

Commissioners,

When I read in the press that this block of The Main was to be redeveloped I was pleased because its decrepitude has become more and more shameful, and because other recent projects implied that Montreal was finished with doing things on the cheap. My home is at the northern extremity of the Quartier des Spectacles and is the product of a city-sponsored competition in which a Cardinal-Hardy design was selected for the construction of a condominium project on what was until that time a parking lot for city machinery, snowploughs and such. The result is today an enviable oasis downtown and a good example of what can be done with a site that might look unpromising at first glance. And so, from my personal experience I tend to look favourably upon redevelopment.

I also read in the press the remarks of some of those who oppose the project and I was sceptical of their claims for 'marginalized artists' and the community of performers whom they presume to depend on the Café Cleopatre. I considered their displacement a small price to pay for a good new building and the revitalization of the block. Not being a drunk, a user, a consumer of hotdogs, a voyeur, fetishist or john, that block, in particular its west side, is of little relevance to my life.

However, when I saw the renderings of the building proposed for the Quadrilatere I was disappointed by its monolithic banality. When I understood that there would be no restoration of the historic buildings that survive, merely the preservation of their facades, I was more disappointed still. And with the further understanding that the new structure is devoted to corporate offices plus an apparently trivial number of retail spaces at street level but entailing an actual loss of (4?) performance and entertainment spaces, I find I am now completely opposed to the project as proposed.

This proposal offers absolutely no benefit to the declared vocation of the Quartier des Spectacles, and on the contrary, is manifestly to its detriment. Is there any gain in free and open civic space? No. Is there any potential for the organic growth of module upon module, container upon container of creative institutions in symbiosis? No. Could the proposed building ever be a signature structure in the ensemble of the Quartier? Never. Does the proposal alleviate the discontinuities in the disrupted architectural fabric of downtown Montreal? No. More pointedly, is the building in itself attractive or repellent? Repellent. It would be especially so at night, empty and guarded against its inevitable defacements by vandals.

I have never set foot inside the Café Cleopatre, but I am offended by its owner's assertions that several of his renovation plans were turned down by the City of Montreal, whose planning department apparently did not respond by counselling the owner about what might be expected in the renovation/restoration of a building whose patrimonial value the planning department could reasonably be supposed to appreciate even more than its owner. Have the commissioners read Kafka's *The Castle*? Very similar frustrations are there suffered by another mystified citizen.

I am not particularly downcast at the loss of an import food shop or a poolroom. But the substitution of a totalitarian scheme where only well-capitalized chain stores will be able to install themselves should not be the destiny of the Lower Main. There is a poverty of imagination in it that is genuinely pathetic just when Montreal is on the edge of a civic revival that honours its uncanny creativity.

With all my respect,
Errol MacDonald