess it and to possess the symbolic power over the city that was ascribed to it. These attempts played out on a physical as well as on a discursive level through the reinterpretations of the founding narrative associated with Mount Royal; in the end, they were attempts to recast the city's identity. In these processes, history and space became inextricably linked. At the same time, Mount Royal allowed coexisting interpretations of the precise nature of its space and its history. In multiple layers, divergent meanings were ascribed to the mountain through the ambivalence of the monument erected on its top. Mount Royal became thus the very grounds on which urban coexistence was peacefully negotiated: French-Canadians could claim Mount Royal as their own and the city's origins as French and Catholic thereby reaffirming their power, while Anglo-Protestant Montrealers could easily identify with the cross as a testimony to the white civilizing impetus of the British Empire. As a space, Mount Royal thereby turned out to be not a static object in the urban landscape, but an almost fluid, dynamic factor produced by innerurban power relations and influencing them in return. In the constant process of power negotiation between the city's diverse communities, the iconic space of Mount Royal represented a factor that permitted subtle manifestations of cultural hegemony and at the same time the balancing of power in a fragmented city.

And today? The cross upon the hill seems firmly entrenched in Montreal's urban landscape as a visual landmark. Night after night, it is illuminated, and popular maps show it as one of the points of reference in the cityscape (*fig. 3*). Moreover, the cross still haunts the literary imagination. In Robert Majzels' novel *City of Forgetting*,

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69 "The Cross on the Mountain", Letter to the Editor, in: *Gazette,* March 1924, MUA, MPPA, MG2079, 2147D, 7-257 "Scrapbook, 1900-1926". Interestingly, the "third solitude", Montreal's Jewish community, did not voice any protest against the cross upon the hill. The reasons for this silence definitely deserve some more research. For an overview of the history of Montreal's Jewish community see King 2002, Medres 2001, Langlais/Rome 1986.

Maisonneuve comes back to the late 20th century city, as a squatter, a caricature of the modernist urban wanderer,[70] a parody of the man representing the religious utopia of Montreal's past. But he is submerged by the hustle and bustle of the modern city, obstacle to his re-enactment of the erection of the cross.[71] Clearly, Maisonneuve's religious fervour is a discourse of the past that Majzels condemns as one of those collapsing "single-minded ideologies"[72]. The cross thus appears as a powerless leftover that has been "translated 'out of' its religious symbolism"[73], in a way a general image of the failure of the great 20th century ideologies. However, while both the Anglo-Protestant and the French Catholic 1920s interpretations of the cross might be viewed as marginal and unknown to many today, the importance that late 19th and early 20th century Montrealers ascribed to Mount Royal remains. The mountain still preserves its unique position, which is not only reflected in its frequent appearance in Montreal literature,[74] but also in the more prosaic, yet all-embracing claim on the city's official website: "One thing remains constant: Montrealers' love for their mountain in the heart of the city."[75]

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70 Simon 2006, 199.
71 Majzels 1997.
72 Simon 2006, 197.
73 Ibid., 192. For a discussion of current, new meanings of the cross, stripped of the old religious meaning, see ibid., 201-03.
74 Ibid., 191.
75 http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/portal/page?_pageid=175,4878067&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&nomPage=bt_parc_01, accessed June 23, 2008.

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