

# NODAL TOPOGRAPHIES A TRANSIT TERMINAL FOR THE OLD PORT OF MONTREAL

Travelling has become an ordinary part of our daily lives. The increasing number of terminals worldwide proves a new social demand arising from today's popular tendency and social need to travel. The common and frequent natures of traveling have caused such buildings to become everyday places in our society that often lack spatial quality and respond to complex urban circumstances in a conventional manner. They do not deal with the plethora of experiences and perceptual richness that people bring into such pulsating environments. These factors alone have the potential to shape space in a way that is more relevant to the culture of travel and social interactions.

The design of terminals has become a blunt and stereotypical response to a complex mixture of conditions and requirements. The process has transformed itself into a plug-in exercise that allows only for the functioning of a space and keeps users busy with commercial distractions. This programmatic habit shows how the commercial sphere has become the only means by which people experience public life. It further proves how society inappropriately deals with the cultural and dynamic richness that surrounds travel and does not fully speak of today's intricate society. The overall tone set by high concentrations of profit based activities generates an overall still atmosphere and ends up creating a sense of stagnant emptiness both spatially and psychologically. A possible challenge in transforming these buildings lies in a better understanding of how the building is used in terms of time and social behaviour. Current design proposals mainly provide reliable amenities such as seating lounges and commercial areas. Unfortunately, this causes terminals to be differentiated only by aesthetic qualities and to miss out on cultural and social exchanges. We are left with junkspace.

"Identity is the new junk food for the dispossessed. [...]  
Junkspace has to swallow more and more program to survive; soon we will be able to do anything anywhere. We will have conquered space. [...]  
Airports have turned into consumption gulags, democratically distributed across the globe to give every citizen an equal chance of admission."  
(Rem Koolhaas, Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping)

Terminals should portray the dynamic world we live in because they are the ultimate proof of the transient hyper movement experienced by contemporary urban populations. Today's society is able to veil geographical barriers and reveal an ease of connection and movement at any scale. Nevertheless, what remains relevant is the way travelers arrive or depart and perceive space. We now live in societies where people rely more on an integrated transit network than the individual transit mean itself. Connectivity clearly reflects the rising demand for a quick and efficient way of traveling. In such circumstances the design of nodal terminals becomes a key factor in a successful urban transit network.

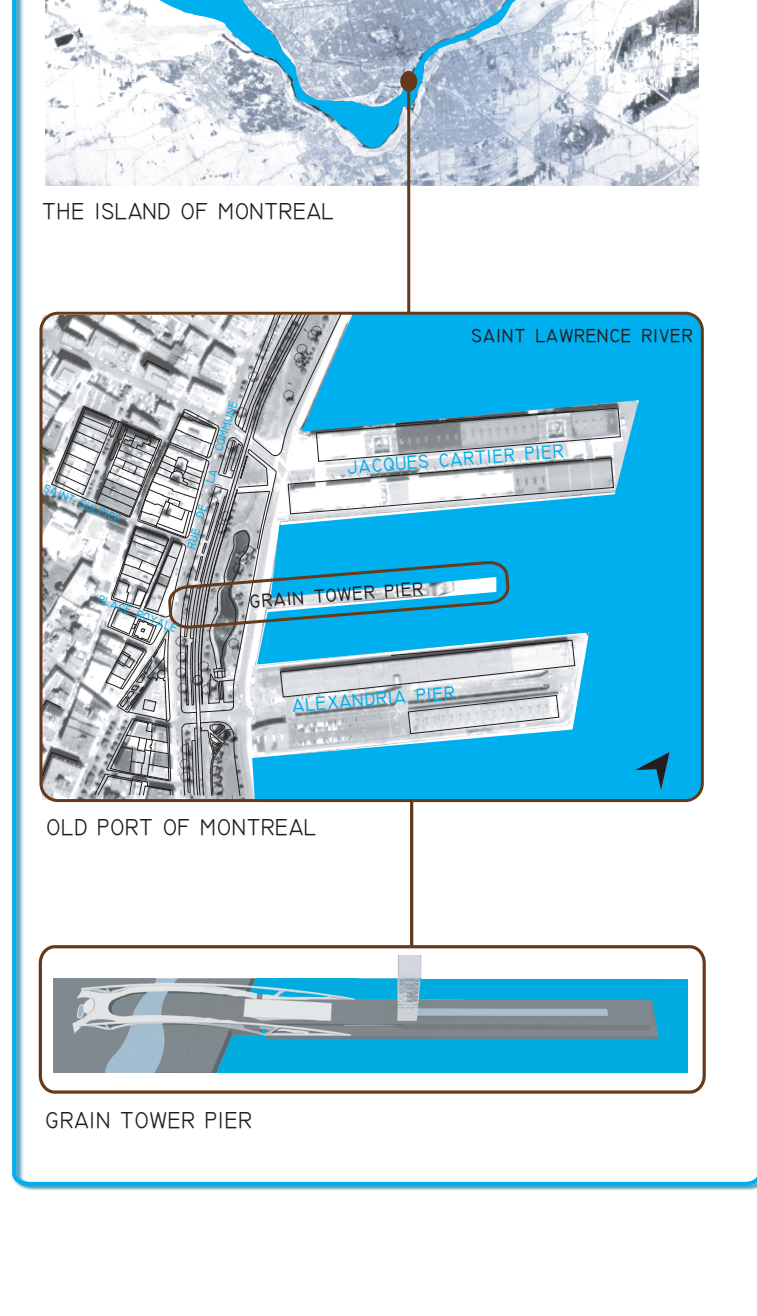
Terminals tend to be either poorly connected to the rest of the city or fully integrated into a city's transportation network. In the latter case, an interesting relationship can emerge between public urban space and transport infrastructure. It reflects in a more coherent manner the contemporary urban intentions of dynamic and flowing connections. The merging of public space with transportation infrastructure becomes a distinctive feature of the contemporary city because it speaks of a spatial and formal continuity between the two.

"The dynamic between these two components, the ephemeral and the solid, are intimately bound and continuously in flux.  
The ephemeral part is the people, how they use, interpret and transform the space over time.  
The solid is the man made landscapes they create and its means of construction.  
The play between the ephemeral and the solid is an often unrecognized potential in the shaping of space."  
(Variable City, 25)

The ephemeral nature of transitory moments within a scheduled time frame has potential from an experiential point of view. The answer to the challenge in transforming terminals lies in that fascinating dynamism between the experiences and the ephemeral presences that people bring to a space. The character of a building can be expressed not only by modern aesthetics of structure but through the impulses brought forth by the users of that space. Interestingly, this intense exchange between social interactions with respect to the layout of a space is constantly in flux. It allows the building to speak of space in terms of experience and not exclusively of program or function. Furthermore, it provides exciting variances in a program that has become standardized.

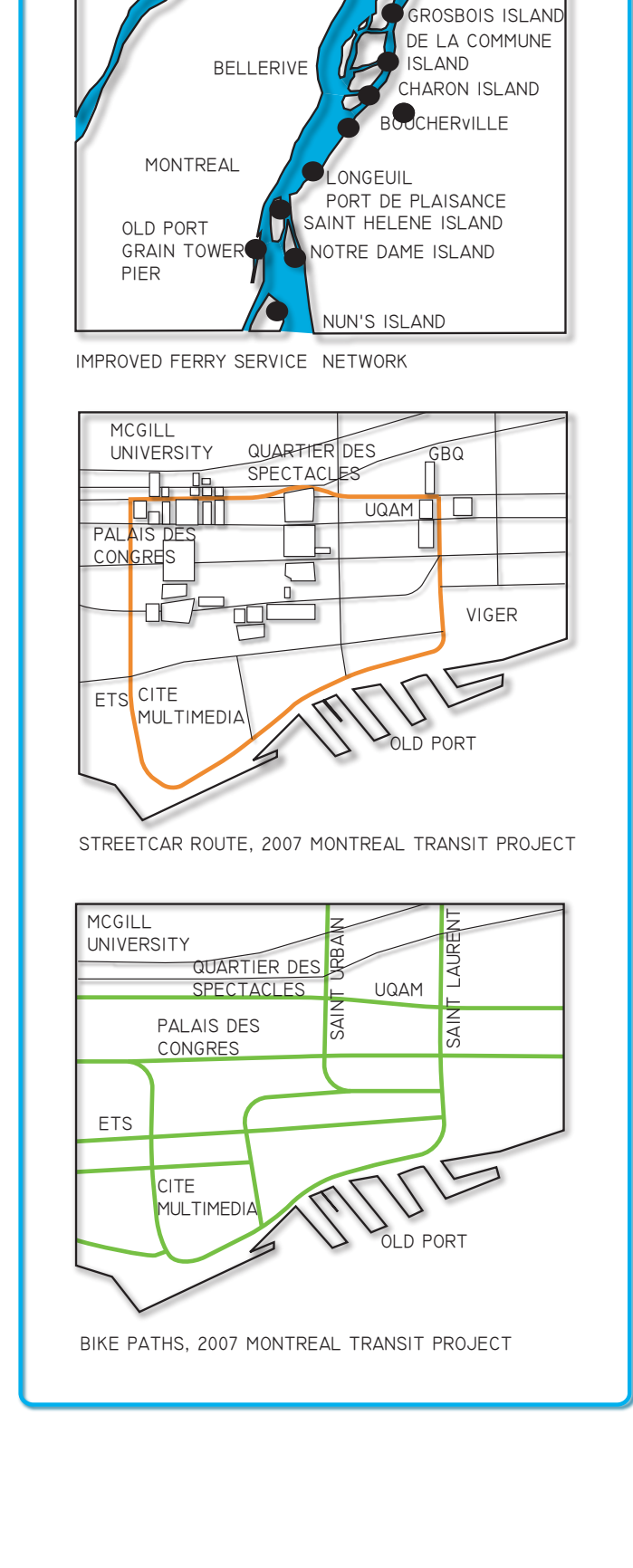
The thesis challenges typical commercial based programs assigned to nodal terminals in pursuit of a more public environment that is shaped by social and cultural interactions. It focuses on a dynamic connectivity within an urban and architectural context by pushing the idea of hyper transit movement which is ingrained in the way we live today. It also aims to re-establish social and cultural exchanges occurring in such terminals by revealing a dynamic shaping of public space through the ephemeral and experiential.

## SITE AND URBAN CONTEXT

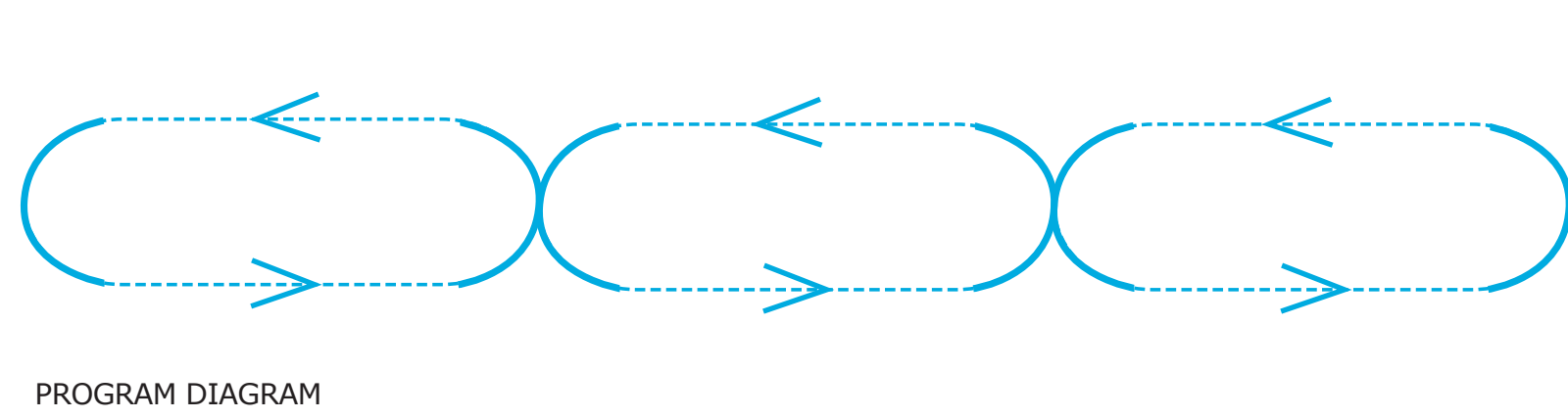


The current image of Montréal's harbourfront may lead us to commit the error of believing that it is well served by existing transport infrastructure. A site analysis carried out in 2003 (The Montréal Harbourfront: Assessment of the Situation, pg. 68) identifies problems, which have yet to be resolved, in order to facilitate access and travel to and from the harbourfront. Major shortcomings in accessibility include incomplete links between the various sectors of the harbourfront and the city. The combined transit network available for the island of Montreal is not fully developed in terms of connectivity. The city's major transportation nodes provide service mainly for metro or bus commuters and privilege selected neighbourhoods. Connections between the harbourfront and the transit nodal areas within the city are poorly coordinated or inexistent. The thesis proposes the combination of three alternative and ecological means of transit (streetcar, bicycle and ferry) into one encompassing transit node situated in the Old Port of Montreal. The presence of such a facility will allow this part of the city to be finally integrated into Montreal's transportation network and will provide an ease of accessibility to and from the harbourfront. The chosen site extends 308 meters from Rue de la Commune up to and including the Grain Tower Quay (or Jetée 1) located between the King Edward and the Alexandra Piers. The pier, 209m x 14m, measures 8m from the surface of the water and is built in concrete. It holds a steel structured tower 50m high measuring 11.2m x 10.3m. This grain tower was originally built in 1956 and is entirely preserved. The Grain Tower Pier was one of the last industrial projects before the mishandled reassessment of the Old Port of Montreal as a recreational tourist area in the 1980s and 1990s.

## TRANSIT LOGIC



The logic of the transportation system incorporated into the building program is based on the 2007 Montreal Transportation Plan, on the principles set forth by projetmontreal.org and on an improvement of the existing ferry service.



PROGRAM DIAGRAM  
INTERNODAL PUBLIC INTERRUPTIONS

## PROGRAM

The project's program is informed by the already intricate site conditions (Rue de la Commune, pedestrian flows, CN train passage, bike paths, the waterfront and presence of green spaces). The main programmatic strategy aims to incorporate the existing situation with varying programmatic features that focus on bringing cultural and daily activities to this part of the city. The public spaces and architecture that will host this unifying program are set up within an architectural gesture that does not compartmentalize a series of functions and assign them a public space. Instead, the idea is to create a flow of people around and throughout a programmatic topography which is informed by temporal change.

Streetcar Hub, Ferry Terminal / Bike Rental Facility and Observation Tower  
(40% of site's total surface area)

Two areas which are located on Rue de la Commune and at the beginning of the pier are appointed to the functioning and organization of alternative and ecological means of transit: the streetcar, the ferry and the bicycle. The streetcar hub and the enveloping staircases on Rue de la Commune create a public interchange point and an elevated esplanade that interacts with the street. The ferry terminal's roof plaza offers the possibility to function as an esplanade overlooking the pier and offering views towards the Saint Lawrence River. It also creates a pocket for activities when the tower is positioned at its closest point to the terminal facility. The grain tower is retrofitted into a movable observation tower which acts as an urban reference point offering views to the city and to the Saint Lawrence River. The pier itself houses a shallow water basin with seating strips along its length that promotes social interaction and recreational activities.

Public Places  
(60% of site's total surface area)

Different programmatic and architectural conditions create a topography that promotes public interaction through cultural and social events. Activities can spread out across the site which extends in a multi levelled manner and may include:  
-Seasonal festivals (Salsafolie, Reggae Festival, etc.)  
-Open air concerts and street performances  
-Seasonal cultural events (Artegonia, National Environment Exhibition, Les Bouquinistes, etc.)  
-Recreational water and ice activities (ice skating, miniature boat races, etc.)

## DESIGN STRATEGY

The design is the result of a form making exercise generated from the intricate organization of site conditions with program and from the idea of merging public space with transit infrastructure. The overall concept treats the infrastructure less as a prominent threshold within the city and more as a programmatic nodal topography.

The gesture of breaking across the east-west axis allows the waterfront to finally connect directly to the city and grants direct access to the piers which were isolated from circulation on Rue de la Commune and were only accessible from an exclusively recreational promenade.

Two main guidelines lay out the overall topography of the design. The first decision is to create an elevated public place which emerges from street level and lands at the base of the pier. The second is to bring people lower than street level in order to enhance a direct relationship with the river and underline the revealing presence of the tower open to the sky, river and city.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

Amanda Reeser Lawrence, Ashley Schafer. Praxis 8 Re: Programming. New York: Praxis Inc. 2006.  
Augé Marc. Non Places: Introduction to an anthropology of Supermodernity. New York: Verso, 1995  
Canada Economic Development. Société du Havre de Montréal. The Montréal Harbourfront: Assessment of the Situation. Montréal: Library and Archives of Canada, 2004  
Chung, Chuihua Judy, Inaba Jeffery, Koolhaas Rem and Leong Sze Tsung. Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping. New York : Taschen, 2001  
Eisenman Peter. Diagram Diaries, New York: Universe Publishing, 1998.  
Foreign Office Architects. Phylogenesis: FOA's ark. Barcelona: Actar, 2003.  
Foreign Office Architects. The Yokohama Project. Barcelona: Actar, 2002.  
Ibelings Hans. Supermodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1998  
Kurlantzick Joshua. "Project Runway" The New York Times 30 Mar. 2007  
Lalonde Michelle. "Making waves at the Old Port" The Gazette [Montréal] 10 Oct. 2005: A6  
Lang Jon. Creating Architectural Theory: The Role of the Behavioural Sciences in Environmental Design. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1987  
Peña William. Problem Seeking. Houston, Texas: Cahners Books International, 1977.  
Price Cedric. Re:CP. Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhauser Publishers for Architecture, 2003.  
Marshall Richard [ed]. Waterfronts in Post-Industrial Cities. New York: Spon Press, 2001.  
Sennett Richard. The Fall of Public Man: On the social psychology of capitalism. New York: Vintage Books, 1976  
Schwarzer Mitchell. Zoomscapes. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004  
Smithson Allison. Team 10 Primer. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1968.  
Toy, Maggie [Ed.]. Architecture of Transportation. West Sussex, England: Academy Editions / Architectural Design, 64:109 (5-6/1994)  
Variable City: taking it to the streets. New York: Van Alen Institute Projects in Public Architecture, 2004  
Vieux Port de Montreal. Groupe d'intervention urbaine à Montréal. Rapport Final Secteurs Jetée #1 et Pointe-à-Callières / Place Royale. Montréal: Groupe Cardinal Hardy, 1989.